

Preface

In the “International Expert Meeting on Paradise and Gardens in Eastern Asia” organized by the Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, we examined the traditional views of ideal worlds held by people of three Eastern Asian countries – namely, China, Korea and Japan – and discussed how such views affected the styles and designs of gardens and garden-making techniques, how individual garden cultures developed in the respective geographical, cultural and historical backgrounds, and how such cultures have been passed on through time in these countries. We also examined in what manner the image of an ideal world was represented in the Japanese Pure Land Gardens which were designed to reproduce the world of the Buddhist Pure Land, and discussed what constitutes the universality and individuality of such gardens.

Gardens of Eastern Asia where natural elements such as plants, water and stones were arranged to imitate the natural environment were meant to emphasize the interactions between man and nature. Such garden-making techniques and styles, when combined with certain beliefs, gave rise to gardens designed to symbolize an ideal world.

Based on the interactions between man and nature, the garden cultures in the three countries are commonly inspired by people’s worship, respect, and love of nature. Also, those gardens shared a similarity in that they copied scenic natural spots or famous mountains and lakes, as mentioned in *Sakuteiki*, the oldest manual for Japanese garden-making. At the same time, differences in style and design are obvious amongst gardens of the three countries. To be specific, the gardens demonstrate their individuality in the way that nature was copied; the uniqueness stems from, for example, the difference in the shape of ponds (whether square or round), the use of artificially processed stones, and the introduction of the technique of landscape paintings.

Also, each of these countries developed their own concept of an ideal world, known by various names such as utopia, paradise, the world of mountain wizards, the world of immortals, and paradise pure land, reflecting different kinds of thoughts including Taoism, the philosophy of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, the belief in mountain wizards, and the *Yin-Yang* theory. These concepts were established in different times, and naturally, there have been subtle differences in people’s sentiments toward the ideal worlds and the significance attached to them.

When examining the styles and designs of the gardens created to symbolize ideal worlds, we see the following philosophical backgrounds: animism or worship of nature spirits (ritual purification by bathing); the Buddhist cosmology with Mt. Sumeru at the center of the universe (stone statue of Mt. Sumeru); the belief in mountain wizards which represents yearning for perpetual youth and longevity (three islands of mountain wizards, Mt. Penglai); the world of mountain wizards in the philosophy of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, that advocates “action through inaction” (hermit culture); and the Pure Land Paradise (water of eight excellent qualities, seven jeweled

ponds, lotus ponds), as well as the *Yin-Yang* and the Five Elements theory and *Feng Shui* thought. The gardens of the three countries share some elements in common, such as artificial hills modeled on the “islands of mountain wizards,” while incorporating in their designs those elements that reflected the philosophical traditions unique to the respective countries, such as the idea of “Pure Land” and that of a “round heaven and a square earth” (represented by a square pond with a round island).

In our effort to define a “Pure Land Garden,” an embodiment of the Buddhist Pure Land as an ideal world, we examined the following: the ruins of ancient gardens; the *hensô-zu* paintings; the concepts of “abhorrence of living in this impure land” and “aspiration for rebirth in the Pure Land” advocated in Pure Land thought; the philosophies of Exoteric Buddhism and Esoteric Buddhism; and the ideas of barriers separating the sacred from the secular and this world from the next. We also discussed the styles and designs of gardens in terms of their geographical locations in relation to natural mountains and rivers, the layout of a pond adjacent to a Buddhist hall, a jeweled pavilion and transept-type structures in the precincts of a temple, the architectural styles of residential buildings and temples, and the types of ponds (*hōjō-ike* pond, lotus pond, jeweled pond), as well as the roles and functions of gardens as venues to pray for protection of the state, and hold Buddhist memorial services, and as representations of Pure Land Paradise. Considering all these factors, we reached the conclusion that a Pure Land Garden can be defined as an artistic space where the main Buddhist deity enshrined in the temple and a Buddhist hall, together with the surrounding natural environment, reproduce the Pure Land of the heavenly world in the precincts of the temple in this secular world. The style of Japanese “Pure Land Gardens” was established between the 8th and the 11th century. We may say that there is outstanding universal value in the group of “Pure Land Gardens” created in Hiraizumi, the Eastmost remote region of Japan, where the world of Pure Land was reproduced based on the Buddhist idea of composite nature unique to Japan, in a manner which gives shape to the images described in *Sakuteiki* of the 11th century.

In this international expert meeting, we reached the conclusion that so far no evidence has been discovered that would indicate that “Pure Land Gardens” had flourished in China and Korea as well. However, we will have to wait for future research in order to be more specific about this issue. It is also necessary to examine the “Pure Land Gardens” in their oldest form, such as the one seen in Amida Jōdo-in Temple dating back to the 8th century.

I very much hope that the results achieved in the “International Expert Meeting on Paradise and Gardens in Eastern Asia” shown in the following pages will help to shed light on the research of gardens designed to symbolize ideal worlds, not only in Eastern Asia but also in the rest of the world.

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