

Formation Periods (Evolution) of Traditional Japanese Garden-Park Art

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Annotation: This article provides a comprehensive and synthesized analysis of the formation process of traditional Japanese garden-park art through the lens of its developmental periods. It examines changes in the characteristics, types, compositional solutions, and structural elements of Japanese gardens during each historical period. Additionally, the factors influencing the formation of traditional Japanese gardens, as well as the functions performed by gardens in each period, are analyzed. The study also considers the impact of political, economic, and religious contexts on garden formation throughout Japan's history.

Keywords: Japanese garden-park art, Kofun period, Asuka period, Nara period, Heian period, Kamakura period, Muromachi period, Momoyama period, Edo period, Meiji period, Showa period.

INTRODUCTION

Interest in Japanese garden-park art has been steadily increasing worldwide. As a result, numerous scholarly studies have been conducted, examining the compositional techniques and structural elements of ancient Japanese gardens. These historical traditional gardens serve as templates for the creation of new Japanese gardens. Therefore,

studying the primary characteristics, structural components, and elements of ancient traditional Japanese gardens is crucial for guiding the construction of modern gardens. However, the evolutionary changes in traditional Japanese gardens during their formative periods have not been comprehensively or systematically studied. In the field of landscape architecture in our country, in-depth research on this topic remains limited. Nevertheless, this subject has been partially addressed in the works of local scholars such as A.S. Uralov, L.A. Adilova, and K.D. Rakhimov. Additionally, contributions from Russian-language literature by scholars and specialists such as L.I. Galkina, N.S. Nikolaeva, L.A. Lebedeva, S.A. Mostovoy, A.S. Pavlova, M.P. Zgurskaya, P.I. Prikhodko, E.V. Golosova, A.B. Zaitsev, and A.N. Meshcheryakov have provided valuable insights.

In Western countries, landscape architects and readers first gained detailed knowledge of traditional Japanese gardens in 1893, largely due to J. Conder. His research primarily analyzed one of the written sources from the Edo period (1603–1868), *The Manual for Creating Mountainous (Hilly) Gardens*. Furthermore, Japanese gardens have been studied in the West by figures such as L. Cook, M. Bring, G. Nitschke, M. Keane, C. Chummy, and W. Kautert.

Research and Methods. A comprehensive approach was employed to address the research problem, incorporating the following specific scientific methods. These included analyzing materials gathered from relevant scholarly and specialized literature through a comparative approach, studying notable Japanese gardens, and synthesizing the collected information to identify patterns in the development of traditional Japanese gardens and the formation of the Japanese garden model.

The developmental trajectory of Japanese national culture can be observed through the stages of evolution reflected in its remarkable gardens. These traditional Japanese gardens serve as primary sources for modern scholars, providing insights into historical Japanese concepts of beauty and harmony, customs, and cultural progress.

Unlike Chinese gardens, which underwent significant changes with each successive dynasty, Japanese gardens evolved progressively, with each historical period contributing distinctively to the development of the "Japanese garden" concept. This has led to the customary practice of studying Japanese garden-park art within its historical phases. Below, we examine the historical periods that played a key role in the formation of traditional Japanese gardens and Japanese culture.

The Kofun Period (3rd–6th Centuries)

The earliest historical records of Japanese gardens trace back to the Kofun period. During this era, the Japanese believed in the presence of numerous deities within their natural surroundings—such as deep ravines, rivers, lakes, old trees, waterfalls, and mountains. This belief led to practices such as enclosing sacred trees with fences and regarding certain stones as divine objects, thereby creating sacred spaces to establish connections with deities.

Religious rituals known as *shiki* were conducted in these spaces. Sacred stones (*ivakura*) were often surrounded by smaller stones, forming sacred zones (*ivasaka*). These sacred stones and spaces are considered among the origins of Japanese gardens. Even today, sacred stones can be found across Japan. **The Asuka Period (552–710)** The introduction of Buddhism to Japan from the Korean kingdom of Baekje significantly influenced Japanese

governance, arts, and craftsmanship. Advanced garden-making techniques also entered Japan during this period, brought by representatives from ancient Korean states. After diplomatic ties strengthened between Japan and the Silla Kingdom, garden models were adapted from Silla's designs.

This era marked the emergence of rectangular ponds in gardens, and gardens transformed from spaces for deity worship to venues for conducting religious ceremonies. The earliest written references to gardens appear in the historical chronicle *Nihon Shoki*.

One such account describes a garden owned by a high-ranking official, Soga-no Unmachi, during the Asuka period. This garden, located along the Asuka River, featured a pond with small islands, earning Unmachi the title "Minister of the Island" or "Minister of the Garden" in 626 CE.

Scholarly Sources Japanese gardens are central to understanding the evolution of Japanese aesthetics and religious practices. The works of Mostovoy and others offer significant insights into the early sacred elements of Japanese gardens, providing a foundation for further study of their cultural and historical significance.

Characteristics of 7th-Century Japanese Gardens

Three distinctive features of Japanese gardens in the 7th century include rectangular ponds, stone-lined shores, and stone sculptures. However, these elements do not appear in later stages of garden-park art development【Mostovoy, Dissertation, pp. 29–30. The Nara Period (710–794)

During the Nara period, Japanese culture evolved under the strong influence of Chinese culture. As cultural exchanges between Japan and China intensified, Japanese architects began modeling their designs on Chinese imperial palaces. This trend of imitation extended to Japanese gardens, which reflected Chinese styles【Zgurskaya, p. 39】.

In the 6th–8th centuries, China was considered the cultural hub of East Asia, with a highly advanced tradition of horticultural art. Neighboring states struggled to match Chinese standards in this field. Despite efforts to emulate Chinese craftsmanship, Japanese gardens retained their unique aesthetic perspectives, traditions, and geographical features【Japan Garden Symbolism, p. 12】.

One notable development in this period was the creation of large gardens featuring ponds with streams (kyokusui type). The ponds were often dragon-shaped, symbolizing power and mysticism. A prime example is the pond discovered in the Heijo-kyo Sanzaiyoin-bo garden (modern-day Nara) during excavations in 1975. This pond was dragon-shaped and hosted rituals such as kyokusui-en (banquets by the riverbank).

During the Nara period, the function of gardens underwent a significant transformation. They became spaces for aristocratic leisure, poetic gatherings, and ceremonial banquets, diverging from their earlier religious and spiritual purposes【Mostovoy, Article.

Transformations in Garden Design During the Nara and Heian Periods Nara Period (710–794) During the Nara period, significant changes occurred in the compositional, spatial, and artistic solutions of gardens. Ponds, which previously had rectangular shapes, adopted more natural, free-form designs. Mimicking seashores became a popular trend, and coastal-like embellishments became the primary technique for decorating pond edges【Japan Garden Symbolism, p. 13】.

Heian Period (794–1185) The Heian period, considered the "Golden Age" in Japanese history, marked a critical phase in the development of traditional Japanese gardening art. It was a time of wealth and prosperity, with gardens continuing to serve as recreational spaces for the nobility. A key feature of this era was the integration of gardens with architectural structures. The *sinden-zukuri* architectural style, dominant during the Heian period, influenced the creation of *chisen-tei* (pond garden) designs, where gardens formed a cohesive composition with buildings. The layout became larger, with ponds occupying significant portions of the gardens.

Buddhism spread widely among the populace, leading to an increase in temple construction. Consequently, temple courtyards began featuring *Jodo*-style (Pure Land) gardens. While the early part of the Heian period still exhibited traces of Chinese cultural influence, the second half saw a complete assimilation of these external elements into native Japanese aesthetics【Taschen, p. 32.

Heian gardens served two primary purposes:

1. To offer scenic views for enjoyment from pavilions or main buildings.
2. To provide an aesthetic experience during boat rides on the ponds.

These pavilions were often connected to the primary structures by galleries

【Takei & Keane, *Sakuteiki: Visions of the Japanese Garden*, p. 247】.

First Documented Guide to Garden Design: Sakuteiki. The *Sakuteiki* (作庭記, "Notes on Garden Making") is the earliest known written source on Japanese garden design. Compiled during the late Heian period (11th century), it is attributed to Tachibana no Toshitsuna (1028–1094), the son of Fujiwara no Yorimichi (992–1074), a powerful aristocrat who established the Byodo-in temple in 1052.

The *Sakuteiki* provides comprehensive guidelines on the placement of stones, pond shapes, island designs, waterfalls, and other garden elements. It also details their constructive features and the philosophies underlying their creation【Japan Garden Design, p. 62】

Buddhism's Influence During Kamakura and Muromachi Periods The Kamakura (1185–1333) and Muromachi (1333–1568) periods were marked by strong Buddhist and Zen influences on garden design. With political power in the hands of military rulers, garden spaces became smaller, and their aesthetic elements were simplified.

Gardens began incorporating stone compositions symbolizing mythical creatures such as the "Tortoise," "Crane," and "Runback" (Dragon Gate Waterfall). New garden types emerged, including *hiraniwa* (flat gardens) and *Kaushik* (strolling gardens), which often blended dry landscapes with ponds.

By the late Muromachi period, garden spaces expanded once more. Ponds started featuring shapes inspired by the kanji for "heart" (心, *shin*), symbolizing serenity and reflection. Stone gardens designed in the *karesansui* (dry landscape) style became prominent as standalone gardens.

Kamakura and Muromachi gardens were predominantly built within temple complexes to aid meditation and contemplation. These gardens encapsulated the essence of Zen philosophy, offering spaces for introspection and spiritual connection【Mostovoy, Article.

Development of Japanese Gardens Across Historical Eras

Muromachi Period (1333–1568): A New Phase in Japanese Garden Art

The Muromachi period marked a transformative phase in Japanese gardening with the creation of iconic temple gardens such as Saihō-ji and Tenryū-ji, as well as the gardens in the Ashikaga shogunate residences. Master Musō Soseki's *jukkei-jukkyo* compositional techniques played a pivotal role in advancing the *kaiyūshiki* (strolling garden) style. These gardens featured carefully curated pathways and unique stone arrangements, setting a benchmark for subsequent garden designs【Fotima, 2024】

Momo Yama Period (1568–1615): Symbolism and Rituals in Garden Design

The Momo Yama period brought unique symbolic elements to gardens, such as the "Islands of Eternal Life," representing the owner's wish for longevity. The gardens often included three symbolic island compositions—*Tsuru* (Crane), *Kame* (Tortoise), and *Horai*—connected by stone bridges and collectively known as *Tsurukame-Horai*.

During this period, tea ceremony customs were refined, leading to the creation of tea gardens (*roji*), which featured pathways and minimalist designs ideal for the meditative tea experience. The *shoin-zukuri* architectural style influenced garden layouts, and garden masters like Kobori Enchi introduced elements inspired by Western landscaping traditions. The *karikomi* pruning technique emerged, emphasizing large, sculptural stone compositions【Taschen】.

Edo Period (1615–1868): The Multifunctional Daymyo Gardens

The Edo period was characterized by peace and prosperity, leading to the construction of grand gardens by powerful feudal lords (*daymyo*). These gardens, such as Kairaku-en in Mito, Koraku-en in Okayama, and Kenroku-en in Kanazawa, represented their owners' power and served as venues for leisure and official gatherings. Features included tea houses for ceremonies, stages for *Noh* theater, and spaces for entertaining shogunate officials.

Edo gardens were multifunctional, combining earlier garden styles and incorporating fields of rice, tea plantations, bamboo groves, and cherry blossoms within distinct sections. Meanwhile, *tsuboniwa* (courtyard gardens) became integral to urban homes, offering a scaled-down version of traditional gardens【Fotima, Daymyo.

Bonsai art also flourished during this era, with specialized containers produced to accommodate these miniature landscapes. Though introduced from China in the 11th century, bonsai evolved and reached its artistic peak in Japan during the Edo period【250-p】.

Meiji Period (1868–1912): Western Influence and Revival of Tradition

The early Meiji era saw the introduction of Western-style gardens featuring symmetrical layouts, flowerbeds, fountains, sculptures, and lawns. Public parks were created by transforming traditional gardens from earlier periods. Despite this Western influence, there was a resurgence of interest in preserving Japanese cultural identity by the end of the Meiji period.

Prominent projects such as the Heian Shrine garden in Kyoto, built in 1895 to commemorate the city's 1100th anniversary, reflected this cultural revival. The shrine symbolized national values and traditions while honoring Emperor Kimmo, the founder of Heian-kayo (modern-day Kyoto)【17-p.

Shōwa Period (1926–1989): Blending Traditions with Modernity

The early Shewa period gardens aimed to showcase Japan's greatness and resilience, often blending traditional Japanese and Western landscaping styles. A notable example is the Meiji Shrine complex in Tokyo, dedicated to Emperor Meiji. Constructed between 1915 and 1926, this memorial represented a significant cultural event and served as a tribute to one of Japan's most revered reformers【23-p】.

Overall, Japanese gardens evolved through centuries, reflecting shifts in societal priorities, aesthetic ideals, and cultural influences while preserving their essence of harmony and spirituality.

Gardens are primarily intended for the general public. By the 20th century, the creative experiments conducted on Japanese gardens led to the emergence of modern gardens. Japanese garden-park art developed under the strong influence of international modernism and abstractionism, becoming part of global cultural processes.

By the second half of the Shewa period (1912-1989), the size of modern gardens decreased, and the composition of themes, garden elements, and materials changed. Modern construction materials and elements began to be widely used in gardens. Principles of composition such as rhythm, dynamics, and contrast were incorporated. One of the landscape architects from this era, Mirei Shigemori, used principles of rhythm and contrast, geometric and arbitrary shapes, lines, and planes in the gardens he created. He applied new elements to the traditional *karesansui* style.

The rise of landscape architecture was stimulated by the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and the Expo '70 World Exhibition in Osaka. Public parks, squares, and sports fields were established, and beautification work was carried out. A garden covering an area of 26 hectares was divided into four thematic zones: "Ancient Garden," "Medieval Garden," "Modern Garden," and "Contemporary Garden." Each zone reflected different historical stages of Japanese garden art.

By the 20th century, construction materials such as concrete, metal, and glass were widely produced. As a result, these materials were used in landscape architecture. Modern architecture and construction technologies led to the formation of gardens with massive concrete structures, plastic surfaces, and geometric shapes.

Thus, the historical development of Japanese garden-park art, which spanned nearly 15 centuries, evolved through the free landscape style.

Result and discussion.

The following table and diagram summarize the development of traditional Japanese garden-park art across different periods.

Period	Purpose of Gardens	Garden Forms	Factors Influencing Garden Formation
Kofun (3rd–6th c.)	Served as sacred places for communication with deities and as religious worship sites.	Early gardens in the form of sacred stones (ivakura) surrounded by stone arrangements (ivasaki).	Shintoism
Asuka (552–710))	Used for conducting religious ceremonies.	Initial pond gardens appeared. Rectangular ponds, gardens with stone beaches, and stone sculptures developed.	Introduction of Buddhism from Baekje. Garden models were influenced by Silla gardens.

Nara (710-794)	Designed for aristocrats to relax and hold poetic entertainment gatherings.	Ponds took on a free landscape form, transforming into dragon shapes.	Strong influence of Chinese culture.
Heian (794–1185)	For the relaxation of aristocrats and officials, conducting religious ceremonies, and mainly for boating.	Large pond gardens influenced by Shinden-zukuri architecture emerged. These gardens occupied large areas and were attached to residences.	Assimilation of Chinese culture and the peak of Japanese cultural formation
Kamakura (1185-1333)	Focused on contemplation, meditation, and walking.	The size of gardens and ponds decreased significantly. Karesansui gardens appeared, featuring stone compositions like “Tortoise” and “Crane.”	Political power shifted to the military; Buddhism and Zen teachings spread widely.
Muromachi (1333–1568)	Designed for contemplation, meditation, and walking.	Gardens began to reflect the essence of Zen philosophy. For the first time, the shape of ponds incorporated the “shin” heart ideogram. Gardens featuring ponds, streams, and dry landscape stone compositions were constructed adjacent to temples. The karesansui (dry landscape) stone gardens became more sophisticated and evolved as a distinct garden type. Stone compositions symbolizing mythical images such as the “Tortoise,” “Crane,” and “Ryumonbaku” remained essential elements of these gardens.	Continued military rule and widespread influence of Buddhism and Zen.
Momoyama (1568-1615)	For contemplation, meditation, walking, and influenced by Zen Buddhism.	The Shoin-zukuri architectural style emerged during this period. Kayyusiki and karesansui types of gardens gained popularity. Master Kobori Enshu was the first to incorporate Western traditions into Japanese gardens, advancing the art of karikomi (clipped shrubs). Large-scale and massive stone compositions were employed. The Surukame (Crane and Turtle) island composition was introduced, interconnected by stone bridges. Tea ceremony gardens also made their debut during this time.	Japan established its first connections with Western countries during this period. Christianity was introduced, and the tea ceremony spread across all social classes.
Edo (1615-1868)	Many gardens of this period were not based on Zen Buddhist ideas but were designed for activities such as strolling, relaxation, meditation, martial arts practice, showcasing power, conducting tea ceremonies, and hosting official visits.	Gardens built in the Kaiyushiki style featured complex layouts and multifunctional designs. The garden sizes expanded significantly. These multifunctional gardens combined various elements, including ponds, streams, flat dry landscapes, tea ceremony gardens, and other Kaushik-style sections. Some gardens also included practical zones like agricultural areas for rice fields and tea plantations. Specialized sections were dedicated to groves of sycamore, bamboo, and plum trees, planted in large clusters.	During this time, ties with Western countries were severed, leading to a decline in Western influences on gardening traditions. The wars among the daimyo came to an end, and the country was unified under the Tokugawa Shogunate, resulting in a period of isolation.
Meiji (1868–1912)	During this period, gardens were designed for public use, providing spaces for relaxation, celebrating festivals, and engaging in sports activities.	Unconventional eclectic gardens emerged, blending European and Japanese styles. Lawns became a prominent feature, and public parks that combined European and Japanese design elements were established. Additionally, growing interest in traditional Japanese gardens during the second half of the Meiji era led to the construction of national shrines.	Japan re-established connections with the outside world, undergoing extensive modernization. The country came under the influence of European culture, which significantly impacted its garden and architectural styles.
Showa (1912-1989)	During this period, gardens were designed for public use, providing spaces for relaxation, celebrating festivals, and engaging in sports activities.	Gardens began to reflect influences from modernism and abstract art, resulting in geometric designs. Modern construction materials were incorporated into garden architecture. Roof gardens, multifunctional European-style parks, and gardens adjacent to national shrines were established.	In the first half of the Showa era, Japan's participation in World War II slowed the development of landscape architecture. However, in the latter half, Japanese garden design came under the influence of European

			<p>culture, leading to a fusion of styles and techniques in contemporary garden projects. During the first half of the Shōwa period, Japan was involved in World War II. As a result of the war, the development of Japanese landscape architecture slowed down. In the second half, it came under the influence of European culture.</p>
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The diagram (or table) above shows that the main elements of the garden have remained "stone and water." Throughout each period, the appearance of Japanese gardens became more complex, leading to the formation of the traditional Japanese garden model. The earliest form of the traditional Japanese garden model developed during the Heian period, which is considered the flourishing period of Japanese traditional garden-park art. Specifically, the first written source on garden creation during the Heian period, *Snakelike*, became a decisive factor in shaping future gardens. The main garden model evolved and became more complex over the following centuries.

During the Kamakura and Murom chi periods, the influence of Buddhism and Zen teachings, along with the consolidation of military power, resulted in a reduction in garden size, and gardens were established near temples. Buddhism had a strong impact on the formation and development of Japanese traditional garden art. As a result, temple gardens

became widespread and well-developed. Under the influence of Buddhism, many elements in Japanese gardens began to have symbolic meanings.

The tea ceremony garden, which does not appear in any other gardens, was formed during the Momo Yama period. The tea ceremony existed during the Kamakura and Muromachi periods as well, but it was during the Momo Yama period that the rules and regulations of the tea ceremony were refined, and the tea house and tea garden were established.

The current traditional Japanese garden model, as we know it, took shape during the Edo period. The Edo period stands out in the history of Japanese gardening art for the creation of magnificent gardens. Large multifunctional gardens for emperors and daimyo were established, and these gardens began to occupy vast areas. These large imperial and daimyo gardens played a significant role in making Japanese gardens famous worldwide. In the subsequent Meiji and Showa periods, Western gardening traditions influenced Japanese garden-park art. Many large gardens were transformed into public parks in the European and Japanese styles. However, by the early 19th century, attention was focused again on preserving, restoring, and reviving historical traditional Japanese gardens and cultural traditions. As a result of the restoration of connections with the outside world, Japanese gardens began to be established in foreign countries as well.



Fig. 6. Plan scheme of the Japanese Garden at Kairėnai Botanical Garden. Vilnius, Lithuania. G. Stauskis pic. 2011

Conclusion. Most gardens are based on Zen-Buddhist ideas and are intended for meditation and walks. Each period in the formation of the Japanese traditional garden approached the concepts of shape and function associated with the garden archetypes of the previous period. When the Japanese invented a new type of garden in each period, they made it a priority to thoroughly study and analyze the previous prototype and harmonize it with the new design. As a result, gardens always had a deep connection with ancient gardens. At the same time, in some periods, gardens underwent significant changes, while in other periods, they simply copied the gardens of the past.

In future research, conducting scientific studies using historical Japanese gardens as examples will yield better results for a deeper understanding of traditional Japanese garden-park art.

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