

Landscape Art in *A Treatise on Garden Design* and *The Craft of Gardens*: A Comparative Analysis

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A Treatise on Garden Design is the earliest Japanese treatise on landscape art, while *The Craft of Gardens* is its earliest Chinese counterpart. The former was composed roughly 500 years before the latter. Both are highly regarded in the landscape architectural community. *A Treatise on Garden Design* elaborates on the techniques of stone and water arrangement in landscape design and draws significantly on Buddhism, the Yin-Yang theory, and the theory of the Five Elements, illustrating the profound influence of metaphysics in China's Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties. In addition to traditional Chinese concepts, it also incorporates Japanese national culture. *The Craft of Gardens* illustrates the penchant for isolation among Chinese nobles and intellectuals in their creative idea of a garden landscape while providing a thorough overview of garden construction in ancient times. It exemplifies the achievements of traditional Chinese landscape art. This paper demonstrates, through a comparative analysis of the two works, that Chinese classical gardens, as a sign of secluded culture, demonstrate an appropriate integration of human design and natural elements and permit individual creativity regardless of the established rules, whereas their Japanese counterparts emphasize the actual simulation of nature.

Keywords: Landscape Art; Landscape Architecture; Garden Design; *A Treatise on Garden Design*; *The Craft of Gardens*

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A *Treatise on Garden Design* was the first monograph on landscape art published in Japan and East Asia. It is extremely valuable for scholarly studies on Japanese landscape art and Chinese traditional gardens. However, there is no definitive historical record of who wrote it, despite specula-

tion that Tachibana Toshitsuna (1028–1094) was the author (1). *The Craft of Gardens* is the only monograph in archaic China that examines landscape architecture in depth. Its publication fills a gap in the theory of Chinese classical garden design and construction. *A Treatise on Garden Design* was written almost

500 years before *The Craft of Gardens*. They differed notably in concepts, techniques, and artistic conceptions of garden construction because they were created at different times and from diverse social backgrounds. *The Craft of Gardens* is divided into three volumes. Volume One contains seven chapters: Summary, Garden Design Principles, Site Selection, Foundations, Buildings, Frameworks, Patterns of Doors and Windows; Volume Two addresses rails; and Volume Three contains six chapters: Decorations on Doors and Windows, Walls, Flooring, Rockery Creation, Stone Selection, and Scenery Borrowing. It carefully explains the design and construction of ancient Chinese gardens and emphasizes the philosophy of integrating humans and nature in garden architecture. *A Treatise on Garden Design* does not have a distinct chapter structure; however, it can be divided into twelve chapters based on its contents (2). The writing is divided into two volumes in the Tanimura family's version, the first of which contains seven chapters: Basic Rules of Garden Design, Garden Patterns, Shapes of Land Along Ponds and Streams, Islets in Water, Waterfall Construction Procedures, Forms of Waterfalls, Streams; and the second book contains five chapters: Secret of Garden Building, Taboos in Garden Building, Trees, Springs, and Other Miscellaneous Decorations. The two works, which specialize in gardening construction techniques and ideas, are masterpieces. Both are quite useful in the study of traditional landscaping art.

Historical Backgrounds and Cultural Sources

Comparisons of Historical Backgrounds

A Treatise on Garden Design and *The Craft of Gardens* have remarkably different historical contexts. Cheng Ji finished *The Craft of Gardens* in 1634, the seventh year of the Chongzhen Emperor's reign during the Ming Dynasty. Scholars and intellectuals praised it favorably, especially Yuanxun Zheng, who penned the book's prologue. Zheng noted that Ji could expertly and adaptably respond to all types of events without conformance to established standards, which was beyond the abilities of common craftsmen, in the prelude to showing his respect for Ji's talent to design gardens. Furthermore, according to Zheng, *The Craft of Gardens* enjoyed the same level of popularity as *The Artificers' Record*, a book that details the building methods used during the Spring and Autumn Periods and the Warring States Period. However, *The Craft of Gardens* was outlawed and subsequently vanished for more than two centuries due to the political notoriety of Dayue Ruan, one of its patrons. It was afterwards secretly exported to Japan, where people praised it as "a marvel from the heavens." It wasn't brought back to China from Japan until modern times.

The story is different in *A Treatise on Garden Design* than in *The Craft of Gardens*. At first, it wasn't officially published. Instead, people passed around handwritten copies of it privately, which led to many versions with different titles but similar content. At the same time, it has become hard to figure out who wrote it and widely circulate it because it was only written by hand and had different names. That was mostly because, in Japan, passing on information about how to build a garden was seen as a private matter. The contents of *A Treatise on Garden Design* are not as organized and complete as those of *The Craft*

of Gardens. This is because the author did not write the book with the intention of publishing it. Instead, he just wanted to keep a record of his own landscaping ideas and methods so that his children and grandchildren would have something to follow when building gardens.

The Ming Dynasty saw the maturation of Chinese classical garden architecture and the creation of *The Craft of Gardens*.⁷ According to historical sources, in China's Shang and Zhou dynasties, the garden was referred to as "You" (the garden's earliest form), and in the Han dynasty, "Yuan." After experiencing a full expansion throughout the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern dynasties, Chinese classical gardens reached their artistic zenith in the Tang dynasty. The Song and Yuan Dynasties saw additional growth in their popularity. By the Ming Dynasty, Chinese landscape art had evolved over thousands of years. In both royal and private gardens, highly developed landscape art demonstrated the excellent garden construction methods and varied garden culture against the backdrop of the era's established social surroundings and thriving economy. The later Heian Period (781–1185) of Japan, roughly 500 years before the time of *The Craft of Gardens*, is when *A Treatise on Garden Design* was produced, tracing the development of Japanese landscape art at that time. Building methods and patterns for the palace gardens were also provided (2). The most well-known Japanese classical gardens, however, are Okayama Park, Ritsurin Garden, and Kenroku-en Garden, all of which were constructed during the Edo Period (1603–1868). They are known as the "Three Excellent Gardens" in Japan and are regarded as the pinnacle of the country's traditional gardens (3).

A Treatise on Garden Design, a record of the landscape art in early Japan, cannot reflect the garden-building techniques and ideas of Japanese classical landscaping at maturity, while *The Craft of Gardens* can represent the culmination of the design and construction of Chinese classical gardens, according to a comparison of the historical backgrounds of the two books.

The Underlying Philosophies of the Two Works

Chinese landscape art had already been influenced by Buddhism and Confucianism in the Han and Tang dynasties, metaphysics in the Wei and Jin dynasties, and literati taste-dominated aesthetics in the Song and Yuan dynasties by the time Ji authored *The Craft of Gardens*. *The Craft of Gardens* was published during the Ming Dynasty and no longer contained any overt references to philosophy, Buddhism, or Confucianism. Instead, it served as a powerful vehicle for the tastes and sentiments of the literati. The garden provided more than just a place to live for its owner; it also functioned as a spiritual haven where he could amuse himself by admiring its beauty and communicate his thoughts and aspirations via its distinctive design. In contrast, Buddhism and Confucianism were the philosophical pillars of landscaping in *A Treatise on Garden Design*, exerting direct and powerful influences on garden construction. In Japanese classical garden design, concepts like immortality, the Yin-Yang theory, the philosophy of the Five Elements, and Feng Shui taboos might all be explicitly expressed.

Buddhism was introduced from India into China at the beginning of the first century, and in the middle of the sixth century it was transferred from China to Japan via the Korean

Peninsula (4). Japanese Buddhism originated in China and had a profound influence on Japanese culture. The chapter of Forms of Waterfalls in *A Treatise on Garden Design* says, “According to Chinese texts, the Buddhist figure Aryaacaalanatha claims that waterfalls as little as three feet in length are a part of his body. This is in addition to waterfalls that are four (or five) to twelve feet in height. The placement of the stones must illustrate how Aryaacaalanatha and his two servant boys are typically depicted in sculptures, with the two stones in the left and right fronts standing in for the boys, respectively” (2, p. 93). China is referred to as the Tang Dynasty in this sentence, and Aryaacaalanatha is a Buddhist bodhisattva. This provides proof that Japanese architects incorporated Buddhism into their landscape artwork by studying Tang Dynasty literature from China. In contrast, Buddhism was not mentioned in *The Craft of Gardens*, and the garden’s design did not include any Buddhist features.

There is no conclusive answer as to when Confucianism arrived in Japan. According to certain Japanese history textbooks, Confucianism arrived in Japan about the year 285 (Emperor Ojin Tenno’s 16th year in power) (5). Japan’s traditional philosophy incorporated Confucianism to a great extent, and both the elite and the populace felt its effects. For instance, Shoutokutaishi, who founded these institutions, infused Confucianism into the Seventeen-Article Constitution and the Twelve-Level Cap and Rank System. Confucianism was extensively promoted during the Tokugawa Shogunate because it served the needs of the Edo Shogunate’s ruling class. Also influenced by Confucianism is Japanese classical landscape architecture. The rockery is the emperor, the stone is the helping minister, and water is the subordinate; therefore, the stone supports the rockery, water depends on the rockery and moves around them and water floods when the rockery is unstable, according to the chapter on Streams in *A Treatise on Garden Design*. Evidently, the emperor is represented by the rockery, while the subjects are represented by the stone and the stream. The use of rockeries, stones, and water in garden structures clearly reflects the Confucian notion of the relationship between the emperor and his subjects. The placement of stones and water is discussed in the chapter on the creation of rockeries in *The Craft of Gardens*, although there is no such clear relationship between Confucian ideas and landscaping. Ji proposed that when creating the arrangement of stones and pebbles, garden builders can take inspiration from the textural strokes used in literati paintings (6). Ji aimed to create artificial rockeries that would convey the romantic appeal of actual mountains so that the man-made landscape would bear the features of nature (6).

Traditional Chinese culture is where the concept of immortality, the Yin-Yang theory, the philosophy of the Five Elements, and Feng Shui taboos all arose. According to a well-known historical book from the Han Dynasty called Records of the Historian: The Biography of the First Emperor of Qin, there are three fairy isles in the sea called Penglai, Yingzhou, and Fangzhang that are home to immortals. The “one pond and three rockeries” in the garden building resemble the fairy landscape. An illustration of this pattern can be found in the Han Dynasty garden at Jianzhang Palace. There are numerous instances of using ponds to mimic the sea in *A Treatise on*

Garden Design. A pond is positioned prominently in the courtyard to represent the ocean in the chapter of Garden Patterns. The Yin-Yang theory, the theory of the Five Elements, and the Feng Shui taboos had a more significant and direct influence on *A Treatise on Garden Design*’s landscaping notions than Buddhism, Confucianism, and the concept of immortality (2). The Chinese Taoist Culture, which first migrated to Japan during the Wei and Jin dynasties and then acquired prominence there during the Tang and Song dynasties, includes the doctrines of Yin-Yang, the Five Elements, and Feng Shui (7). Taoism had circulated in Japan for at least 500 years by the time *A Treatise on Garden Design* was written. The Yin-Yang, Five Elements, and Feng Shui Taoist concepts are commonly interwoven into the landscape design in the book. For instance, according to the Taboos in Garden Design chapter, the master runs the risk of being attacked if a large, white stone is placed in the east of the courtyard (2). According to the Five Components Principle, this Feng Shui taboo has to do with how different elements interact. *The Craft of Gardens* does not directly apply Taoism to garden architecture, in contrast to *A Treatise on Garden Design*.

As a result, *A Treatise on Garden Design*’s representation of Japanese classical landscape culture is strongly related to Chinese traditional culture. It frequently references works of Chinese literature from the Tang and Song dynasties. It might be said that *The Craft of Gardens* and *A Treatise on Garden Design* share a common cultural background.

Different Landscape Architecture Specializations

In the chapters Summary, Principles of Garden Design, and Scenery Borrowing of *The Craft of Gardens*, as well as in the author’s introduction, the theory of garden construction is covered. The following chapters include specific construction methods for building foundations, structures, frames, decorations, rails, doors, windows, walls, flooring, stone arrangement, and stone choice. With a primary focus on the development of the overall style of gardens, the book is an ideal synthesis of theory and practical practices. The chapters on Garden Patterns, Shapes of Land Along Ponds and Streams, Islets in Water, Procedures of Waterfall Construction, Forms of Waterfalls, and Streams in *A Treatise on Garden Design* (the version kept by the Tanimura family) aim to explain garden building techniques, while the chapters on Basic Rules of Garden Building, Trees, Springs, and Other Miscellaneous Decorations discuss Feng Shui taboos.

Despite having diverse focuses, both monographs elaborate on garden construction methods. *The Craft of Gardens* stresses both the general design of the garden and minute details, whereas *A Treatise on Garden Design* concentrates on the knowledge of how to arrange stones and water. The landscaping methods used in the placement of stones and water are thoroughly covered in the first volume of *A Treatise on Garden Design*. Additionally, it says in the first two chapters that when placing stones, one must consider the terrain’s natural features as well as the pond’s design (2). This prerequisite is in line with Ji’s contention in Summary that it is preferable to be flexible and appropriate rather than adhering to strict standards (6). The sensible use of resources and the consideration of the particular

natural context are stressed by both authors. *A Treatise on Garden Design* shows five ways to arrange stones: building a rockery in the palace, building an islet in the pond, erecting stones in the pond, erecting stones in the stream, and erecting stones alone without water. In all of these cases, stones are the main focus of the landscape. It also shows five ways to build a garden using stones and water. These patterns are called Sea, River, Mountain and River, Marsh, and Reed Marsh. So, landscapes that are dominated by stones and landscapes that are based on how stones and water interact are talked about separately. *A Treatise on Garden Design* has a lot of information about how to build a garden. For example, the Pattern of Mountain and River shows how stones and water are set up to look like mountains and rivers: “The stones and water are set up to look like mountains and rivers, and stones are naturally scattered in water. When these stones are used to divert water, blocking stones must be placed on the left and right sides of the river to keep the water from flooding the ground” (2, p. 77). In this passage, it says where the stones are, what kinds of stones they are, and how the water flows.

In *The Craft of Gardens*, there are seventeen different ways to arrange stones: rockeries in the garden, miniature rockeries in the hall, rockeries by the tall building, rockeries by the pavilion, rockeries in the study courtyard, rockeries in the pond, rockeries in the backyard, rocks piled up against the wall, rockeries with a pond on top, peak-shaped rocks, rocks attached to “cliffs,” rockeries by the stream, rocks behind the waterfall, and miniatures of rockeries in goldfish jars, steep hill-shaped rockeries, rockeries with caves, and water channels dug out of rocks (6). *The Craft of Gardens* has more garden design patterns than *A Treatise on Garden Design*, but it mostly shows the different styles of models rather than giving detailed information about how to build a garden, as *A Treatise on Garden Design* does. *A Treatise on Garden Design* breaks down water into several forms and discusses how each one is used differently in the overall plan, in addition to providing more detail on the techniques of stone arrangement. For instance, the shallow body of water that lines the margins of ponds or rivers, or “Ting,” varies in shape; streams can be used in a variety of ways depending on their direction and drop; depending on their shape, waterfalls can be categorized into ten categories: waterfalls that consist of two streams falling face-to-face, waterfalls that fall in one continuous body, waterfalls that run along “cliffs,” waterfalls that are free from the rocks behind them, waterfalls that can only be seen from one side, waterfalls that fall quietly like a piece of cloth, waterfalls falling in little separate streams, waterfalls that fall in multiple segments, waterfalls that fall from the left and right sides of a rock, and waterfalls of considerable width (2). *The Craft of Gardens*, on the other hand, emphasizes the function of water in representing the qualities of gardens rather than devoting a chapter to the arrangement of water. The varieties, shapes, and qualities of islets in ponds are also thoroughly described in *A Treatise on Garden Design* (2), although the description of the pond’s rockery in *The Craft of Gardens* is only briefly mentioned.

The five chapters of the second volume of *A Treatise on Garden Design* talk about Feng Shui taboos in garden building, especially in the ninth chapter, “Taboos in Garden Design,” and

the tenth chapter, “Trees.” However, *The Craft of Gardens* doesn’t talk about this subject at all. *The Craft of Gardens* is well organized and logical, and it has a lot of pictures. *A Treatise on Garden Design*, on the other hand, doesn’t have any pictures.

To summarize, the contents of the two monographs have parallels and variations. *The Craft of Gardens* stresses the construction of styles in landscaping but also discusses the essential technical elements in garden design. *A Treatise on Garden Design* concentrates on garden building skills, supplemented by lectures on Feng Shui taboos.

Commonalities and Differences in Artistic Conception

The importance of mimicking nature in landscape design is emphasized in both *A Treatise on Garden Design* and *The Craft of Gardens*. In their introductory chapters, both books offer their perspectives on the artistic conception of gardens. In the chapters Summary and Principles of Garden Design, *The Craft of Gardens* emphasizes that the architect must be inventive in making use of natural conditions, establishing the overall layout, and integrating the natural landscape, and that the primary objective of garden architecture is to make the man-made landscape appear like a work of nature. The first chapter of Basic Rules of Garden Design in *A Treatise on Garden Design* describes its landscape architectural concepts: (i) take advantage of the land’s original conditions and learn from nature to give man-made landscapes a natural appearance; (ii) the architect must learn from those renowned masterpieces, respect the requirements of the garden owners, and give full play to his personal style; and (iii) through investigation and broad travel, the architect gets the opportunity to see nature and learn from his peers’ strengths (2). Similar statements are made in the first chapter of Summary of *The Craft of Gardens*, such as “The unique artistic conception of the architect is far more important than the building techniques” and “It is recommended to make intelligent use of natural conditions and incorporate natural scenery into the conception of the garden to make it appropriate and in harmony with the natural environment.” In the preface, Ji emphasized the significance of extensive travel for expanding the knowledge and horizons of architects by relating his own life experience—he had been traveling in Yanjing (now Beijing), Hunan, and Hubei, among other places, and did not return to his hometown of Runzhou, Jiangsu, until his middle age.

A Treatise on Garden Design and *The Craft of Gardens*, however, have quite different ideas about art. The importance of replicating nature in garden construction is emphasized in *A Treatise on Garden Design*, although it ignores the development of an artistic tone in landscaping. Although there is a description of a waterfall that seems to fall from the mountain’s natural rocks, creating a serene and solitary mood, in the Procedures of Waterfall Construction chapter (2), it is uncommon to find such a description in *A Treatise on Garden Design*. *The Craft of Gardens*, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of the aesthetic mood of the piece and the emotional expression in landscape architecture, despite the fact that it acknowledges the necessity of nature replication.

Ji introduced a distinctive creative concept that is absent from *A Treatise on Garden Design*: “borrowing scenery from

nature.” Ji emphasized that the most significant and beautiful aspect of landscape design was “borrowing scenery from nature” (6). By incorporating the beauty of the natural world into landscape design, it implies bringing natural views into interior places for people to live. According to *The Craft of Gardens*, there are various ways to borrow landscape, including borrowing from distant or nearby countryside, views above or below the observers, and scenery that changes with the seasons. With the use of the word “borrowing,” nature is personified as a dependable friend of people, and people are seen as a part of nature that people can always borrow scenery from and give it back to. It showcases the Chinese traditional garden architects’ great artistic conception. Nature, however, is only the subject of emulation in *A Treatise on Garden Design*. Feng Shui taboos, which are meant to shield the garden owners from danger, also give the gardens a mysterious feel. *A Treatise on Garden Design*’s primary considerations appear to be the garden’s aesthetic value and its role as a safe haven. The garden in *The Craft of Gardens*, on the other hand, is a living thing. Rather than simply being a peaceful and lovely place to live, the garden and its owner share a spiritual communion.

In addition, “harmony” is the watchword in *The Craft of Gardens*’ proposal of making the garden “suitable” and “in tune with” the natural surroundings. Harmony has been a major concept in traditional Chinese design and object creation. It has been considered an interaction between the universe and humans, underlying human relationships with nature, time, and the environment (8). The concept of “harmony” appears frequently in *The Craft of Gardens*. For example, the Chapter on Scenery Borrowing states that each solar term has its own corresponding flowers and unique scenes, and thus the architect must consider the harmony with seasons when planning how to “borrow scenery from nature” (6); in the Chapter on Patterns of Doors and Windows, the author states that although there is no restriction on the direction of garden buildings, the direction of the garden gate should be consistent with that of the main building to make

the overall plan harmonious (6). *The Craft of Gardens* applies the classical premise that man is an intrinsic part of nature to all elements of landscape building.

Conclusion

The Craft of Gardens and *A Treatise on Garden Design* both have their origins in traditional Chinese culture. *A Treatise on Garden Design* makes extensive use of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism in traditional Chinese culture. The landscape art of ancient Japan and traditional Chinese culture can still be seen in many modern Japanese gardens. For instance, *A Treatise on Garden Design*, which states that “there are no ponds and streams in the rock garden,” is where the concept of a dry landscape in Japan first appeared (2, p. 75). The two works’ contents share certain similarities and differ from one another. *The Craft of Gardens* is a relatively comprehensive book with in-depth descriptions and illustrations of buildings, paths, mounds, water, doors and windows, and other parts of the garden, and is presented in more literary language. *A Treatise on Garden Design* is more like a work manual for architects, focusing on the techniques of stone and water arrangement. In terms of creative conception, the two books agree that landscape architecture should respect nature and emulate it, but there is a difference in their assessments of whether they have gone beyond mere imitation. The lack of higher-order pursuits in *A Treatise on Garden Design*, aside from the practical functionality of gardens, largely contributes to the limitations of contemporary Japanese landscaping, which prioritizes technology above aesthetic innovation. That explains why there has been little change in Japanese landscape architecture over the course of many centuries. *The Craft of Gardens*, in contrast to *A Treatise on Garden Design*, aims to delve deeper into the philosophical significance of gardens. As a result, in the history of Chinese landscape architecture, individual inventiveness of architects has been encouraged rather than adherence to predefined standards. ■

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