

## A Kyoto Garden Renewal? From Meiji to Early Showa Period

Toshio Watanabe

The Japanese garden must be one of the most widely recognized icons of Japanese culture. It is a symbol of not only Japanese culture but also of Kyoto. Any tourist visiting Kyoto, for example, would include at least two or three of the old Japanese gardens even for a day trip. Which gardens in Kyoto then would have the highest reputations for us now? The two most famous gardens are likely those at Ryōanji Temple and the Katsura Detached Palace, both created centuries ago. Ryōanji seems to represent the deeply thoughtful Zen culture on the one hand and Katsura, a highly sophisticated aesthetic sensibility on the other. I should like to argue that this current view could be traced back only to the early twentieth century and could be seen as a type of cultural renewal as this volume is arguing, but unlike other cases, the revival happened just after the Meiji period had concluded in 1912. In order to get a clearer picture, first I should like to look at the development of the notion of landscape during the Edo and Meiji periods. Then I will examine how Meiji gardens in Kyoto developed, in particular how the Meiji innovations emphasized not the revival of distantly old types and ideas, but continued and modernized the Edo tradition of the immediate past. Finally I will examine the issue of renewal in garden design during the early twentieth century.

### *What landscape meant during the Edo and Meiji periods*

During the Edo period there were a number of strands of landscape paintings, such as *meisho-e*, which depict famous places; *shiki-e*, paintings of the four seasons; *sansuiga*, mountain and water

paintings; and *shinkeizu*, a type of *sansuiga* that purport to depict “true landscape.” However, for my purpose I should like to examine two major strands of how the concept of nature and landscape was interpreted more generally.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand there was the “*meisho*” (famous places) cult, which celebrated places with cultural associations, i.e., where landscape was always connected to human activities. On the other, we have the admiration of landscape and natural phenomena for their own sake without any connections with human endeavor.

The tradition of famous places and its representation in Japanese art and literature has been well known and widely discussed. The literary historian Suzuki Sadami has argued that the *meisho* concept originated in poems that were recited to praise the gods of a particular place and to pray for the safety of the traveller. (Suzuki 1995, 382) Once these poems became well known, poets and artists created more poems and art works depicting these landscapes. Many were created even without having been to the actual places they are depicting. The fame of these places became dependent on these poems and art works, often more or less independent of the natural features of the actual famous places. Just a non-descriptive river with some maple leaves floating was enough to evoke the famous Tatsuta River because of the poem by the ninth century poet Ariwara no Narihira (825-880). During the Edo period the cult of famous places increased. The historian Hasegawa Seiichi argued that the general interest in *meisho* was established in the seventeenth century and even such famous sites as the *Nihon Sankei* (the top three landscapes in Japan) only became established at the end of the seventeenth century. (Hasegawa 1996, 12, 16) During the Edo period the increasing ease of travel gave rise to an increase in related publications such as travel guides, maps and descriptions of *meisho*. Particularly from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century the *ukiyo-e* artists played a dominant role in the

dissemination of these famous place-oriented images of landscape in Japan. However, it is important to note that the art historian Aoki Shigeru argues that the *ukiyo-e* artists' concept of landscape is essentially derived from the genre picture in which the traveller plays a central role even when no traveller is depicted. (Aoki 1996, 30, 33) He even regards *shinkeizu*, the so-called "true landscape" of the Edo period, as a fresh interpretation of the famous places or mountain and water genres rather than as a break with tradition. This is very much a people/culture-centered approach to landscape.

Let us examine now an alternative tradition of looking at landscape, which runs counter to the idea of the famous places tradition and which is less burdened with cultural baggage. Suzuki Sadami points out that this alternative tradition was not a Meiji invention, but can be traced back in older literature such as *Kaidōki*, a travelogue from 1223 depicting a journey to Kamakura which shows a tendency to avoid places famous for their depiction in poetry. (Suzuki 1995, 182-183) Fascinatingly, this way of looking at landscape avoiding the immersion in the atmosphere of famous places also grew during the Edo period parallel to the increasing popularity of the *meisho* cult. Travels are undertaken as expeditions rather than for aesthetic pleasure. The trips are motivated by a desire for knowledge and by an urge to observe and record. This brings with it a tendency to record and to objectify nature rather than to immerse oneself in it.

Two geographers from the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries epitomized these two opposing views. Sugae Masumi (1754-1829) is characteristic of the former and Furukawa Koshōken (1726-1807) the latter. For example, Koshōken in his writing denigrates Itsukushima, one the three most famous places in Japan, celebrated for its shrine and treasures. He

acknowledges the impressive scenery there, but questions the criteria for ranking such a landscape and proposes that a famous place should be judged on its natural elements and not on such man-made elements as its architecture or the treasures kept in a shrine. (Hasegawa 1996, 19-20) He doubts whether this place would still receive such accolades without the shrine and the treasures. Though Koshōken did not decry *meisho* as such, in emphasizing the natural elements in the scenery he showed a new and growing appreciation of landscape in its own right and without human connotations. The importance of his theory of landscape lies also in the fact that he himself had seen many of these famous places and was judging from first-hand knowledge. Traditionally it was rather the accumulation of cultural references that were the important factor when ranking a particular scene. People would have shed tears in front of a boring landscape as long as its association with a poignant poem or a tragic history could be evoked. Koshōken's attitude, in contrast, was much more positivist, and he tried to establish a more rational and scientific attitude to places. However, Sugae Masumi was opposed to such an attitude towards landscape and places. He actually criticized Koshōken as not having enough regard for the local people and that Koshōken is lacking in cultural insights. (Hasegawa 1996, 23) In this criticism we can observe the clash of the two different ideas of landscape.

Once we enter the Meiji period, the anti-*meisho* tendencies became associated with the Western notion of nature and landscape. Landscape paintings were now called *fūkeiga* (landscape paintings) rather than *sansuiga* (mountain and water paintings), and this *fūkeiga* was seen as something new and associated with Western culture, though as we have seen it was not a new “invention” nor exclusively Western in origin. This new notion of what constituted a landscape was pushed in Meiji Japan by artists, writers and mountaineers, who were steeped in British

culture. For example, the English writer John Ruskin's view on nature attained cult status in Japan during the late Meiji and Taishō periods. Also the artist J.M.W. Turner became a central figure for the artists of the Watercolor Movement in Japan, who were also closely associated with the burgeoning mountaineering movement, where mountains were seen as places for leisure rather than of religious significance.<sup>2</sup>

This new notion of modern landscape was distinctively anti-*meisho* as we can see in Kunikida Doppo's (1871-1908) short story *Musashino*, which emphasized the mood rather than the specificity or cultural associations of a place. The main torchbearers of this new notion of a more "natural" landscape were the artists of the watercolor movement gathered around Ōshita Tōjirō (1870-1911) and his journal *Mizue*, which in its early years carried many articles on British art and artists. It should also be noted that this new view of landscape had also affected literature, *nihonga* and photography, but less so with the Paris-oriented *yōga*, where landscapes with human connotations were much more preferred.

*Meiji Kyoto gardens and naturalism as an expression of modernity: the case of Murin-an garden*

Kyoto gardens created during the Meiji period demonstrate this new notion of "natural" landscape. Perhaps the most famous Meiji garden in Kyoto, Murin-an, was created by Ogawa Jihei VII (Ueji) (1860-1933) between 1894 and 1902.<sup>3</sup> (Fig. 1) His client was Yamagata Aritomo (1838-1922), a famous Meiji oligarch. This garden uses Higashiyama as a backdrop *shakkei* (borrowed landscape), uses shallow streams, mostly low-lying rocks, and has large areas of lawns. The most distinguishing feature, however, is the dearth of elements with symbolic meanings. Its pond is not a *shinjiike* (a pond shaped like the letter of heart), and no crane or

tortoise rocks are included. Most rocks are rather flat and unassuming. What the viewer is confronted with is just a sheer accumulation of “natural” landscape. The mountain and water paintings from the previous era were usually packed with symbolic meanings, whereas the new *fūkeiga* landscape paintings were full of non-symbolic natural elements. Similarly, previous gardens were filled with symbolic meanings, but this pioneering Murin-an garden was full of natural and non-symbolic elements.

How could Murin-an, usually regarded as the first major representative Meiji garden, express such a radical change from previous gardens? As discussed elsewhere in this volume, Kyoto in the Meiji period had a certain momentum in trying to renew old culture in a new and refreshing way commensurate with modernity, which was accompanied with a vigorous business ethos. Kyoto, the bastion of Japanese traditional craft, was not sitting quietly to be bulldozed by the upstart Tokyo. The craft industry in Kyoto was also in better shape than in Tokyo, where the first few years of Meiji saw an astonishing reduction in population and thus a breakage in much of the previous economic infrastructure for the production of luxury craft goods. In Kyoto on the other hand this situation was also bad but less drastic. The new generation of Kyoto entrepreneurs actively tried to adapt to the new demand for things more appropriate to modern ways of living and also to what the overseas export market demanded. This spirit of modern openness also permeates the garden of Murin-an.

Another important factor in the innovative nature of the design of Murin-an was its patron, Yamagata Aritomo. He was one of the most famous oligarchs of the Meiji period and thus his contribution to the history of Japanese garden design is undervalued in favor of his political

activities. However, he was one of the major instigators of this new and more naturalistic interpretation of a Japanese garden. In a 2005 article Suzuki Makoto, Awano Takashi and Inokawa Wakana discuss Yamagata's ideas on garden design in conjunction with his Chinzansō garden in Tokyo. (Suzuki, Awano and Inokawa 2005) This article raises a number of important points for our discussion. First, they establish that Yamagata's interest in garden design predates the activities of the Murin-an designer Ueji as a major garden designer; in other words, Yamagata's interest in naturalistic gardens was not dependent on Ueji. It is more the case of Yamagata influencing Ueji. Second, they argue that his interest in naturalistic gardens originates in the landscape of his homeland of Yamaguchi prefecture and in particular his home city, the coastal castle town Hagi. They speculate that what he was trying to do was to recreate the essence of this landscape. If this is so, the garden needs to be naturalistic and any traditional symbolic garden paraphernalia would be of secondary importance. Third, the authors have quoted 13 expert comments on Chinzansō from the period between 1896 and 1987 and the terms *shizen* (nature, natural) and *shizenshugi* (naturalism) recur frequently to characterize this garden. His lack of rocks has also been criticized by Takahashi Sōan in 1933 and a 1982 quote acknowledged Yamagata's role in the move from a symbolic garden towards a naturalistic garden. (Suzuki, Awano and Inokawa 2005, 345)

However, the three authors are rather dismissive of suggestions that Yamagata's extensive use of lawn, especially in Murin-an, could originate from English gardens he had seen in his travels to Europe and the United States. (Suzuki, Awano and Inokawa 2005, 349) It is true that there is no record of Yamagata specifically referring to this. However, we do not have to restrict ourselves to English gardens in the narrowest sense of garden history definitions. Many public parks in the

West contained extensive areas of lawn, and Yamagata had traveled in Europe and the U.S. many times. He left Japan for the first time in June 1869 and returned in August 1870. This was such a long trip that he must have come across many parks with extensive lawns. For example, London had not only large parks, such as Hyde Park and Regent's Park, but also hundreds of garden squares with lawns at the time of Yamagata's visit. St. James's Park, in particular, became a more romantic garden, when in 1826-27 John Nash remodeled it to a more naturalistic garden with a nice combination of lake and lawn.

Suzuki Hiroyuki also adds another possible element contributing to Yamagata's introduction of the 'naturalistic' garden, which is Yamagata's anti-intellectualism. (Suzuki 2013, 65-67) He quotes Yamagata's own words, which appeared in Kuroda Tengai's publication on his visit to Murin-an in 1900:

Kyoto gardens emphasize their retired and quiet nature, but they have none of the flavor of splendor or grandeur. They are talking about gardens made by this or that person or by Kobori Enshū, but most are just small-scale gardens in tea master taste and are really not that interesting. Therefore I decided to create a garden in my way.

Then, first the gardener suggested that ... I should consult a manual [on garden rocks]. Therefore, I said yes, I don't know anything about the rules on Yin or Yang stones, but if one looks around here, the main mountain for this garden is the Higashiyama Mountain, which towers in front of us. Therefore, this garden is situated where the foot of this mountain has stretched out and the water of the waterfall also comes from this mountain.



This means the positioning of the rocks and the pruning of the trees all has to be calculated from this. ...

In Kyoto gardens the patinated elegance of moss is cherished and the lawn is hardly used, but it is a bit too laborious to grow moss all over this garden and also there is no fun in using moss. Therefore I decided absolutely to lay a lawn. (Suzuki 2013, 65-66)

Suzuki is undecided whether Yamagata's attitude comes from his lack of education in such tastes or from a firm belief in aesthetics; he concludes that it is a mix of both. (Suzuki 2013, 67)

Whatever it is, clearly Yamagata demonstrates his philosophy of how his garden should be and rejects the norm of Kyoto's traditional aesthetics in garden design. The independence of Yamagata's idea from that of Ueji is also shown in that Yamagata never asked Ueji to create another garden for him. (Suzuki 2013, 87-89)

Another question hitherto little asked is why should Yamagata want to establish a garden in Kyoto in the first place. He was one of the most important politicians and military personnel in Japan at the time and these things were centered in Tokyo, not Kyoto. The story of Murin-an clearly indicates that Yamagata had close connections with a number of Kyoto politicians and intelligentsia and he must have already sensed the developing importance of modern Kyoto. He had flexed his political muscle so that he could divert the water from the nearby and newly installed Biwako Sosui Canal for his garden. As Alice Tseng argues elsewhere in this volume, the new development of Okazaki Park was of central importance for Kyoto's political, economic and cultural revival. It cannot be an accident that Murin-an was chosen to be situated just to the

south of Okazaki Park. Also Ueji apparently got the commission to design the Heian Shrine garden in Okazaki Park thanks to this work for Yamagata. (Amasaki 1990, 58)

Yamagata's taste for a garden may have been an individual quirk, but this had huge implications for the history of Meiji garden design, as it made an indelible mark on Ueji. He owes much to Yamagata for most of his garden design characteristics. The use of more than one moving stream of water, thus creating a sonically complex space; the lack of huge standing stones; the large expanse of lawns; the use of trees, such as fir trees, which were previously rarely seen; and above all, a non-symbolic naturalistic style; all of these originate in Yamagata's taste. The achievement of Ueji was to turn these elements derived from the almost eccentric taste of one man into a coherent style that came to define Meiji period gardens.

How was Ueji able to introduce these new elements and make them into such a success? There are many reasons, but the new entrepreneurial spirit among Kyoto craft professionals was certainly one of them. Also Ueji was at the very beginning of his career and before Murin-an he created only one garden for Namikawa Yasuyuki (1845-1927), the famous cloisonné maker and a neighbor. Here we find a lively use of water and some planting of unusual trees, but it is not clear how far the design reflects Ueji's or Namikawa's taste. Also, before Ueji created this garden in 1894 there was already a garden that seems quite similar to it, for which there is a description in a book published in 1891. (Amasaki 1990, 31-32) Again, the patron's taste is likely to have dominated. Another important aspect of Ueji as a garden professional is that he was not trained as a child in garden design. He was obviously a bright youth and was even earmarked for study in Paris. (Ogawa 2004, 81) However, this did not happen and he was

adopted and married into the Ogawa family, which ran a gardening business. Then, just two years later when he was twenty, his father-in-law died and he became the head of this business, taking on the name of Ogawa Jihei VII. Apparently he was trained by his mother-in-law Ogawa Ito (Ogawa 2004, 82), but he probably had considerably less pressure to follow the old ways than if his father-in-law had not died. He was now a head of his own business, eager to make a mark in the market. His phenomenal success was also due to his entrepreneurial skill in delivering tight-budgeted projects on time. He changed the traditional gardening business into one focused on modern garden design, as well as created a new type of garden for Kyoto.

Another reason for Ueji's success was the general cultural shift in the appreciation of nature. By the 1880s the anti-*meisho* view of looking at nature gained considerable ground. As discussed above, the origin of this view goes well back into the Edo period, but the Western view of seeing nature in a more objectified way became also more prevalent, and this was identified with modernity. The author Tokutomi Roka's (1868-1927) book, *Shizen to Jinsei* (Nature and Life) of 1900, for example, looked at nature and landscape in a very different way from the more *meisho*-oriented texts. Roka, like Doppo, loved the anonymous copses of Tokyo suburbs, which are familiar and unspectacular but also are part of a landscape not related to any specific cultural event or product, such as history, legend or poetry. It is also a view of nature by an urban inhabitant, seeing landscape as a place of leisure and relaxation. Ueji's naturalism chimes with this type of naturalism, which is connected to modern urban life, and could be seen also in the Watercolor Movement, which then lost its momentum by the late 1920s. The connections between naturalism, modernity, and Meiji Kyoto is also discussed by Julia Sapin elsewhere in this volume.

What is argued here is that Yamagata's love of naturalism may have been one man's whim, but once Ueji got this idea and put it into practice by creating many more gardens in this style, such as the Heian Jingū garden, Maruyama Park or Tairyūsansō garden all in Kyoto, it became the dominant idea for Meiji garden design. It was also successful as it hit a cord with many patrons, such as the industrialist Sumitomo Shunsui, who commissioned Seifūsō and Yūhōen gardens in Kyoto and Keitakuen garden, one of the largest private gardens of this time in Ōsaka. They were often urban nouveau-riche clients who appreciated this way of enjoying open nature unencumbered by old symbolism and heavy-laden cultural baggage. Another early garden designed by Ueji was the Heian Jingū garden in Okazaki Park, Kyoto. The nature of this commission was really an exercise in public urban planning rather than creating a garden of purely religious nature. Ueji then got involved with many more public commissions, and in the process he not only established modern private villa gardens but also created high quality Japanese gardens in public spaces. (Amasaki 1990, 81)

We are now so used to Ueji's many gardens and other similar ones in Kyoto from this period that we forget the unusualness of Murin-an garden for trying to be so naturalistic without the heavy symbolism of older gardens. However, we should also note that in many other aspects, Ueji's gardens were a continuation of a previous Edo-period tradition. Shirahata Yōzaburō in his ground-breaking book *Daimyō teien* (Daimyō Garden) of 1997 tried to resurrect the reputation of daimyō gardens and argued in this context that the Meiji gardens such as those created by Ueji continued the tradition of such Edo-period gardens. (Shirahata 1997) He sees this tradition as continuing well into the twentieth century only to be broken in the 1920s and 30s. When we

examine Meiji period publications on garden design, such as Honda Kinkichirō's (1851-1921) *Zukai Teizōhō* (Illustrated Garden Design Guide) of 1891 or even Josiah Conder's (1852-1920) *Landscape Gardening of Japan* published in 1893/1912, it is clear that much of its content relies on Edo period garden design methods. In our context, this means that there was no major renewal here. Ueji's *Murin-an* shows both innovation and continued tradition, but no targeted resurrection of ideas not current in the immediate past.

*The post-Meiji renewal in garden design: the case of Ryōanji garden*

In the history of modern garden design in Japan the break with the immediate past by re-introducing and re-interpreting earlier styles came just after the Meiji period during the late Taishō and early Shōwa period of the 1920s and 30s. Around this time new ideologies arose regarding what a Japanese garden should be. These were backed by detailed studies of old gardens, and new garden designs, associated with Modernism in architecture, broke with the Ueji tradition.

When Shirahata published his book *Daimyō Teien* in 1997, his stance was to challenge the then orthodoxy of the denigration of Edo period Daimyō gardens. (Shirahata 1997, 178-187) He quotes Mori Osamu (1905-1988) who criticized gardens created from the mid-Edo period onwards as losing artistry, lowering the quality of the gardeners and becoming degenerate. (Shirahata 1997, 181) Shirahata's great contribution was the rehabilitation of the Edo period Daimyō gardens, and in trying to find the source of why they lost their standing so much, he identified two villains. One was Mori Osamu and the other Shigemori Mirei (1896-1975). They were both giants in the historiography of Japanese gardens. Their meticulous documentation,

historical research and analysis of Japanese historical gardens were detailed and voluminous. Their authoritative publications basically defined the field. Mori's ideal was the philosophy expressed in the famous eleventh-century manual *Sakuteiki* (Records of Garden Making) and for him the supreme expression of this was realized in the Katsura Detached Palace gardens of early Edo period. On the other hand Shigemori regarded the dry stone garden style developed during the fourteenth century mainly in Zen temples as the epitome of Japanese garden art. According to Shirahata these two apparently did not communicate much with each other and held onto to different ideologies of garden design, but what they had in common was their low estimation of mid to late Edo-period gardens, (Shirahata 1997, 183) which by implication could include Meiji garden design as a continuation of this particular tradition.

Because Mori and Shigemori were such dominating personalities in this field, their views became so influential and created a new orthodoxy from which we are getting somewhat freer only very recently. Indeed, Shirahata's book itself is evidence of this new trend. Likewise, the gardens at Katsura and Ryōanji have recently inspired more skeptical appraisals as well. Pertinently Shirahata also argues that the two garden design ideals of court and Zen aesthetics promulgated by Mori and Shigemori were really a modern creation, as what they argued is focused too much on the visuality of the garden design, very much a concern of modernity. (Shirahata 1997, 245)

In order to examine this phenomenon more in detail, I should like to concentrate on the case of Ryōanji garden. (Fig. 2) The exceptionally high reputation of the garden of Ryōanji was, in fact, only a product of the early twentieth century. Significantly and rather paradoxically, modernism

was instrumental in putting this much older cultural product on a high pedestal.

Methodologically this is also an attempt to see the phenomenon of ‘the Japanese garden’ beyond the normal discussion of it as an eternal symbol of old Japan, by emphasizing the fluidity of its interpretation and while doing so, to examine how the re-evaluation of this garden fits in with our investigation of renewal in Japanese culture.

Let us begin by contrasting the current reputation of the gardens of Ryōanji with that of the period before the 1920s. Then we will examine the story and the critical context of how this garden attained canonical status during the period of the 1920s and 30s, as well as how this process is accelerated in the immediate postwar period. From about the 1980s a new revisionist view questioning the canon of Ryōanji and Katsura starts to appear, with some even claiming incomprehension in the attribution of any aesthetic value to these canonical gardens.

First, we need to confront the fact that in spite of its current fame the Ryōanji garden is rather enigmatic in many ways. We do not know when it was made or who designed it. The date suggested among scholars veers from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, though the latter date is recently more favored by scholars. Also what the garden represents is not quite clear. In general it is regarded now as the epitome of Zen art, a visual representation of the Zen idea, but garden history expert, Isoya Shinji, doubts whether the dry gardens, hitherto so much associated only with Zen, can be explained only by Zen. (Isoya 2005, 36) Nevertheless, the Ryōanji garden is world famous as a Zen garden, attracting about 300,000 annual visitors. (Miyamoto 2001, 12)

In survey-type art history books in English, Katsura Detached Palace is likewise very popular. For example, in *A World History of Art* by Hugh Honour and John Fleming published in 1982, perhaps the best of these traditional world art survey books, Katsura is the only example of Japanese garden design, though the text itself talks solely about the architecture and not the garden of Katsura. Another book, *Japanese Art* by Joan Stanley-Baker, which is one of the most widely available general survey books on Japanese art, has in its revised edition illustrations of Ryōanji and Katsura, as well as Tenryūji garden, also in Kyoto. For the official Japanese view, we can consider *Japan's Cultural History – A Perspective*, published in 1973 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan. This was a multilingual publication and a PR exercise by the Japanese government. It has illustrations of Byōdōin Temple and Katsura Detached Palace, but both are given as examples of architecture and not of gardens. The only representation of Japanese garden design is that of Ryōanji. In general, therefore, Ryōanji and Katsura seem to be used to represent not only the pinnacle of Japanese garden design but also Japanese culture.

The situation before the 1920s shows a very different picture. The most famous and respected book on Japanese gardens in English is probably the book *Landscape Gardening in Japan* by Josiah Conder, published in 1893 in Tokyo. It should be pointed out in our context that in the *Supplement* to this book published in the same year, Conder does mention these two gardens, but crucially illustrates neither Ryōanji nor Katsura among the more than one hundred photographs. In fact, the general neglect of Kyoto gardens in this publication is astonishing. He includes only 6 plates from Kyoto and the vast majority of the photos are from Tokyo with examples from Aomori, Niigata and Kagoshima among others. The canon of the Japanese garden provided by Conder is seriously at odds with that of our age. Recent studies have shown that Conder's book



is highly dependent on *Tsukiyama teizōden* (Commentary on landscaping and garden design), a famous Edo period garden design manual, and also on *Zukai teizōhō* (Illustrated garden design guide) by Honda Kinkichirō published in 1891. This means that the Tokyo-centric view and the relative neglect of Ryōanji and Katsura gardens of Conder's text were not eccentricities but were interpretations that were shared by some Japanese experts at the time. This means that the pre-1920s generation of Japanese and Western commentators did not give the gardens of Katsura and Ryōanji canonical status, which were later given by the post-1920s generation.

During the 1920s and 30s there was a distinct change in how Japanese gardens were evaluated both in Japan and the West. *The Gardens of Japan* by Jiro Harada (1878-1963) published in 1928 in London still contains a substantial amount of Tokyo gardens, perhaps more than a survey of this kind would do today, thus showing a larger overlap with the value criteria of the previous period. However, Kyoto now plays the dominant role and both Ryōanji and Katsura are illustrated.

Then during the 1930s the Hawai'i-based American writer and garden designer Loraine E. Kuck emerged as a new champion of the Japanese garden and in particular of Ryōanji garden, publishing a series of books on Japanese gardens.<sup>4</sup> Her 1935 book *One Hundred Kyoto Gardens* published in London and Kobe has two black and white photos of Katsura, but boasts a rare early color plate and a black and white one of Ryōanji. In her 1940 book *The Art of Japanese Gardens*, published in New York, the remit has widened from just covering Kyoto to the whole of Japan, but still the number of plates on Ryōanji increases to three. In her 1957 catalogue of an exhibition of photographs of Japanese gardens at the University of Oregon at Eugene, one of the

only three illustrations is of Ryōanji. In her final and probably her most popular book *The World of the Japanese Garden*, published by John Weatherhill in 1968, there are six illustrations of Ryōanji including one in snow and a rather illogical one taken from the back of two rocks not normally visible. Here also the garden of Takai-an in Kyoto is illustrated, but for the sole purpose of claiming the success of Ryōanji garden at the expense of, in her view, the poorly designed Takai-an garden.

It should also be noted that *The Art of Japanese Gardens* was published in 1940 in New York, at a time when it would be assumed that the entire United States was hostile to anything to do with Japanese culture. In 2010 the Research Centre for Transnational Art, Identity and Nation (TrAIN) at the University of the Arts London completed a large three-year research project *Forgotten Japonisme: The Taste for Japanese Art in Britain and the USA 1920s – 1950s* and one of our most startling findings was that the US attitude to Japanese art and culture during the war period was not universally hostile, as Kuck's publication proves. Many Americans kept their appreciation for Japanese art even during the height of war as this could be confirmed by perusing auction catalogues where Japanese artifacts were sold and bought. (Basham, Kikuchi and Watanabe, Forthcoming)

Let us examine the turning point in more detail. In 2009 Shōji Yamada wrote a detailed account of the reception of Ryōanji garden in his meticulously researched book *Shots in the Dark: Japan, Zen, and the West* published by the University of Chicago Press, which is a revised edition of his original Japanese edition entitled *Zen to iu na no Nihonmaru* (The Japan ship named Zen) published in 2005. According to Yamada, possibly the first time Ryōanji and Zen were combined

together in an English publication was when the caption ‘an Embodiment of the *Zen* spirit’ appeared under a photograph of Ryōanji garden in *Houses and People of Japan* by the German architect Bruno Taut (1880-1938) written in 1936 but published in 1937 in English. It is clear that Taut admired Zen and also Ryōanji garden, but in his extensive writings on Japan this caption according to Yamada is the only time these two appear together. He examines the circumstantial evidence in detail and suggests that these do not give clear proof that Zen and Ryōanji would have naturally been considered together by Taut or those around at the time when he was in Japan and raises the possibility that this could have been inserted by the Japanese editors of the book without Taut’s permission. (Yamada 2009, 199) This is highly likely as Taut started writing the draft for this book on 23 January 1935, but by the time the English edition published by Sanseido, a Tokyo publisher, appeared he was in Turkey and it is not clear how far he was involved with the editing of the book. As we will see, by 1937 this idea of Ryōanji as “a” or even “the” Zen garden becomes gradually more prevalent.

Yamada states that it was the American, Loraine Kuck, who for the first time identified Ryōanji garden as a Zen garden in her book *One Hundred Kyoto Gardens* mentioning it ‘as an “esoteric Zen temple garden” and that “the creator of this garden was a follower of Zen.”’ (Yamada 2009, 202) Yamada gives the date as 1936, but there is an earlier edition from 1935, which would strengthen Kuck’s claim to be the first foreigner to say that the Ryōanji garden is Zen. Yamada refers to Wybe Kuitert’s research, which established that this notion of Ryōanji garden as the representative garden of Zen Buddhism is only recent and probably originated in the 1934 publication *Essays in Zen Buddhism* by the famous proselytizer of Zen in the West, Daisetz Suzuki (1870-1966). (Kuitert 2002, 132 and 240 note 11) In this context Loraine Kuck was very

early in arguing the Zen-ness of Ryōanji already in 1935 and Yamada suspects that this came not from Mirei Shigemori but from Daisetz Suzuki to whom Kuck was also close. In fact, they were neighbors when she was staying in Kyoto between 1932 and 1935. Also Suzuki's wife, Beatrice Lane, was an American. (Kuck 1968, 387. Kuitert 2002, 132)

This chasing of the exact date of when Ryōanji garden was called a Zen garden seems like splitting hairs, but let us see what this means for our investigation. This detailed examination reveals two astonishing facts. First, Ryōanji garden, which we now think as the epitome of Zen, was linked to Zen only as late as 1935. Second, this was promoted mainly not by the Japanese but by an American author. Even the Taut text is within a book written in English by a German author, though who wrote the actual sentence remains obscure.

What were Japanese writers and scholars of gardens doing during this time? First, it is clear from the records that Ryōanji garden was neglected and was in no state to be a tourist attraction.

Yamada has documented its rather sorry recent history. (Yamada 2009, 110-113) The temple had no resident priest for nearly 300 years until Ōsaki Ryōen was appointed in 1907 as its twelfth chief priest. Its fortunes as a tourist attraction only seemed to have changed after the appointment of Matsukura Shōei as the thirteenth chief priest in 1947. Before this time there is even evidence that children were playing in the garden and old photographs show that weeds were growing in the garden. (Fig. 3)<sup>5</sup> It certainly wasn't set up as a tourist attraction before 1947.

Second, Ryōanji did not have a particularly high status during the previous several hundred years. It was known and at times mentioned in guides, such as in *Miyako rinsen meisho zue*

(Illustrated Guide of Gardens and Scenic Places in Kyoto) of 1799 by Akisato Ritō. The illustration of this garden shows people actually walking in the garden. Likewise, most modern, prewar guidebooks do not include Ryōanji, such as the pocket guides published by the Japanese Government Railways in different languages. These contain the nearby Kinkakuji temple with the famous Golden Pavilion but astonishingly not Ryōanji, not even on their maps.

Third, there was a surge of interest in stone gardens in Japan during this period. Foremost in this was the scholar and garden designer Shigemori Mirei, who was prolific both in scholarship and the creation of new stone gardens. He surveyed about 300 gardens in Japan and published the details of 245 of them in 26 volumes in 1939 and then published a 35-volume history of Japanese gardens in 1971. He also created or restored about 200 actual gardens during his lifetime, which was unprecedented in Japanese garden history. His interest in his own creations was focused on the stone garden style and this eventually also contributed to the rehabilitation of Ryōanji garden.

The fourth circumstantial point regarding the Japanese attitude towards Ryōanji garden is that there was a new emphasis on the spirituality of Japanese gardens. The first person to proselytize this was Jirō Harada in his 1928 book *The Gardens of Japan*, which puts spirituality right at the center. On page one he states: “the garden has come to constitute a necessity in life, not so much for the physical as for the mental and spiritual.” For Harada this was of primal importance for the Japanese garden. He also mentions that “the influence of Zen was irresistible in all branches of art” and then discusses how this affected gardens.<sup>6</sup> This is in a stark contrast to Josiah Conder’s view of what a Japanese garden was about. We have already mentioned him as illustrating neither Ryōanji nor Katsura gardens in his 1893 book. The characteristics of Conder’s view of

the Japanese garden are that he does not regard the spirituality of the Japanese garden as important. Even on occasions where he could have referred to the spirituality of the Japanese garden, he just does not do so. Conder's undervaluing of the spirituality of the Japanese garden is radically different from that of Harada Jirō, but is shared with that of Conder's contemporary Japanese writers on gardens.

These were the circumstances that Ryōanji garden's reputation faced at the time. What about the direct discussion of Ryōanji by Japanese experts? It seems that on the whole they were interested in the design of *toranoko watashi* (tiger cubs crossing the river), the particular arrangements of the rocks, which have nothing to do with Zen spirituality. Yamada points out that as early as 1923, Saitō Katsuo produced a diagram of the *toranoko watashi* and that "[a]lready from this time Saitō was describing the rock gardens at Ryōanji and Daisen-in as the epitome of the 'Zen garden'. ... Saitō can be considered the first person who saw Zen in the garden." (Yamada 2009, 169) However, he seems to be a rather a lone voice here. As Yamada argues Saitō's main concern is in the geometric configuration of the rocks and its abstract, philosophical and aesthetic effects and Saitō does not privilege Ryōanji above other gardens such as that of Daisen-in. (Yamada 2009, 244-246) No analysis of the Zen-ness of this garden is offered. Harada in his 1928 book also connected Zen and the art of garden design repeatedly, but he nevertheless did not specifically refer to the Ryōanji garden as Zen.

What was emerging from the 1920s was a shift among garden commentators regarding some gardens as spiritual, as we have seen in Harada's writings. However, this did not seem to have led to Ryōanji garden's rehabilitation in popular eyes. Yamada points out that this happened as

late as in 1949 when the film *Banshun* (Late Spring) by Ozu Yasujiro (1903-1963) contained a scene of Ryōanji garden for just one minute and forty-five seconds, which then triggered instant fame for the site. (Yamada 2009, 162) As we have noted before, by this time Ryōanji had a resident priest looking after the site already for two years. The Zen-ness of the Japanese garden was thus not a particularly important point for many Japanese writers. Of course they all knew that Ryōanji temple belonged to a Zen sect, and many also commented on the merit or otherwise of a stone garden, but nobody in Japan was pushing the uniqueness of Ryōanji garden as the pinnacle of a Zen ethos as hard as Lorraine Kuck did.

A different aspect that needs to be discussed here is the role of Japanese Modernist architects in promoting Ryōanji. Before doing so we need to consider the role they played in the promotion of Katsura Detached Palace. In 1986 Inoue Shōichi exposed how this was done in his groundbreaking and iconoclastic book *Tsukurareta Katsura Rikyū shinwa* (The manufactured myth of Katsura Detached Palace). (Inoue 1997) The story Inoue tells is also very relevant to our discussion of the post-Meiji renewal in garden design. Inoue disassembles the myth that it was Bruno Taut who rediscovered the beauty of Katsura, which still lingers on even now in spite of Inoue's exposé. Inoue establishes that there were differences of opinion regarding past architecture between the older and newer generations of architects. Meiji generation architects, such as Itō Chūta (1867-1954), were not appreciative of Katsura, whereas the younger generation architects with Modernist ambitions promoted it. Particularly important was the book *Kako no kōsei* (Constructions of the Past) published by Kishida Hideto in 1929. This was a compilation of photographs of old Japanese architecture, and Kishida declares that his intention was to examine past architecture with contemporary sensibilities to try to find the ideal of the modern in these

older Japanese structures. (Inoue 1997, 26) Kishida promotes Japanese architecture from the past such as Katsura or Ise Shrine in purely visual terms, devoid of historical or religious connotations.

Another pattern emerged whereby Katsura and the buildings of Nikkō Tōshōgū were put into oppositional positions, with the younger Modernists rejecting Nikkō but adoring Katsura.

Though more or less from the same period, the Nikkō buildings seem to be associated with the whole of Edo period, even with its authoritarian bombast, as an example from the tradition of immediate past, whereas Katsura's association with the older court culture seem to be from the time of an older past, in other words as something that was discontinued during the later Edo period. Here clearly we see that the new appreciation of Katsura by the younger generation of architects was very much understood or imagined to be a renewal. Inoue's detailed analysis makes it clear that this new perception was shared by many Modernist architects, such as Horiguchi Sutemi (1895-1984), Tange Kenzō (1913-2005) and others, and soon became the orthodoxy. Inoue proves that all this had already happened before Taut's visit to Japan. In fact, Taut's visit was made at the invitation of *Nihon Intānashonarū Kenchikukai* (International Architectural Association of Japan), a Modernist group. It was Ueno Isaburō (1892-1972) who together with like-minded friends seemed to have masterminded the schedule of Taut's visit and coaxed him to praise Katsura. Once Taut's praise was uttered, it became orthodoxy.

Exactly the same pattern also happened with Ryōanji garden. In Katsura's case, much of the praise was not just for the garden but also for the architecture, but in Ryōanji's case, it was just for the small dry stone garden itself. This time it was Yamada who chronicled Taut's encounter



with Ryōanji garden. (Yamada 2009, 194-199) Ueno Isaburō and also Kurata Chikatada (1895-1966), two Modernist architects, took Taut to Ryōanji on 3 October 1933. However, according to Kurata, Taut's reaction to Ryōanji garden was quite different from that of Katsura, as he said nothing while at the garden and only on the way back uttered that it was very strange (Fremde) for a foreigner. (Yamada 2009, 197. Kurata 1942, 139) As we have seen already, Taut doesn't seem to be that enthusiastic in promoting Ryōanji garden as an expression of Zen. The important issue here is that the younger generation of Japanese Modernist architects were keen to rehabilitate Ryōanji garden and this trend seemed to have been consistent and long lasting.

It is also of interest that many of the Japanese protagonists in this discussion show similar transnational traits. Jirō Harada was fluent in English and was employed by the Tokyo National Museum. Miyuki Katahira's research shows that he was not a curatorial expert, but more of a front man for overseas contacts for the museum because of his excellent English. (Katahira 2007) Daisetz Suzuki wrote all his major publications in English; even Shigemori Mirei called himself Mirei, taking the name from the French painter Millet. He named his children, Kanto (Kant), Kōen (Cohen), Yugō (Hugo), Gête (Goethe) and Bairon (Byron). Thus it becomes clear that the whole debate on the Japanese garden took place within a heavily transnational context, where appreciation of older art jostled with modernity, which then lead to this cultural renewal.

Once Ryōanji garden was discursively and visually connected with the idea of Zen, the linkage is promoted more and more frequently. As Yamada points out, Loraine Kuck in her 1940 book *The Art of Japanese Garden* devotes an entire chapter entitled 'Sermon in Stone' on Ryōanji garden and gushes as follows: 'undoubtedly this garden is one of the world's greatest masterpieces of

religiously inspired art.’ (Yamada 2009, 202) In her subsequent publications she continues to make this point. This view had a significant impact on understandings of Ryōanji, because her writings—particularly her 1968 book *The World of the Japanese Garden*—were among the most popular books on this subject published in English at the time and thus very influential.

Even more significant than Kuck in proselytizing the Ryōanji garden was the artist Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988). For Yamada, Noguchi was “the person most responsible for publicizing the rock garden overseas.” (Yamada 2009, 2003) Noguchi was a truly transnational figure. He was born in Los Angeles, and his mother was an American and his father was the Japanese poet and writer Noguchi Yonejirō (1875-1947), normally known as Yone Noguchi in the West. Yone was an important figure in the story of East/West interaction in his own right, but then he abandoned both mother and child. Isamu and his mother came to Japan when he was three, but Isamu then left for the USA alone when he was only 13. His identity is essentially that of a Japanese-American.<sup>7</sup> However, he visited Japan many times and identified himself strongly with the art of Japanese Zen garden design, in particular with Ryōanji garden. Yamada details Noguchi’s sojourn in Japan in 1950 in particular and refers to Dore Ashton’s monograph on Noguchi, where she writes that in preparation for this trip Noguchi read and reread Suzuki’s book *Zen and Japanese Culture* and books by Bruno Taut. (Yamada 2009, 204) We see a clear pattern emerging of the appreciation of Ryōanji garden and Zen culture spreading and overlapping.

Yamada refers to a revealing episode: when Noguchi visited Ryōanji for the first time in 1931, apparently he was not particularly moved by the garden. (Yamada 2009, 204) However, in 1950

his preparatory readings of Suzuki and Taut put him into a better position to appreciate the site. Also Yamada speculates whether Noguchi read Kuck's 1940 *The Art of Japanese Garden* with its eulogy of the Ryōanji garden. Then between 1961 and 1964, Noguchi created the commission for his Sunken Garden at Chase Manhattan Plaza in New York, which he called "my Ryōanji, as it were." Here we see the impact of Ryōanji travelling across the world to New York as an artistic reinterpretation.

It is clear in the reception history of the Ryōanji garden that this was a renewed appreciation of an older garden type, which was not highly appreciated in the recent past. This newly highlighted austere garden with no living plants except small patches of moss, contrasted greatly with the naturalistic garden style of Ueji that dominated the Meiji period. Fascinatingly, as in the case of the Italian Renaissance, this renewed interest in the culture from the distant past was also heavily backed up by a serious and detailed study of that old time. Shigemori Mirei's research on old gardens was astonishing in its quantity and meticulousness and created a new standard in garden history scholarship. He was also a notable and leading contemporary garden designer and championed dry stone gardens favoring the use of large vertical rocks unlike Ueji who preferred low-lying stones.

Shigemori took on an almost Kobori Enshū like persona and not only made Kyoto the center of innovation in garden design but also contributed to establishing avant garde *ikebana* flower arrangements, thus revolutionizing one of the most conservative forms of Kyoto craft. Shigemori and other supporters of Kyoto gardens had decisively wrenched the hegemony of Japanese gardens from Tokyo back to Kyoto. The domination of Tokyo gardens we could see in Conder's

1893 publication would never again happen. No other city in Japan could claim such a long and unbroken tradition of high culture and certainly not the upstart Edo/Tokyo, which had little to offer before 1600 CE, certainly nothing in garden history. Also this renewal broke from the tradition of the immediate past by reintroducing spiritual qualities, not a strong point of Edo/Tokyo culture, into the garden design philosophy at the expense of naturalism. It is clear that this artistic renewal was not a transient phenomenon, but created orthodoxy in how we appreciate Japanese gardens and by extension Japanese culture. This late Kyoto resurgence reclaimed the cultural authority of Kyoto and certainly for its gardens there is as yet no sign of this city relinquishing it.

#### Bibliography

- Amasaki, Hiromasa. 1990. *Nanadaime Ogawa Jihei* (Ogawa Jihei VII), Kyoto: Mineruva Shobō
- Aoki, Shigeru. 1996. *Shizen o utsusu: Higashi no sansuiga, nishi no fūkeiga, suisaiga* (To copy nature: Mountain and water painting of the East, landscape painting of the West, watercolor painting). Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten
- Ashton, Dore. 1992. *Noguchi East and West*. New York: Alfred A Knopf
- Basham, Anna, Yuko Kikuchi and Toshio Watanabe, eds. (Forthcoming). *Trans-War Japanism 1910s – 1960s: Shaping Taste in Britain, Japan and North America*
- Duus, Masayo. 2004. *The Life of Isamu Noguchi: Journey Without Borders*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press
- Harada, Jiro. 1928. *The Gardens of Japan*. London: Studio
- Hasegawa, Seiichi. 1996. *Ushinawareta keikan – meisho ga kataru Edo jidai* (The lost landscape: Edo period through famous places). Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan

- Isoya, Shinji. 2005. *Nihon teien* (Japanese garden). Tokyo: Chūōkōron Shinsha
- Katahira, Miyuki. 2007. Ōbei ni okeru Nihon teienzō no keisei to Harada Jirō no ‘The Gardens of Japan’ (The images of Japanese gardens in the West: the analysis of Jiro Harada) *Nihon Kenkyū*, 34, March, 179-208
- Kuck, Loraine. 1968. *The World of the Japanese Garden*. New York and Tokyo: John Weatherhill
- Kuitert, Wybe. 2002. *Themes in the History of Japanese Garden Art* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press
- Kurata, Chikatada. 1942. *Burūno Tauto* (Bruno Taut). Tokyo: Sagami Shobō
- Lyford, Amy. 2013. *Isamu Noguchi’s Modernism: Negotiating Race, Labor, and nation, 1930-1950*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press
- Miyamoto, Kenji. 2001. *Ryōanji sekitei o suirisuru* (Deducting the secrets of the stone garden of Ryōanji). Tokyo: Shūeisha
- Ogawa Jihei XI. 2004. “*Ueji no niwa*” o aruitemimasenka (Take a walk in the Ueji garden) Kyoto: Shirakawa Shoin
- Shirahata, Yōzaburō. 1997. *Daimyō teien* (Daimyō garden). Tokyo: Kōdansha
- Suzuki, Hiroyuki. 2013. *Niwashi Ogawa Jihei to sono jidai* (The garden designer Ogawa Jihei and his time). Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai
- Suzuki, Makoto, Takashi Awano and Wakana Inokawa. 2005. Yamagata Aritomo no teienkan to Chinzansō (Aritomo Yamagata’s image and view of Gardens and Chinzan-so), *Randosukêpu kenkyū* 68, 5, 339-350.
- Suzuki, Sadami. 1995. Nihon kindai bungaku ni miru shizenkan – sono hensen no gaiyō (The concept of nature in modern Japanese literature – An outline of its transformation). In

*Nihonjin no shizenkan* (The idea of nature by the Japanese), ed. Shuntarō Itō, 371-394.

Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha

Watanabe, Toshio, ed. 1997. *Ruskin in Japan 1890-1940: Nature for art, art for life*. Tokyo:

Cogito.

Watanabe, Toshio. 2010. The Establishment of the Concept of Nature in Modern Japan. In

*Sensing Nature: Rethinking of the Japanese Perception of Nature*. Tokyo: Mori Museum of Art

Watanabe, Toshio. 2013. Josiah Conder (1852-1920). In *Biographical Portraits*, 8, ed. Hugh

Cortazzi, 324-331. Leiden & Boston: Global Oriental

Yamada, Shōji. 2009. *Shots in the Dark: Japan, Zen, and the West*. Chicago: University of

Chicago Press

---

<sup>1</sup> See Watanabe 1997 and Watanabe 2010. The following section is a précis of the arguments expressed in these publications.

<sup>2</sup> See note 1 above.

<sup>3</sup> For Ogawa Jihei see Amasaki 1990 and Suzuki 2013.

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Dr. Anna Basham for providing me material for Kuck.

<sup>5</sup> I am grateful to Professor Yamada for providing me with early photographs of Ryōanji including this illustration.

<sup>6</sup> Harada 1928, 4. See also Watanabe 2013, 324-331.

<sup>7</sup> See Lyford 2013 especially “Appendix B, I become a Nisei by Isamu Noguchi,” 215-219, Ashton 1992 and Duus 2004.

