

ELEMENTE SIMBOLICE ȘI VALORI ESTETICE COMPLEXE ALE GRĂDINII JAPONEZE TRADIȚIONALE

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The traditional Japanese garden combines characteristics which have been developed over many centuries and which reflect the different influences prevailing during particular periods of history. The Japanese garden is a work of living art, imbued with a moral dimension, being penetrated by Zen Buddhism. Zen Buddhist monks played an important role in the development of garden design, and many of their principles have been incorporated into Japanese aesthetic values. As with all Japanese art forms and aesthetic principles, the Japanese garden is a manifestation of Japanese values, beliefs, and thoughts –in short a reflection of the Japanese spirit, characterised by modesty, moderation and sobriety. The present paper aims to demonstrate that although the Japanese garden has kept all the elements belonging to the Chinese aesthetics, it has nevertheless its own individuality, carried out by a special mystic and symbolism, based on the careful observation of the nature, on the aesthetics of the great refinement of the curved line, by the use of the symbolic geometrical forms (square, circle, rectangle), by the numeric essence of the composition, everything in the garden being organised depending on the numbers 3,5,7. The Japanese have created their gardens by restriction, by virtue of the order which is present in their inward nature: the moral order which becomes outside a spatial order. The Japanese spirit has „ritualised” the garden, providing it with a constant symbolism, ensuring the perfect order of the traditional Japanese garden, a garden almost „rational” all the time, which induces thinking, which must be seen with the mind, not just with the eyes to discover its deep spiritual meanings. Making a synthesis of the materials, presented in the vast specialised literature, concerning the art of gardens and traditional Japanese garden particularly, the following aesthetic principles present in the traditional Japanese garden may be evidenced: „meigakure”—the quality of remaining hidden from the ordinary view; minimalism; reverence for Nature; suggestion; asymmetry and movement; simplicity; naturalness; balance; unity of oppositions. The intellectual and spiritual tone of the traditional Japanese garden, the taste for abstraction and symbolism relate them to the modern Western art, this type of gardens being widely spread in the world.

Keywords: traditional Japanese garden, symbolism, aesthetic principles, garden art.

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prevailing during particular periods of history. Those persons who have visited many such gardens deny the existence of a „typical traditional Japanese garden” claiming that the gardens they have seen differ greatly one from another. However, this is comparable to stating that an „average Japanese” does not exist because each Japanese is so different. Just as most Japanese share characteristics which can be identified, so it is possible in most cases to identify a traditional Japanese garden by analysing its general appearance and savoring its atmosphere. The traditional Japanese gardens were built by the ruling elite to meet their personal requirements or as temples to create in their surroundings a mood appropriate to worship and contemplation. Gardens or „niwa” provided a means of achieving the peace of mind for which the rulers so desperately sought during the periods of strife and conflict which marked much of Japan’s history. In its origin the garden was representative of utopia or, more often a paradise of Buddha. Both were Chinese concepts. The first, brought to Japan in the sixth century, was the product of China’s ancient mythology. The other gained credence as Buddhism came to influence all sectors of Japanese life. Indigenous factors, such as Japan’s insularity, also had an impact on the development of gardens. The character of most of today’s famous gardens owe much of their development to the influence of Zen Buddhism which was brought from China in the thirteenth century and became a major influence in Japan in the two following centuries. 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 Western sense of forms, textures and colours are less important than the invisible philosophical, religious and symbolic elements. This is shown clearly when we examine the derivation and importance of the key elements (water, islands of stones, rocks, plants, and garden accessories) present, in some form, in almost every Japanese garden.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The Japanese garden evolved from the landscaping of gardens and it developed into an original art form to become an important part of the Japanese culture. The art of Japanese garden is closely associated with the art of architecture and the stone arrangement which are the integral part of the comprehensive art of gardens. History of the Japanese garden goes back to around 7th century and the early documents about the design of gardens are from approximately the 10th century. Japanese gardens are very important to the Japanese. All of the gardens are representations of nature. The purpose of these gardens is to capture nature in the utmost natural way, and do it with a touch of artistic feeling. From antiquity the Japanese have revered natural beauty, and their gardens seek to recreate this world in microcosm. In the background of the design and rock arrangements of the Japanese garden there is a respect for the nature and abstract representation of the utopian world of the time which were derived from the religion and philosophy. The designers of the Japanese gardens of different times had extremely sophisticated sense of beauty and aestheticity. The dry garden is perhaps the most extreme example of symbolism in Zen gardening. Zen regards the whole universe as sacred.

Once you start to view the garden as symbolic, you begin to draw inspiration from it in many different ways. In order to understand the symbolism of the traditional Japanese garden we should point out some of its essential elements: water, garden plants, stones or rocks, waterfalls, bridges, etc. -- elements which create this symbolism. From ancient times, the Japanese people had an affinity for the sea. Japan is a group of islands surrounded by oceans and seas. Water as a design element in the garden is crucial. Water has deep symbolic meaning to the Japanese, perhaps because the country is composed of many separate islands surrounded by sea. Water's importance is not as a substance but as a symbol and expression of the sea. Even the quality of water present is unimportant. The presence of water itself is not required. In the dry garden of „karesansui” style, the sea is symbolized by grey gravel or sand and the state of the sea is expressed by sand patterns or „samon” created by raking the sand to form certain designs. In the Zen garden, water is of such importance that even in the dry garden maintaining the illusion of its presence is of paramount importance. A stylized watercourse running through the garden may be viewed as our journey through life, beginning with youthful springs, waterfalls, and cascades, moving to the rivers of middle age, and finally to the ocean of wisdom, understanding, and oneness with the universe. Water is a „yin” element with strange qualities and moods. Fast-moving water generates „ki” energizing the space around it, the negative ions released by waterfalls or waves are known to be of benefit to the human health. Water is mutable, taking the shape of any container into which it is poured. This is symbolic of what Zen teaches about being open, not rigid, in our thinking. Water challenges our perception of reality and is paradoxical in nature. In winter water will sometimes change its character completely to become ice. But ice and water are merely different states of the same element, just as life and death are both natural states of our human existence. It is water's ability to produce either a true or distorted image that explains its tremendous symbolic significance in Zen. Water represents mind. When mind becomes pure and clear and is not contaminated by thoughts and emotions, it reflects a perfect image of everything, around it. In other words, it sees the world, the true nature of things, without distortion. A sea without islands is unthinkable and in the creation of such islands the Japanese owe much to the concepts imported from China. One of the earliest developments was the „shumisen-shiyo”, a utopia or sacred place remote from ordinary human society. In this tradition an island of immortal and everlasting happiness called Horaisan or Horeijima became an important element in the garden. Later, as a result of the growth of Buddhism, the sacred island was replaced by „shumisen”, the legendary mountain on which Buddha was believed to have lived. Often the names were used interchangeably. Crane and tortoise islands belong to this category. According to Chinese mythology, the crane lives a thousand years and the tortoise ten thousand years. Symbols of auspiciousness and longevity, the actual beings are often simulated by the shape of the islands. Another auspicious symbol is the „kibune” or treasure ship which sails the seas and is represented often by a rock or group of rocks. Such islands, due to their sacred character, are inaccessible to human beings and no bridges are constructed to reach them. In contrast, ordinary islands called „nakajima” are accessible to the mainland by bridges and it is on these latter islands that one may find teahouses and arbors. In dry gardens, islands are symbolised by rocks of interesting shapes set in gravel or sand. Groups of stones representing a rocky seashore may be arranged near the edge of a lake or its gravel or sand depiction. The „three Buddha” arrangement called „sanson” is one of the most orthodox styles in the art of stone arrangement. It consists of three rather vertical stones. The largest stone, which is always placed in the center, represents the Buddha while the two smaller stones placed nearby represent two Bodhisattvas.

This arrangement is used commonly to express „horaisan”, „shumisen”, or a waterfall. Through the ages, rock has been a constant feature in Japanese gardens. Rock is „yang” in nature and is balanced by the „yin” element of water. In the dry gardens, as we have already mentioned, water is represented instead by carefully raked grit or fine gravel. These two elements also demonstrate another fundamental relationship –the one that links the Buddhist concept of „ku”, meaning emptiness or non-substantiality, with „shinnyo” meaning suchness or thusness –the true nature of things. In the „karesan-sui” an expanse of raked sand is void, a sea of emptiness. In representing mutable, flowing water, it also expresses impermanence, which is another face of „ku”. By contrast, solid, immovable rock perfectly exemplifies „shinnyo”. Contemplating the rock groupings in a dry garden, we may become fully aware of their existence, and in a flash of inspiration and understanding we may conclude simply that -- rock „ is”. There is a similarity between the large areas of white space in the black-and white Chinese paintings that influenced Zen garden design and the broad, empty expanses of sand in the garden. In both cases, the voids allow the viewer mentally to enter into the creative process, to fill in the gaps in their own way. The dry garden may be thought of as a visual koan, a riddle posed by the master to aid his student’s progress in meditation. Contemplating the dry garden, we are drawn out of ourselves; time can appear to stand still, and with practice we move into the void and in so doing enter a higher plane of consciousness. The interpretation of the rocks is left to the individual. Whether they see rocks, gravel, and plants or something more profound not only depends on their ability to interpret abstract art and their understanding of the „vocabulary” of Zen dry gardens, but also the level of their spiritual development. Trees and plants used in the garden are closely interwoven with the spiritual and physical life of the Japanese people. The pine is a major basic structural tree. Traditionally it is called „ tokiwa” and, as an evergreen, it expresses both longevity and happiness. The black and red pines symbolize the positive and negative forces in the universe. The Japanese black or male pine called „omatsu” represents the former force and the red or female pine called „ mematsu” represents the latter force. Flowers, an inherent component of western gardens, are considered distracting elements and are almost absent in Buddhist gardens – all because of their fugacious beauty. Like Japanese ink painters, who gave up colors to achieve monochromatic simplification, rock garden designers renounced varicolored flowerbeds in favor of stone. The exception proving the rule, however, is the flower of Buddhism – lotus. Bamboo is usually found in traditional Japanese garden and plum trees are often grown there. Combinations of pine, bamboo, and plum are used in decorations to mark the most auspicious occasions. Bamboo is an evergreen also and is credited with auspicious characteristics similar to those of the pine while the plum is thought to embody the qualities of vigor and patience since it is the first to bloom after a severe winter. Bridges have symbolic meaning in many cultures, and just as passing through a gateway can transport you physically and mentally to another realm, so bridges can make people aware of journeying to a special place within the garden. Simple bridges, especially those of a graceful arcing design, generate a feeling of balance and stability. In our minds, the connection between bridge and water is so strong that the presence of a bridge can complete the illusion of water in the symbolic dry garden landscape. When carefully positioned, a bridge or row of stepping stones will lead the eye across to a particular feature, linking two different areas and helping to strengthen the sense of perspective. Stepping stones, which normally represent the yang force of immovability and endurance, can have a surreal quality when they almost appear to float on the surface of a deep, black reflecting pool.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Aesthetic values which are believed to 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 results or products of Zen thought or were reinforced by it. It is said to be impossible to describe Zen in words since the doctrine denies this possibility. The doctrine rejects intellectually devised images in favor of direct experience. Shortly after the doctrine's introduction into Japan, its monks began the construction of gardens. The essential design elements included in these gardens came to be the main elements of what is known today as a traditional Japanese garden. Naturally the employment of these elements provided the monks with an opportunity to express the „Way of Zen”. In them, Zen principles were translated into very special aesthetics. Perhaps the most important concept of traditional Japanese gardens, „meigakure” is the quality of remaining hidden from ordinary view. Each feature of the garden appears from partial concealment, creating a profound sense of mystery and encouraging visitors to continue their journey. The Japanese aesthetics that evolved from Zen Buddhism is one of extreme simplicity. Simplicity which looks to the achievement of „nothingness” or „mu”. In this concept, beauty is attained through omission and elimination. Simplicity must not be confused with plainness which is, in many cases, monotonous or a lack of refinement. Simplicity means the achievement of maximum effect with minimum means. Japanese revere the sensitivity and creativity required to achieve an exquisite effect by the simplest possible gesture. The simplicity of a Japanese garden results from a willingness to expend enormous amounts of care and resources on every detail to create an atmosphere of unaffected naturalness and tranquility. We should also mention the minimalist approach which applies to all aspects of gardening. The overall design should have smooth, clean lines and no unnecessary flourishes. The detail of hard landscaping and planting also follow minimalist principles. In the Zen garden the palette is extremely restricted so that the senses are smoothed rather than stimulated. Among other concepts important to garden building are: asymmetry involving a preference for the imperfect over the perfect form and shape and a preference for odd rather than even numbers. Elements in Japanese gardens are usually arranged in odd numbers of seven, five and three to suggest the asymmetry of nature. Contrasts between slender and massive, vertical and horizontal, smooth and rough stimulate the mind to find its own path to perfection. Symmetry is extremely rare in Zen gardens. It is never observed in the natural landscape, and Japanese gardens strive to represent features of the countryside, even if it is only symbolic. In Zen gardens the various elements remain in perfect harmony with one another. Balance –another concept of Japanese aesthetics-- is exemplified by the symbol „yin” and „yang”, or „in” and „yo” as they are called in Japan, the two opposing forces in nature. In the garden, „yin” is represented by sand and gravel because these symbolize the „yin” element of

water. This is balanced by the „yang” elements of rock and plants. A careful balance is maintained between opposing forces. For instance, in rock or plant groupings, vertical shapes, which are „yang” are set against low horizontal shapes, which are „yin”; light, sunny areas (yang) are complemented by cool shady areas (yin). Communicating through implication rather than direct statements, many Japanese believe that meaning exists beyond what can be described in words. They enjoy viewing their gardens through mist or rain while listening to the sounds of water and insects without seeing the source. To allow freedom for the imagination, Japanese gardens are monochromatic compositions of greens, browns, and blacks with color used only as an accent. Rocks, the backbone of the garden, are carefully chosen for dark tones to suggest age and mystery.

CONCLUSIONS

The Japanese garden may be considered a work of living art, a manifestation of Japanese values, beliefs, and principles – in short, a reflection of the Japanese spirit. The Japanese reverence for nature, the Zen way, Shinto beliefs are all reflected in the Japanese garden. Nothing is left to chance; every living thing in the garden exists for a reason. Every rock, tree or plant is significant and stands as a symbol for something else in Japanese society and culture. The Japanese garden is a physical manifestation of religious belief, a poetic form, a symphony, a link to a traditional sense of cultural heritage, an inspiration to meditation, a gateway to oneself; it is anything you choose it to be because it is ever-changing; and from any angle you choose to view and experience it, you arrive at different conclusions.

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