

# Contrastive Study between Chinese and Japanese Gardens

## Taking Zhanyuan Garden in Nanjing and Abbot's Garden of Long'an Temple in Kyoto as Examples

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### ABSTRACT

Chinese gardens have developed distinctive features through thousands of years. Japanese gardens, under the influence of Chinese gardens, have developed unique Japanese characteristics of dry landscape gardens, thus, contributing to some differences and similarities while compared with Chinese gardens. The fact that Zhanyuan Garden in Nanjing and Abbot's Garden of Long'an Temple in Kyoto were built in the same era makes it meaningful to compare the two gardens. This article focuses on the differences between the two gardens through investigating the knowledge of Chinese and Japanese garden schools, the historical development of Chinese gardens, and the integration and transformation of Japanese gardens after being influenced by Chinese culture. After a contrastive study of the characteristics of the two in three main aspects: ideological and philosophical systems, aesthetic perspectives, and landscapes techniques, this article analyzes the reasons for the differences between the two countries' gardens in two aspects: social and environmental factors, cultural and traditional factors. The contrastive study of garden culture is conducive to understanding the cultural differences between China and Japan, promoting cultural exchanges, and making suggestions for the inheritance and innovation of Chinese gardens.

**Keywords:** *Chinese and Japanese Gardens, Zhanyuan Garden, Abbot's Garden of Long'an Temple, Landscape Art, Zen Thought.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Chinese gardens have revered nature, and reproduced nature. Japanese gardens, though influenced by Chinese culture, have developed a unique school of gardens after thousands of years of fusion and transformation of the imported culture. Chinese gardens are represented by Suzhou gardens, but as the capital of the Ming Dynasty, gardens in Nanjing have also developed with distinctive features, and Zhanyuan Garden is one of the best. Abbot's Garden of Long'an Temple was established in the Edo period in Japan, the same period as Zhanyuan Garden, which makes the connection between the two worth considering. Undeniably, there are both similarities and differences between Zhanyuan Garden Abbot's Garden of Long'an Temple, but this article will focus on the differences between the two gardens through investigating the knowledge of Chinese and Japanese garden schools, the

historical development of Chinese gardens, and the integration and transformation of Japanese gardens after being influenced by Chinese culture.

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Chinese gardens originated from the Shang and Zhou dynasties and developed in the Ming and Qing dynasties. In the heyday of the Ming and Qing dynasties, three types of gardens were formed in the south, north, and south of the Five Ridges, which can be divided into royal gardens, temple gardens, and private gardens. After Buddhism was introduced to Japan during the Northern and Southern Dynasties, Japanese gardens evolved through different periods and developed into diverse forms, among which the dry landscape is the most famous one.

As one of the four famous gardens in Jiangnan, Zhanyuan Garden is one of the oldest classical gardens

survived in Nanjing, and its exquisite layout and construction make it a typical representative of excellent classical gardens, with a natural, tranquil, and elegant style and a philosophical foundation synthesized from Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist thought [1]. The spatial layout of Zhanyuan Garden is both separated and connected, consisting mainly of rocks, water bodies, plants, and architecture, where plants are configured with rocks, water bodies, and architecture respectively, expressing man's understanding of nature.

Abbot's Garden of Long'an Temple is representative of Japanese dry landscape gardens, conveying a sense of calm and seclusion, absorbing the art of Chinese gardens while giving some new vitality. For example, the layout of Long'an Temple borrows the traditional Chinese gardens' forestry technique of one step with one scene, while converting it into an effect of different views from different perspectives, and also refers to the characteristics of Chinese ink painting, emphasizing the distinction between the important and the lesser one [2]. Long'an Temple has an inseparable and close connection with Zen thought, giving a sense of loneliness and powerlessness through time and space. The landscape of Long'an Temple consists of white sand, stone groups, planting, etc. The texture of sand and stone is sent to the landscape, stripping it of its material and making the concept of landscape "solidified"[3].

Zhanyuan Garden and Abbot's Garden built in the same time, though in the different countries. Having been studied respectively, the two gardens arouses the author's interest to conduct a contrastive research between them, thus to promote cultural exchanges in some sense.

### **3. CONTRASTIVE STUDY BETWEEN ZHANYUAN GARDEN IN NANJING AND ABBOT'S GARDEN OF LONG'AN TEMPLE IN KYOTO**

Zhanyuan Garden and Abbot's garden of Long'an Temple belong to the same period of gardens. This article will make a contrast between them in terms of ideological and philosophical systems, aesthetic perspectives, and landscapes techniques.

#### ***3.1. Differences in ideological and philosophical systems***

The ideological and philosophical systems of both China and Japan include Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, but there are still some differences in the expression of these ideas in Zhanyuan Garden and Long'an Temple.

#### ***3.1.1. The ideological and philosophical system of Zhanyuan Garden***

As a vehicle for expressing beauty, the classical Chinese garden system contains deep traditional Chinese cultural connotations and is governed by a certain philosophical system. China has a native Confucianism and Taoism in the construction of its ideological system, while not rejecting and expelling Buddhist ideas. As one of the representatives of private gardens in Jiangnan during the Ming and Qing dynasties, Zhanyuan Garden is a synthesis of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, all of which were influenced by each other. Confucianism pursues the golden mean and advocates harmony; Taoism pursues a state of inner peace and pleasure; Buddhism emphasizes resting the heart and desires, pursuing inner emptiness and tranquility [4]. It puts nature in a small landscape, assigns Zen meaning to enjoyment, and sees the big in the small within limited space while conveying the idea of indifference in the landscape. The style of Zhanyuan Garden is thus derived.

#### ***3.1.2. The ideological and philosophical system of Abbot's Garden of Long'an Temple***

Buddhism was introduced to Japan from India through China in 1192, and some rulers valued it for its value in protecting the country and the state, so Buddhism developed in Japan, and the garden of the dry landscape is the style formed through the development of Zen thought. Long'an Temple, as a representative of dry landscape, is profoundly influenced by the aesthetics of Zen thought and reflects the mood of dryness and silence in every way. In the garden, the viewer can feel the transience and impermanence, and experience infinity, eternity, and emptiness, where samurai often sat in meditation to cultivate their spirit, receive spiritual support to ignore the difference between life and death, get rid of the ties of desire, meditate, and gain inner enlightenment. Abbot's garden of Long'an Temple becomes an explanation of Zen meaning, expressing a mournful yet pleasant beauty.

#### ***3.1.3. Contrast in ideological and philosophical system between the two gardens***

Though both based on natural scenery and influenced by Zen, there are some differences in this case. Zen has had a more profound impact on Japanese culture. Although it is originally a sinicized Buddhist sect, Zen's influence on Chinese culture has been far less significant than that on Japan. Zen in the Chinese tradition highlights primarily a pearl of intuitive wisdom and ultimately dissolves and subsumes this wisdom into the affirmation of life and living [5]. Under the influence of this principle, the Zen spirit of Zhanyuan Garden is very natural, achieving a state of unity

between nature and humans and giving people a sense of leisure and elegance. Abbot's Garden of Long'an Temple, on the other hand, as a typical temple garden, is more deliberately refined in its Zen expression, with a highly abstract natural landscape that expresses an eternal mood beyond life and death.

### ***3.2. Differences in aesthetic perspectives***

The eyes to examine the beauty of the form are necessary for the experience of beauty, and people, as subjects who appreciate beauty, will have very different aesthetic orientations due to different reasons such as psychological, ethnic, and social backgrounds. And the garden as an aesthetic object also includes its natural properties and the special spirit given by the times.

#### ***3.2.1. Aesthetic subjects and objects in Zhanyuan Garden***

Zhanyuan Garden was born in China and developed during the Ming and Qing dynasties and was a typical manifestation of the culture of the scholarly class in a feudal and authoritarian society. The aesthetic subject of the garden was more inclined to the literati of the scholarly class, so Zhanyuan Garden showed a tendency to be literate. The literati scholars in Zhanyuan Garden practice, study, and cultivate their bodies, reflecting their aesthetic sensibilities. The Chinese aesthetic psychology has a relatively strong sense of life, realism, and utilitarian colors, so the landscape of Zhanyuan Garden is shaped by the pursuit of natural reality, but not simply imitation and reproduction of natural landscapes. In terms of the landscape, on the one hand, it reflects the ambitions of the scholars to rule the country and the world, and on the other hand, it shows the philosophy of tranquility and health.

#### ***3.2.2. Aesthetic subjects and objects in Abbot's Garden of Long'an Temple***

The aesthetic subjects of Long'an Temple were mostly samurai and Zen monks. Being influenced by Zen thought, together with some defects brought about by the geographical location of Japan, the Japanese were inclined to a pessimistic attitude toward landscape aesthetics. They used sand to express the mood of water, simulating the sense of waves of water flow; they used stones to simulate the posture of mountains, symbolizing the sublime mountains and hills, which is different from the real mountains and water gardens in China and requires a delicate spiritual feeling.

#### ***3.2.3. Contrast in aesthetic subjects and objects between the two gardens***

There are also similarities and differences between the Chinese and Japanese as aesthetic subjects of

gardens. The Chinese and the Japanese have similar cultural backgrounds and both belong to the Oriental cultural group. The differences lie mainly in the following points. First, the Chinese are taller than the Japanese, which makes a difference in their determination of the size of the aesthetic object, so the Chinese create gardens on a larger scale and at a higher height. Second, the Chinese live on the mainland, the garden content is mainly mountain scenery reproduction, while the Japanese live on the island, the garden content is mainly seascape. Third, the aesthetic subjects of Chinese and Japanese gardens belonged to the literati and samurai, monks, and their aesthetic trends were naturally different.

As aesthetic objects, the landscape elements of gardens mainly include architecture, planting, rocks, and water features. In the natural sense, the differences between the two gardens are mainly as follows. First, Zhanyuan Garden uses more plants based on mountains, while Long'an Temple uses more plants based on island water. Second, Zhanyuan Garden is located in the mainland of China and is richer in the expression of mountain scenery, and the balance between mountain and water scenery can be basically achieved. In contrast, there is no real water in Long'an Temple, but because Japan is an island country, the interior of the garden still uses white sand to simulate the ripples of water, while there are fewer mountain scenes. Long'an Temple is essentially a water-based garden. Third, in terms of water settings, Zhanyuan Garden has more lake and pond type water features than ocean type, while water features in Long'an Temple are mostly in the form of fake water to simulate the ocean due to the difference in geographical location between the two countries.

### ***3.3. Differences in landscape techniques of expression***

In terms of garden layout, both Zhanyuan Garden and Long'an Temple are very particular about the expression of mood, but each has its own distinctive way of expression.

#### ***3.3.1. The embodiment of the characteristics of Zhanyuan Garden***

Zhanyuan Garden has a history of five hundred years, and its unique landscape techniques show the exquisite beauty of private gardens in the south of China, and its subtle spatial layout and deep cultural connotations reflect the gardeners' interest and style.

The private gardens in Jiangnan during the Ming and Qing dynasties in China were generally small in space, and in order to pursue a profound mood, the gardeners usually separated the garden spaces flexibly and designed the viewing routes cleverly to achieve the purpose of changing the scenery.

In the process of space separation, the garden elements, such as rocks, water bodies, and plants, were generally used. First, the use of rocks to separate spaces is very common in private gardens in Jiangnan, and there are three rock formations in Zhanyuan Garden, which form the interface and scenery of three different spaces in the back garden. Second, the water bodies in the private gardens of Jiangnan are divided into two forms: concentrated and dispersed, and the form of the water bodies often affects the layout of the entire space. There are only three scattered water bodies in Zhanyuan Garden, but these three water bodies are surrounded by various architecture, forming three centers, which are self-contained and interconnected. Third, plants as a green gardening element can form an interface to define space and add a sense of hierarchy to small private gardens. The plants in Zhanyuan Garden are planted in two ways: point planting and bush planting, which can meet different needs in different sizes of space, and through the combination of these two planting methods, the purpose of the garden is to have beautiful scenery in all seasons.

### *3.3.2. The embodiment of the characteristics of dry landscape style in Abbot's Garden of Long'an Temple*

The main idea of the dry landscape garden is "insight" in Zen Buddhism, and the abstract nature is reflected through sand, rocks, and plants to meet the spiritual needs of the viewer, and these features are reflected in Long'an Temple.

The typical dry landscape Long'an Temple has fixed characteristics. First, it has clear boundaries, mostly rectangular, with fences at the borders to isolate it from the outside world and create a quiet atmosphere. Second, the space inside the garden conveys a feeling of inaccessibility, and the idea of gardening in a dry landscape shows a static mood. The gardeners emphasized the idea of avoiding outside interference, and also used a lot of gravel and stone sets to reflect this feature. Third, Long'an Temple has a strictly organized layout. Like the dry landscape, one of the greatest characteristics of Long'an Temple is its minimalism. The gardeners can convey unlimited cultural connotation and spiritual power through limited design elements, so every detail of the garden interior needs to be strictly considered and designed.

### *3.3.3. Contrast in landscape techniques of expression between the two gardens*

As a dry landscape garden, Long'an Temple is influenced by the traditional Chinese gardening art, but at the same time a new life is given by the Japanese cultural style.

In terms of spatial layout, Long'an Temple shares with Zhanyuan Garden the same approach to gardening of one step at a time and one scene at a time, and is good at creating the visual effect of changing scenery from one step to another. In terms of plan layout, both follow the characteristics of Chinese ink painting with clear-cut priorities, and both are miniature landscapes, i.e., they create an infinite mood in a limited space. However, Zhanyuan Garden tends to use artificiality in nature to achieve the unity of nature and human, while Long'an Temple tends to do the opposite, creating nature in artificiality.

Garden plants are essential to the composition of Zhanyuan Garden and Long'an Temple, but there are obvious differences between the two in terms of plant selection and modeling. Zhanyuan Garden is rich in plant species, and the flowering season is carefully examined. Plants are given certain symbolic meaning and connotation here. While Long'an Temple is influenced by China, and the seasonal changes are also taken into account in the selection of plants, but the Japanese pay extra attention to the worship and reverence for nature and the gods, such as the black pine, which is given the power of God in Japanese culture and thus becomes the most loved plant in the garden, and the moss, which is customarily used in Long'an Temple, but such plants are rarely seen in Chinese Jiangnan gardens like Zhanyuan Garden. In terms of the combination and shape of plants, Zhanyuan Garden is characterized by asymmetrical and random arrangements that directly imitate the natural landscape and are seldom pruned, while plants in Long'an Temple are well layered and have a simple, regular style.

In terms of stone placement, Zhanyuan Garden is dominated by stacked rocks and rockery, aiming to create a natural mountain and forest landscape. Long'an Temple appreciates the native state of the stones and expresses the simplicity and wildness of nature. The designers mostly use volcanic stones and are good at skillfully combining stone groups to simulate seascapes.

In the arrangement of water scenery, Zhanyuan Garden takes water as the pulse throughout the garden, making water scenery into a belt-like meander, allowing the landscape to unfold around the water body layer by layer, which deepens the depth of the garden. The Long'an Temple uses "fake water", i.e., white sand to simulate the form of water, and dotted with isolated rocks to simulate islands to outline the abstract sea.

## **4. REASONS FOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ZHANYUAN GARDEN AND ABBOT'S GARDEN OF LONG'AN TEMPLE**

The formation and development of garden art is influenced by social, environmental factors as well as

cultural traditions, and it is significant for this study to explore the reasons for the differences between the two gardens.

#### **4.1. Natural environment**

China, a continental country, covers a wide range of climatic zones, with very different climates and rich topographical landscapes. So in Chinese gardens there are many inland landscapes, with great emphasis on the beauty of harmony between man and nature to create a variety of natural scenery. The southern gardens, to which Zhanyuan Garden belongs enjoy to the preferential treatment of the region, with a petite and dexterous scale and ingenious craftsmanship.

Japan is an island country surrounded by sea on all sides, with a long coastline. Japan has unique natural coastal landscape and hilly island. In terms of climate, Japan covers also tropical, temperate, subtropical three climate zones, bringing their rich plant resources. But the crustal activity is intense, and earthquakes happen frequently. The creation of nature has become the source of Japanese garden art, and the Japanese developed a worship of the sea, so that island landscapes and hilly landscapes became the theme of garden conception.

#### **4.2. Political background and economic development**

The Ming and Qing dynasties were the heyday of the development of Chinese classical gardens, with social stability and economic prosperity providing favorable conditions for large-scale garden construction. Jiangnan at that time was the most economically developed region in the country, resulting in a large number of literati and the creation of private gardens in Jiangnan flourish. The gardens of this period were the closest to nature in form and spirit, reflecting the aesthetics of quiet and subtle moods, and creating the ornamental effect of changing the scenery from one step to another.

After Japan entered the Musha era (1185 A.D.) when the samurai were in power, the spirit of Bushido, originated in Japan, and based on the awareness that the Samurai is not afraid of dying for the lord, emphasizes "death without thought, death without fear, death without hesitation" and the spirit of sacrificing one's life for the lord without reservation. It became the orthodoxy of the ruling country, and they promoted a life of astringent desires and simplicity. Those who wanted to achieve great things must go through hard trials and endure the cultivation of a clear mind. But such a society gave rise to negative emotions for many people, so the monks incorporated such emotions into the dry landscape gardens. In the era when Long'an Temple was born, Japan was short of material goods, and this kind of enjoyment was only available among

the upper class. Under such economic prerequisites, Long'an Temple adopted the most primitive and simple way to present the beauty of the garden.

#### **4.3. National psychology**

Although the ancient Chinese literati were influenced by both Taoism and Confucianism, they had a unified character. On the one hand, Confucianism advocates the positive spirit of entering the official career, encouraging people to pursue the personality of a gentleman. Chinese people prefer to look at the future with optimism. On the other hand, Taoism promotes the spiritual mood of transcendence and seclusion, which is also a process of positive progress to rectify one's body and mind, rather than a helpless submission and renunciation. So overall, the Chinese national psyche is on the happy and optimistic side. This national psychology also has many manifestations in the art of gardening. Classical Chinese buildings are mostly built for pleasure and set up for the present life of the literati, with a hedonistic spirit. While flowers and trees are planted as one of the important elements of garden composition, all showing the pursuit of the perfect personality of the literati and elegant people.

For Japan, although Confucianism and Taoism have also had an impact on it, the leading role in the Japanese national psyche and aesthetic consciousness is still Buddhism, which reflects a kind of low, sad emotions after the perception of nature in all its forms. There is pantheistic religious worship and some pessimistic colors. This mournful beauty can be reflected in the classical Japanese gardens, where the dry landscape style gardens have no flourishing flowers and trees, no real flowing water, and the proportion of buildings is low. The gardeners abandon superfluous ornamentation and do not serve worldly pleasure activities, expressing lonely Zen feelings and loneliness of life.

#### **4.4. Aesthetic consciousness**

Classical Chinese gardens pursue natural and contextual beauty. The root of natural beauty comes from the philosophical idea of "the unity of nature and human", and contextual beauty comes from the classical Chinese aesthetic tradition. The literati of all generations believe that this natural and pure beauty is the highest realm of beauty, and only the unity of the scene can form an organic artistic whole. Classical Chinese gardens are based on landscape painting, leaving room for poetry and painting as the main theme to create a profound effect in a limited garden space.

Japanese culture has actually absorbed a lot of Chinese and Indian ideas, but it still has its own native culture. Japanese beliefs emphasize nature worship, cleanliness, neatness, and pure emotional expression. So

they put the natural landscape in the form of miniature in the limited scale of the garden.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Japanese classical gardens are an offshoot of Chinese classical gardens. Through long-term historical influence and digestion, Japanese gardens have developed a unique garden art with their own cultural characteristics. As a private garden in the south of China, Zhanyuan Garden contains thousands of years of traditional Chinese culture, and it is a product of specific historical and social conditions. As one of representatives of Japanese dry landscape gardens, Long'an Temple expresses the aesthetics and abstract Zen culture of Japanese gardens and also embodies the concept and consciousness of conservation and environmental protection in its design. Interested in the two gardens, which were built and developed in the same time, this article has made a contrastive study of Zhanguan Garden and Long'an Temple in terms of their ideological and philosophical systems, aesthetic perspective, and landscape techniques. And finally the reasons for the differences are explored from social, environmental factors as well as cultural traditions

Both Chinese and Japanese gardens are treasures left to mankind, deserving to be inherited and protected. Under the trend of globalization nowadays, garden designing in China and Japan can gain inspiration in the aesthetic category from each other, thus to enrich architectural theory and to promote cultural exchange.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Author Yumeng Han contributed significantly to conception of this study and to the drafting of this paper.

Corresponding author Feng Li helped revising this paper in outline and language.

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