The Contrast between Japanese and Chinese Gardens – Taking Humble Administrator’s Garden in Suzhou and Katsura Imperial Villa in Kyoto as Examples

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Abstract. Garden culture has evolved through thousands of years to create its own distinctive features in both China and Japan. Chinese culture also had a major influence on Japanese culture, which is seen in garden culture. Both the Humble Administrator's Garden and the Katsura Imperial Villa were built during the same eras, the Ming Dynasty and the Edo era, and they are considered to be the greatest examples of Japanese and Chinese garden architecture. The garden design, water features, and rock elements of the Humble Administrator's Garden and the Katsura Imperial Villa are thoroughly compared in this study to highlight their commonalities and differences. It explores the factors behind these distinctions, encompassing the design and aesthetic concepts of the two countries, while considering the influence of cultural, economic, and natural factors. Additionally, the research uncovers key findings, shedding light on the distinctions between these two gardens and the influential factors, including cultural, economic, and natural influences, shaping their unique characteristics. The study delves into historical, geographical, and cultural influences, unveiling the distinct preferences and philosophies of Chinese and Japanese garden aesthetics. Ultimately, this research extends readers’ comprehension of Chinese and Japanese garden art and culture, fostering positive cross-cultural understanding and communication between the two nations. Through comparison and analysis, readers gain a deeper understanding of the underlying ideologies and aesthetics of these two cultures, promoting greater exchange and mutual enrichment in the realm of Sino-Japanese garden art.

1 Introduction

Garden is an important art form that embodies culture, aesthetics, values, religion and other spiritual pursuits. Thus, the comparison of Chinese and Japanese gardens is a study of the commonalities of Chinese and Japanese culture. The interplay between Chinese and Japanese cultures has a profound influence, continuing for thousands of years. Literate gardens in Suzhou and imperial gardens in Kyoto are representatives of gardens in two countries. Humble Administrator’s Garden and Katsura Imperial Villa were built in the same period. Humble Administrator's Garden was built in the Ming Dynasty, which was the golden age of Chinese gardens; and Katsura Imperial Villa was built in the Edo period, which was also the golden age of Japanese gardens. These two representative gardens are exquisitely designed and worthy of study. By delving into the and aesthetic concepts of gardens in both countries, the research seeks to foster a deeper appreciation and mutual understanding of Chinese and Japanese garden art and culture, promoting positive cross-cultural exchange.

2 Literature review

Scholarly research has been conducted on gardens in China and Japan, introducing gardens from the perspectives of space division, scientific research, and measurement of scenery elements. Theoretical studies that explore the design concepts and aesthetic concepts of Chinese gardens and Japanese gardens, respectively, have also been conducted, revealing fascinating insights and underlying principles of Chinese and Japanese garden art. A thorough basis for comprehending the subtleties of garden design in China and Japan and its cultural ramifications is provided by the pertinent literature that is already available. For instance, Cen and other researchers analyze the Humble Administrator's Garden's aesthetic water management, illuminating its sophisticated design and significance [1]. Habib’s team delves into the Japanese garden's role as a physical embodiment of Japanese culture, emphasizing the cultural symbolism intertwined with its design [2]. Han conducts a contrastive study between Chinese and Japanese gardens, further underscoring the distinctive attributes and design philosophies of both traditions [3].

All in all, these references establish a comprehensive framework for understanding the unique design elements, cultural influences, and historical contexts that shape Chinese and Japanese garden art. Among these articles,
some compare temple gardens, and some compare academic gardens, which approach the cultural comparison by comparing typical gardens. However, From the aspect of time period, there is still a gap. These two Chinese and Japanese gardens being compared in this thesis are able to present the garden art in China and Japan in the same period of time, around 1600. Comparing Humble Administrator’s Garden and Katsura Imperial Villa provides a new aspect of viewing Chinese and Japanese culture.

3 Comparison between Humble Administrator’s Garden and Katsura Imperial Villa

Humble Administrator’s Garden and Katsura Imperial Villa are similar in different aspects. This paper will compare these gardens and propose possible reasons for commonalities and differences from the perspective of spatial layout, rock scene design, and water scene design.

3.1 Contrast in spatial layout

The whole experience and aesthetics of a garden are shaped by its spatial arrangement, which acts as the basic framework. A garden's deliberate layout can represent the cultural ideals of the period and place. The Humble Administrator's Garden and the Katsura Imperial Villa are two well-known East Asian gardens whose spatial arrangements are explored in this section.

3.1.1 Humble Administrator's Garden

The Humble Administrator's Garden in Suzhou, China, is a classic illustration of traditional Chinese garden architecture. The idea of peaceful coexistence between man-made and natural elements is embodied in its spatial design. The asymmetrical design of the garden, with its winding paths, arching bridges, and carefully placed pavilions, gives a sense of equilibrium while enabling visitors to see things from different angles at every turn. The arrangement is centered on a sizable central pond, which doubles as a mirror, reflecting the nearby buildings and vegetation. This is the notion of "borrowed scenery," a defining characteristic of Chinese garden architecture, at the heart of the Humble Administrator’s Garden. The garden frames panoramas that masterfully interweave interconnected ponds, bridges, and distant landscapes through the deft positioning of pavilions and viewing platforms. The exterior world is smoothly incorporated into the garden's interior through this use of space. The lines between artificial and natural elements are blurred as a result of this integration, which produces an immersive experience. Also, according to ancient Chinese thinking, human works need to coexist peacefully with nature [4]. This design philosophy supports these ideas. Besides, its spatial arrangement is evidence of the deliberate embrace of irregularity, reflecting the peaceful disarray present in all of nature [5].

3.1.2 Katsuara Imperial Villa

In stark contrast to the Humble Administrator's Garden's dynamic asymmetry, Kyoto, Japan's Katsuara Imperial Villa has a more organized and structured spatial layout. The villa's design, which has its roots in Japanese aesthetics, celebrates simplicity and minimalism and is distinguished by its simplicity, abstraction, and reflection. The thoughtful placement of objects, such as stepping stones and lamps, highlights the value of limited views and encourages reflection. Visitors are encouraged to embark on a sensory journey where each stop reveals a different facet of the garden's attractiveness thanks to the spatial structure [6]. The Katsura Villa's interior is laid up in a precisely planned succession of areas, each of which is intended to create a certain aesthetic experience [6]. The zones that separate the pond garden, walking garden, tea garden, and other special places determine the garden's physical layout. Space is meticulously divided within the Katsura Imperial Villa to produce a sense of development and anticipation. Through a gradual unfolding of viewpoints, this purposeful orchestration of spatial transitions enables visitors to interact with the garden, arousing feelings of surprise and curiosity, and contributing to the overall aesthetic of the minimalist use of space [7].

3.1.3 The differences and similarities

The differences in these two gardens' spatial arrangements demonstrate the variety of methods used in East Asian garden design. The Humble Administrator's Garden celebrates how buildings, water, and plants are intertwined with a sense of wild elegance, creating an immersive experience that seamlessly combines components of the natural and human worlds by embracing fluidity and the organic growth of nature. On the other hand, the Katsura Imperial Villa's purposeful orderliness serves as a blank canvas for curated nature landscapes, each of which is expertly crafted to elicit a certain emotion, exuding deliberate selection and restrained restraint and inviting visitors on a reflective journey via carefully selected points of view. Despite these variations, both gardens portray a strong bond between the garden and its inhabitants. While the Katsura Imperial Villa offers a meticulously planned path of aesthetic discovery, the Humble Administrator's Garden immerses visitors in a harmonic interaction with nature.

3.2 Contrast in water scene design

Water, a quintessential element in garden design, holds immense aesthetic and symbolic significance. Comparing the water scenes in the two gardens involves an exploration of their expression modes, design techniques, and underlying purposes. The graceful interplay of water bodies, such as ponds, streams, and cascades, becomes a canvas for examining how each
culture crafts its water features to evoke emotions and harmonize with the surrounding landscape. East Asian garden design places a great deal of emphasis on water sceneries, which influence both the aesthetic appeal and the emotional resonance of these landscapes. This section dives into the detailed water scene designs of the Katsura Imperial Villa and the Humble Administrator's Garden, revealing their distinctive methods for using water as a key component of the garden experience.

3.2.1 Humble Administrator’s Garden

A complex web of water features that are essential to the Humble Administrator's Garden's design rests at its center. The harmonic interaction of man-made structures and water surfaces results in a complex tapestry of reflections and shadows. Ponds, meandering streams, and calm water areas produce a setting that closely resembles the way water naturally flows in the wild, creating a multifaceted experience [8]. These water features act as reflective canvases, capturing the nearby pavilions, bridges, and vegetation and heightening the garden's visual depth. A clever use of water's reflected properties is seen by the appropriately called Half-Moon Bridge, whose arch creates a crescent-shaped reflection on the water [9]. The water scene design in the garden goes beyond the bounds of conventional garden layouts because water is not only an adornment but a dynamic element that urges users to interact with its constantly shifting forms. According to Li and Wang, the strategic positioning of water features creates a rhythm that leads visitors through various areas and encourages a sense of exploration [10]. The Humble Administrator's Garden's water scene design strategy goes beyond just aesthetics. Water bodies are strategically positioned to offer a cooling effect, which is useful in a subtropical environment. The ponds act as irrigation reservoirs, which improves the garden's usability.

3.2.2 Katsura Imperial Villa

A different viewpoint is provided by the water scene design of the Katsura Imperial Villa, which is based on the Japanese aesthetic values of harmony and peace. Water scenes are meticulously planned and executed in the Katsura Imperial Villa. This garden's water exhibits restraint and refinement, reflecting Japanese reverence for the transient and variation. A perfect fusion between the garden and its surroundings is achieved through tranquil ponds and motionless water surfaces, which reflect the surrounding landscape [6]. Stepping stones that have been set with care encourage visitors to interact with the water on a personal level, which heightens the sense of serenity. In the Katsura Imperial Villa, the water vistas evoke a sense of peaceful reflection. Visitors are prompted to pause and become fully present by the water's quiet. The water transforms into a reflective canvas on which people project their ideas and feelings in a culture that values mindfulness and simplicity. These water sceneries are also used the idea of "shakkei," or "borrowed scenery," which refers to the use of extraneous objects like far-off mountains and trees to enhance the visual appeal of a garden, blending the garden's limits with the wider natural world and increasing the sense of immersion [11]. Besides, in the Katsura Imperial Villa, the river landscape holds rich symbolism derived from Japanese philosophy. The mirror-like surfaces of the ponds represent the idea of "mu" or nothingness, allowing visitors to view their own reflections while blending with the surroundings [12]. The ethereal nature of water parallels the Zen concept of "ma," highlighting the importance of voids and spaces between things.

3.2.3 The differences and similarities

The water features in these gardens can be compared to reveal subtle cultural differences in their design philosophies. The dynamic and fluid design of the Humble Administrator's Garden makes water a key player that enhances the sensory experience of the garden. The dynamic aspect of water is celebrated in The Humble Administrator's Garden, which also celebrates its function in fostering life and producing colorful scenery. The Katsura Imperial Villa, on the other hand, takes a more understated approach, using water as a reflected canvas that encourages reflection. The Katsura Imperial Villa uses water as a trigger for reflection, enabling guests to connect with their inner selves while immersing themselves in the peacefulness of the surroundings. Despite taking different approaches, both gardens demonstrate the skill of employing water as a means of tying the garden to the surrounding landscape and generating visitors' emotions and promoting a sensory experience. Whether it is motionless or moving, water serves as a channel for connecting with the natural world and the human psyche. While the Katsura Imperial Villa offers silence and reflection, the Humble Administrator's Garden promotes exploration and social engagement.

3.3 Contrast in rock scene design

Rocks hold a special place in traditional East Asian garden design because they symbolize nature's untamed beauty and serve as symbolic components that improve the garden's overall appeal. This section explores the Humble Administrator's Garden and the Katsura Imperial Villa, two very different rock scene designs, to show the unique ways that each garden utilizes rocks in its environment. The storylines and aesthetics of the Humble Administrator's Garden and the Katsura Imperial Villa are significantly shaped by the rocks, which serve as silent storytellers woven into the landscapes. These gardens' greater cultural and philosophical settings are reflected in the way that pebbles are used and arranged.

3.3.1 Humble Administrator's Garden
In the Humble Administrator's Garden, rocks are sculpted into intricate formations that echo the grandeur of China's diverse landscapes. This form of artistry, known as "scholar's rocks" or "gongshi," encapsulates nature's essence within a confined space. The garden showcases a rich variety of rocks, including limestone, sandstone, and Taihu stones, each chosen for its distinct texture and form [8]. These rocks are artfully placed within the garden to evoke harmony between nature and human intention, where an ensemble of rocks forms a miniaturized mountain range. This arrangement is reminiscent of the majestic landscapes found in Chinese paintings, inviting visitors to engage with nature's beauty on a more intimate scale [9]. Beyond aesthetics, the placement of rocks follows the principles of Feng Shui, shaping energy flow and enhancing the garden's spiritual significance [4].

### 3.3.2 Katsura Imperial Villa

The Humble Administrator's Garden's bright and dynamic rock scene stands in stark contrast to the Katsura Imperial Villa, which personifies the Japanese ideal of subtle beauty. In this instance, pebbles have been chosen for their ability to arouse feelings and associations with the natural world. The Japanese emphasis is on highlighting the natural beauty of the rocks themselves, in contrast to the Chinese strategy of sculpting rocks into gorgeous shapes [6]. The Katsura rocks, in contrast to the overt prominence of Chinese rockeries, inspire quiet reflection and provide visitors a chance to interact with the intricacies of nature. The Katsura Imperial Villa's rock scene follows the "wabi" and "sabi" aesthetic concepts, which embrace imperfection and impermanence. To capture the essence of nature in its unadorned state, little groupings of rocks, frequently covered in moss, are artfully positioned [13]. The distance between the rocks, which serve as representations of mountains or islands, and the layout itself are meant to promote contemplation [14]. The "tsukiyama," a skillfully arranged group of rocks that resembles a small landscape, is one of the villa's most notable rock features. This conjures up a vision of far-off mountains and sea, mirroring the conventional Japanese aesthetic of "shakkei" or "borrowed scenery" [12].

### 3.3.3 The differences and similarities

The Humble Administrator's Garden and the Katsura Imperial Villa's rock sceneries highlight the stark cultural differences in how people view beauty and nature. The former emanates a sense of grandeur and displays how people have creatively mastered natural elements. The latter, in contrast, promotes living at a proper distant from nature to show respect and owe and invites viewers to recognize the inherent beauty in their surroundings. Despite these distinctions, all gardens have the same goal: to use rocks to evoke feelings and encourage introspection. Rocks act as connectors between the human and the natural world, and between the fleeting and the enduring, in both gardens. These gardens become living representations of the civilizations they represent by the intentional placement of rocks, and they warmly welcome visitors to enjoy the poetry of nature and humans in their harmonious coexistence. The differences in these two gardens' depictions of natural environments are highlighted by comparing their rock scene designs. The dynamic interaction between rocks, water, and plants is celebrated in the Humble Administrator's Garden, which invites visitors to fully immerse themselves in the cyclical rhythms of the surroundings. The rock landscapes of the Katsura Imperial Villa, on the other hand, provide a meditative setting where the presence of artfully placed boulders prompts thoughts on the eternal beauty of nature. Although they take different techniques, both gardens represent the profound relationship between rocks, nature, and the human imagination. By analyzing the rock scene designs of the Katsura Imperial Villa and the Humble Administrator's Garden, we reveal the skill involved in choosing and arranging rocks to communicate sentiments of peace, untamed beauty, and peaceful reflection. These gardens demonstrate how rocks may be used as platforms for reflection and storytelling, serving as a constant reminder of the interplay between man-made and natural elements.

### 4 Reasons for similarities and differences

#### 4.1 Cultural reasons

The design philosophies of gardens are greatly influenced by cultural values and aesthetic ideas. The concepts of "unity" and "asymmetry" in aesthetics can shed light on the cultural foundations that shape how things are arranged in the Humble Administrator's Garden and Katsura Imperial Villa. The analysis of various aesthetic vantage points offers a glimpse into the unique sensibility that distinguishes Chinese and Japanese garden art.

##### 4.1.1 Humble Administrator's Garden

As a result of the long history of cultural exchange, Chinese garden design principles have deeply influenced Japanese gardens. This influence, which dates back to ancient times, encompasses various aspects, including philosophy, art, and aesthetics. For example, elements of Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, and the "landscape" aesthetic concept have been incorporated into Japanese culture.

##### 4.1.2 Katsura Imperial Villa

Japanese culture has been influenced not only by Chinese culture but also by other Asian cultures and Western culture, and developed its own features. For instance, Zen Buddhism, which emphasizes contemplation, tranquility, and spiritual pursuit, has had a significant influence on the architecture of Japanese
gardens. Modern Western culture has also contributed new ideas and features to the creation of current Japanese garden design. The variety of Japanese garden designs, which set them apart from traditional Chinese gardens, is influenced by these outside cultural influences.

4.1.3 Commonalities and differences

Both parallels and contrasts between Chinese and Japanese gardens can be attributed to cultural factors. Chinese culture provides the foundation for shared elements in both gardens, while other cultural influences make Japanese gardens distinct. Chinese and Japanese gardens are visual representations of two different cultural traditions as a result of this cultural diversity and interaction.

4.2 Natural reasons

Design decisions are inextricably influenced by the available space for a garden. Examining the physical limitations and opportunities in Suzhou and Kyoto provides insight into how the surrounding environments influenced the design choices for these renowned gardens. The differences in topography and geography between the two regions provide explanations for certain design modifications made within each garden.

4.2.1 Humble Administrator's Garden

The Humble Administrator's Garden is located in Suzhou, China. Suzhou, a well-known water town in southern China, has a subtropical monsoon climate with distinct seasonal weather patterns. Summers here are warm and muggy, whereas winters here are comparatively chilly and dry. The garden features numerous water elements such as ponds and canals, not only for their aesthetic value but also for providing a cooling retreat during the hot summer months. The lush plants and plentiful plant growth within the garden are also a result of these water features and climate features. The size and design of the garden are constrained by the restricted space in Suzhou, China. As a result, the Humble Administrator's Garden features elaborate patterns made up of numerous smaller-scale landscapes.

4.2.2 Katsura Imperial Villa

The influence of Japan's moderate environment with distinct seasons may be felt at Katsura Imperial Villa, which is situated in Kyoto, Japan. While winters in Kyoto can be chilly and occasionally snowy, summers there can be hot and humid. These seasonal variations are included in the beauty of Katsura Imperial Villa. Every season brings a different beauty to the garden, from spring's cherry blossoms to autumn's vibrant foliage. The various hills, ponds, and elevations in the garden are a reflection of the Japanese awareness of the cycles of change in the natural world. Moreover, Japan's geographical features, characterized by a small landmass with many mountains, influenced the design of Katsura Imperial Villa. The design cleverly incorporates the hilly terrain to provide a mesmerizing multi-level landscape.

4.2.3 The cultural reasons for commonalities and differences

The scale and layout of gardens are strongly influenced by geographic factors, which also have an impact on the resources that are accessible and the design options. Suzhou's Humble Administrator's Garden emphasizes richness by showcasing numerous water features on a small plain. In contrast, the hilly environment is cleverly incorporated into the Katsura Imperial Villa, which is built on a small and uneven area. The designs of Chinese and Japanese gardens are largely influenced by these geographic variances.

4.3 Historical reasons

Historical settings can have a big impact on how gardens are created, including economic prowess and societal tendencies. Understanding why specific design decisions were taken requires a thorough examination of the garden owners' financial situation as well as the prevalent architectural and design trends at the time. This historical perspective reveals the dynamic interaction between the era's socioeconomic structure and garden design.

4.3.1 Humble Administrator’s Garden

The Humble Administrator's Garden is situated in China during the Ming and Qing dynasties, a period symbolizing prosperity in Chinese society. Wang Xianchen, the garden's owner and a member of the commercial and political elite in this region, used the garden to display his wealth and social standing. The construction of the Humble Administrator's Garden is a reflection of China's then-current economic and cultural prosperity.

4.3.2 Katsura Imperial Villa

Katsura Imperial Villa was built during the Edo period in Japan, an era characterized by feudalism. Japanese society was comparatively quiet but also comparatively closed during this time. The garden's design was influenced by this societal background, which placed an emphasis on inner peace, spirituality, and abstract beauty, reflecting the serenity and stability of society at the time.

4.3.3 The historical reasons for commonalities and differences

Wang Xianchen, the proprietor of the Humble Administrator's Garden in Ming and Qing Dynasties China, had enough money to finance the garden's development. As a result, the garden represents wealth and elegance. Contrarily, because Japan was a feudal
country during the Edo period, Katsura Imperial Villa's architecture placed a greater emphasis on spirituality and was less ostentatious than the Humble Administrator's Garden. In keeping with the prosperity of Chinese culture, the Humble Administrator's Garden was built in response to Chinese society's love of and pursuit of gardens during the Ming and Qing dynasties. In contrast, the peacefulness and reflection emphasized by Katsura Imperial Villa are consistent with the relative calm and cultural traits of Japanese society throughout the Edo period.

5 Conclusion

Delving into the differences and similarities in spatial layout, water scene design, and rock scene design, insights into the intricate web of cultural, philosophical, and artistic influences that have shaped these gardens can be gained. These insights offer valuable perspectives not only on garden design but also on the broader. The comparison of the Humble Administrator's Garden and the Katsura Imperial Villa highlights the many ways that traditional East Asian gardens use space, river scenes, and rock scenes. The Humble Administrator's Garden is a prime example of the harmonious union of human ingenuity and natural elements, rooted in Chinese garden traditions, thanks to its intricate integration of architecture, water, and rocks. Deep insights into the complex worlds of Chinese and Japanese garden art have been revealed via the examination of the Humble Administrator's Garden and Katsura Imperial Villa, both of which are rich in historical and cultural value. By comparing two gardens, which capture the distinctiveness of each tradition, common aesthetic values and a variety of design philosophies are discovered. The intricate factor that influences garden design in both countries has been revealed via the synthesis of cultural, natural, and historical variables. This study intends to improve cross-cultural appreciation by building a deeper awareness of these traditions, and fostering pleasant interactions and connections between individuals from many cultures.

References

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