

# Japanese Garden as a Physical Symbol of Japanese Culture

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Received 07. 19. 2011; Accepted 08. 01. 2012

**ABSTRACT:** A view of nature within the framework of garden and in relation with human needs and drives that satisfy the need to be rooted has caused the representation of nature in garden to be regarded as cultural heritage. Garden and garden designing are suitable cases for us to study cultural characteristics and traits. Thus, human beings have searched their eternal interest in an ideal and unattainable world in garden building and garden totally reflects each culture. Art and knowledge are both represented in garden in which engineering creativity reaches its summit. Japanese garden is one of the oldest patterns in gardening in the world. It demonstrates Japanese ideology, ontology, cultural views and rites. Relativity and multi religions represent its cultural difference. Changeability and cultural ease along with preserving basic core and nature of Japanese culture are the basis of Japanese culture. Japanese garden is one of the most obvious emblems and representatives of Japanese culture. The aim of this paper is to make a content analysis that will primarily study the cultural characteristics and will then focus and conclude the results of Japanese garden designing as a cultural physical symbol.

**Keywords:** Culture, Cultural symbol, Japanese garden, Gardening.

## INTRODUCTION

Nations, civilizations, and even religions and schools of thought each have valued nature on the basis of their ideologies and have defined nature and natural elements on the basis of the principles and values that result from the very ideologies. It seems that garden designing has been shaped in direct relationship with culture in different countries and counts as cultural species. Thus, identifying the significance of natural elements in people's culture and thoughts is very important. To study the culture of every nation, they directly refer to the relationship between man and nature, which is so firm that it can be generalized as the study of a whole culture and vice versa; that is, in order to know the relationship between every culture with nature correctly it is necessary to refer to cultural characteristics to seek the relationship between man and nature.

This paper aims to understand the concepts and values related to Japanese history, culture and traditions. It will also try to find a range of new and original concepts on discussing how the physical culture of this country is represented in physical garden designing by focusing concepts, thoughts, beliefs and the history of garden designing in Japan. In this study, garden is studied from cultural, physical and structural viewpoints. The structure is studied as social and cultural system and symbolical ones have been unknown and ambiguous and represent the dominant values and thoughts in a society. The garden will also be appraised not as a whole but as a collection of elements that are both multiple and unified regarding the wholeness of the garden.

## Culture

Culture is a collection of acquired conducts, common habits and traditions that are passed down on from generation to generation and it is continuously acquired and used by those who enter that society. Culture has a mobile, dynamic and synthetic nature. Culture is the source of thought, and expression of history and shows what a nation has collected (Habib, 2010). Every culture reflects the value system of a social system. On the whole, it can be said that knowledge and art represent this reflection. Knowledge moves towards reason and deals with human mind, whereas art is intuitional which deals with emotion (Laghaee, 2000). Generally, Fig. 1 shows the role of culture and its effects in every country.

## The Country and Culture of Japan

The Japanese firmly believe that the government and ethnicity are the same and Japanese society is stable and unchangeable. One of the reasons that Japanese cities do not have fortifications and walls is that Japan has never been under political and military dominance of other nations. And it has kept the degree of cultural and military contacts. Although Japan was divided into small independent states in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, they never turned into fighting adversaries and very soon turned into a completely unified government and country through end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 2). Japan is a country rich in religious, historical and natural places and handicrafts. Garden, which creates physical symbol throughout history, is one of the most significant symbolical elements that have roots in culture. Japanese garden designing is related to its rich culture and beautiful nature. We will presently analyze each cultural element and its concepts and

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the symbolical reflection of Japanese garden in Japanese culture.

**An Analysis of Physical Representations of Culture in Japanese Garden Designing**

The Japanese garden is the most charming aspect of representation of Japanese culture. Japanese garden includes all gardening scientific-philosophical, historical, architectural, artistic, and religious aspects. Gardens are essentially “urban art-forms”. They were constructed, at first, by people in societies at the beginning stages of urbanization in an attempt to create environments that included elements of nature they felt deprived of in the city (Fig. 3).

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The present study will use reliable sources and analyze Japanese garden through descriptive. The garden will be studied as an original and living symbol (emblem) of culture.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Three Unique Natures of Japanes Aestheticism**

Unique nature of aesthetics in Japan are Nature, Man and Art. Art is not an independent phenomenon in Japanese spiritual and physical life (Gustafson, 1999). All objects, natural or man-made, can evoke all aesthetic experiences in the Japanese’s lives. The Japanese always attempt to be in touch with nature directly in a way that there is no boundary between man and nature and they are unified (Sajadzadeh, 2000).

**Religions**

Due to geographical seclusion, Japan has less been exposed to the invasion of non-native religions throughout its history. The most sustaining non-native religion (rooted in India) has been Buddhism in Japan. Festivals, myths and other cultural representations have been more under the influence of Shintoism, the native religion of Japan (Table 1). The diverse religious beliefs and acts have made a connected

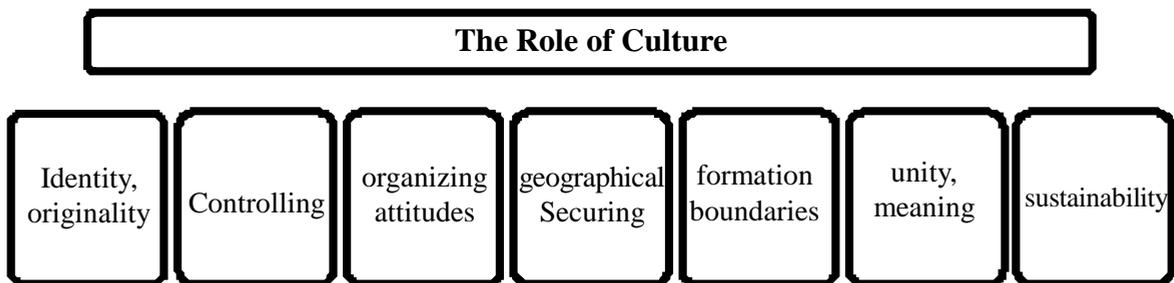


Fig. 1: The role of culture in Cities

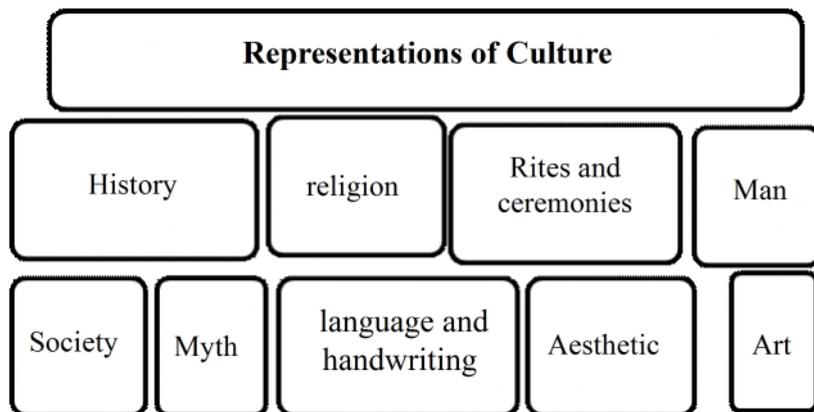


Fig. 2: The establishing elements of culture

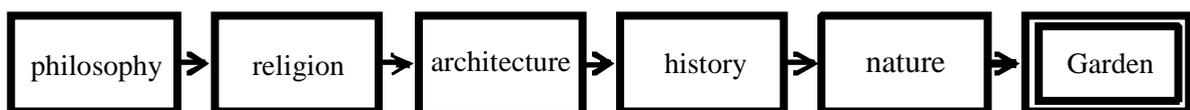


Fig. 3: The effective elements on garden designing

Table 1: Shinto in religion of Japan

Views	concepts and also “Kami” means “Gods” and “To” is driven from the Chinese word
Shinto	“Tao “meaning “way” (5) The Sun goddess, Amaterasu, is the guardian of Japan (Tyinipon) meaning “the country of rising sun”. Shintoism is based on faithfulness, love of country, and requires its adherents to live as the Kami ask them to; that is, to have a healthy relationship with the Kami and natural phenomena.
The Ethics	Yushido is the a method of chivalry, resistance, health, security, living a pure life, faithfulness, altruism, correct, array, honor, justice, and self-control. Man is good and so is the world. Evil enters the world from outside through evil spirits. Belief system and its representations in Japanese Garden: warning, inspiration, purity, naturalism

Table 2: Historical japans garden

Nara period (645-781 AD)	During the Nara period the first stone groupings of the Shimisen, which is a symbolic representation of the mountain at the center of the universe. The Buddha is supposed to reside in the center stone with his disciples in the rocks that surround him.
Heian period (781-1185)	In the Nara period and continuing into the Heian period the Japanese placed rocks according to the powers they were believed to hold, the powers being dictated by their shape and color. The Heian period gardens also showed a great deal of Chinese influence in the placing and type of rocks used.
Muromachi period (1186-1573)	The Muromachi period was a time when temple gardens were the most prevalent. During this period, the gardens were used as religious symbols.

network of whole ideology that has created a rich connection between man and a cultural holy power. For the Japanese, thinking is viewing objects. Nature is the Japanese’s real idol. For the Japanese, nature is the end of evolution. Thus, the principles of dispossession are like emptiness in Zen, non-practicing in Tao which is not inactivity but letting things run in their natural way. This harmony with nature prevents nature from being a mere object and it is considered as a spirit behind which there is a hidden secret. Such a view is obviously seen in artistic life of Japanese culture (Rogers, 2001, 281).

Gardens are still hugely significant in the lives of the Japanese. The art of Japanese garden design is meant to express the beauty of natural surroundings in a contained space. Japanese garden design has evolved throughout the centuries to reflect the cultural values of the people, as the art continues to evolve today. In Japan’s indigenous religion, Shinto, natural objects like mountains, hill, trees, and stones can all house divine spirits. Many of Japan’s early gardens were built around these spirits so as not to disturb them. Heian Period is the second very important era in the development of Japanese garden art. Aristocratic styles of gardens were created in front of the mansion with artificial ponds and islands. That’s where water poetry ceremonies were held. Heian Period is also known as the time when the first book about garden-making technique was written.

During the Kamakura period and Muromachi period,

garden-making techniques improved considerably because of the rise of the Zen style. Many gardens designed in that time were properties of successive Shoguns and Daymios, who belong to the highest class in Japanese society. Famous gardens created after Meiji Period were frequented by business people and politicians. Most of them are opened to the public now and play a role in city parks (Table 2).

### Three Gods: The Buddha Stone, the Goddess Stone, and the Child’s Stone

There was often also a Guardian stone. Also, at this time, many bird and turtle stone islands were added to the garden ponds. These creatures symbolized longevity and a happy existence together (Turner, 2005).

Complex stone designs representing Buddhist saints were also displayed in many of these gardens. The rock and sand gardens, created by Zen Buddhist monks as a scene for meditation during this period, were the first distinctly Japanese gardens. By then, the gardens had been heavily influenced by Chinese and Korean gardens (Morton & Olenik, 2005).

### Concepts and Values Related to Japanese Garden

A Japanese-style garden is an exercise in the balance between open space, asymmetry, visual suggestion, energy, texture and monochromatic surroundings. However, all Japanese garden design ideas are second to the central

principle that a garden should be composed of a series of pleasing views. No matter where a visitor is standing or sitting in a Japanese garden, the landscape should offer tranquillity, visual interest and enticement to look toward the next pleasing view. Adding elements of Japanese style to an existing garden is easy enough, but creating an entire Japanese garden takes forethought and a good amount of hard work.

#### Basic Rules in the Design of Japanese Garden

The design of traditional Japanese gardens has a strict guideline. The major guidelines while creating a garden are: **Natural:** that should make the garden look as if it grew by itself.

**Asymmetry:** that creates the impression of its being natural.

**Odd numbers:** like three, five or seven; that support the effect of the asymmetry.

**Simplicity:** that follows the idea of 'less is more'.

**Triangle:** that is the most common shape for compositions made of stones, plants, etc.

**Contrast:** that creates tension between elements.

**Lines:** that can create both tranquillity and tension.

**Curves:** that softens the effect.

**Openness:** that indicates interaction between all elements.

**Using Perspective to Alter Depth, Distance, and Size:** The Japanese are masters at altering the sense of depth, distance and size of the garden from the viewers' perspective.

**Pruning and Shaping:** severe and calculated pruning, manipulating and contorting trees and shrubs help to bring about that prized sense of age in the Japanese garden.

#### Basic Elements in Japanese Garden

The design of the Japanese gardens is based on the principles of symbolization. There are essential elements which have different meanings:

A stone lantern representing four natural elements: earth, water, fire and wind;

Statues of male and female lions, placed at the entrance of the garden in order to protect the garden from intruders, representing the two opposite forces: yin and yang (fire and water, male and female);

Water basin known as a deer chaser, which keeps deer away by making a special sound when filled up;

The Koi fish swimming in ponds, which have a decorative meaning;

Typical Japanese bridge, called a moon bridge, whose purpose is to reflect artistic feelings.

#### Different Styles of Gardens in Japan

Traditional Japanese gardens can be categorized to the five basic types (Ketchell, 2001):

**Hill and Pond Style Gardens (Tsukiyama Gardens)-** Ponds, streams, hills, stones, trees, flowers, bridges and paths are used to create a miniature reproduction of natural scenery which is often a famous landscape in China or Japan. The name Tsukiyama refers to the creation of artificial hills.

Tsukiyama gardens vary in size and in the way they are viewed. Smaller gardens are usually enjoyed from a single viewpoint, such as the veranda of a temple, while many larger gardens are best experienced by following a circular scrolling path which was originally imported from China. The ponds represent the sea, and the hills symbolize the islands. Lanterns, trees, bridges, and ponds are practically necessities here. They

vary in size, and usually cover many acres, but with careful techniques, they can be created in a small backyard.

**Dry Landscape Style Gardens (Karesansui Gardens'-** Karesansui gardens reproduce natural landscapes in a more abstract way by using stones, gravel, sand and sometimes a few patches of moss for representing mountains, islands, boats, seas and rivers. Karesansui gardens are strongly influenced by Zen Buddhism and used for meditation. They are very simple and modern-looking, usually placed in a very small area. They refer to the Zen philosophy and usually try to evoke a deeper meaning (Hendy, 2001).

**Tea Style Garden (Chaniwa Gardens)-** It has a very intimate atmosphere and is meant to provide a relaxation from a person's busy lifestyle. They are designed for the tea ceremony. They contain a tea house where the ceremony is held and a stone basin where guests can purify themselves before participating in it.

**Stroll Style Gardens-** that are meant for viewing from the path and that is why they never reveal the whole garden's beauty from one spot. They must be big enough to enable visitors to walk along the path and spacious at the same time to allow the path to take turns.

**Courtyard Style Garden-** follows the rule of having an outside sensation while still being inside. Apart from other styles, everything here must be full-sized. All elements, as lanterns, bridges, basins have an ornamental rather than a functional meaning.

#### Symbolism

The key elements are water, stones, and plants. From ancient times, the Japanese as an island people had an affinity for the sea. Water is crucial in garden design, not as a substance but as a symbol of the sea. In a *Chisen* style garden, a pond or lake occupies the most significant portion. In the dry *Karesansui* gardens patterns raked in gravel or sand express the state of the sea. The presence of water is not even required (Messervy & Hibi, 2000).

A sea without islands is unthinkable and in designing islands in the garden, the Japanese developed various concepts. One of the earliest was that of a sacred place remote from ordinary human society; in the form of an island of immortal happiness, which was called *Horaisan*. Crane and tortoise islands are especially favourable because in Chinese mythology the crane lives a thousand years and the tortoise ten thousand. Such islands are inaccessible to human beings and no bridges are constructed to them.

Groups of stones representing rocky seashore may be arranged by the edge of a pool. Among the most orthodox styles of stone arrangement is *Sanzon*. It consists of three upright stones, the largest in the centre representing the Buddha, the others two Bodhisattvas.

Plants are closely interwoven with the physical and spiritual life of the Japanese people. Pines are major structural elements in their gardens. Being evergreen, pines express both long life and happiness. Japanese red and black pines symbolize *in* and *Yo*, the soft, tranquil female forces and the firm, active male forces in the universe (Table 3).

#### CONCLUSION

Gardens of Japan provided a means of achieving the peace of mind for which rulers so desperately sought during the periods of strife and conflict which marked much of Japan's

Table 3: The Symbolic Meaning of Items of Japanese garden

Item	Symbolic Meaning
Japanese Flowering Cherry	Celebrates the change of seasons
Japanese Maple	Welcomes Autumn as a friend
Pinus densiflora	Eternity
Mounds	Mountain ranges
Pond in shape of tortoise	Longevity
Crane	Longevity
A line of rocks	A line of boats sailing toward the Isles of the Immortals
Shumisen – Central rock	Central pillar that supports the heavens
Rocks	The Buddhist Trinity, Mythical Islands, a guarantee of prosperity
Island in pond	Paradise – land of paradise
Guzei – Red bridge	Route blessed to take to salvation
Split bridge	Bridge split to prevent the evil spirits from crossing (evil spirits are believed to only move in straight lines)
Mountain	Assertive, hard, uncompromising (Yang)
Water	Intellectual force, softness of water associated with feelings (Yin)
Wooden terrace jutting over picturesque garden	Constant need to be with nature
Gravel	Water-Straight lines – calm water Curved lines - waves
Upturned roof edges	The giant wings of the Phoenix in full flight Phoenix – symbolic of rebirth

history. Part of the beauty of the Japanese gardens comes from the symbolic expression of religious Buddhism and Shinto beliefs. Indigenous factors, such as Japan's insularity, also had an impact on the development of gardens. A real appreciation and understanding of the traditional Japanese garden is complex and difficult. The visual entities which may appear as a design in the sense of forms, textures, and colours are less important than the invisible philosophical, religious, and symbolic elements.

These elements include water, islands of stones, plants, and garden accessories. The design of the Japanese gardens is based on three basic principles, reduced scale, symbolization, and borrowed view. In their reverence for the landscape and the seasons, Japanese gardeners have always made exquisite use of natural materials, such as bamboo, rocks and pebbles. Traditional Japanese gardens approach created Japanese garden such as hill and pond gardens with their islands and bridges, and tea gardens with their stone lanterns and water features, to Zen dry gardens with their use of moss and pebbles.

Aesthetic values which are believed by both Japanese and Westerners to be uniquely Japanese in origin such as simplicity, naturalness, refined elegance, subtlety and the use of the suggestive rather than the descriptive mode of communication are either products of Zen thought or are reinforced by it.

Garden design has been an important Japanese art for many centuries. Traditional Japanese landscape gardens can be broadly categorized into three types, Tsukiyama Gardens (hill gardens), Karesansui Gardens (dry gardens) and Chaniwa Gardens (tea gardens).

The Japanese garden is a living reflection of the long history and traditional culture of Japan. Influenced by Shinto,

Buddhist, and Taoist philosophies, there is always "something more" in these compositions of stone, water, and plants than meet the eye. Three of the essential elements used to create a Japanese garden are **stone**, the "bones" of the landscape; **water**, the life-giving force; and **plants**, the tapestry of the four seasons.

Ultimately, the purpose of a Japanese garden is to enhance the quality of human life, by skilfully guiding nature and bringing it into their homes. The art of Japanese gardens has been believed to be one of the most important parts of Japanese culture for many centuries. The garden design in Japan is strongly connected to the philosophy and religion of the country. Shinto, Buddhism and Taoism were used in the creation of different garden styles in order to bring a spiritual sense to the gardens and make them places where people could spend their time in a peaceful way and meditate.

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