

Conclusion of the International Expert Meeting on Paradise and Gardens in Eastern Asia

May 21, 2009

Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties
Agency for Cultural Affairs

The “International Expert Meeting on Paradise and Gardens in Eastern Asia” was jointly organized by the Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties and the Agency for Cultural Affairs of the Government of Japan on May 19-21, 2009, Nara. 10 experts, including 2 international experts from Peoples Republic of China and Republic of Korea, 6 national experts from universities and governmental organizations, and 2 experts from relevant local authorities, participated in the meeting to exchange views of studies and discuss about the issues on this theme.

The aim, discussion points and conclusion of the Meeting are as follows.

1. Aims

The aims of the Meeting are;

- to identify the characteristics and justify the value of the garden created in Japan from 8th to 14th centuries representing the Buddha realm; “Buddhist Pure Land” as a paradise (hereinafter referred to as a “Pure Land Garden”).
- to identify the following three items in order to clarify the historical process of the development of “Pure Land Gardens”.
 - Ideas of paradise evolved in the East Asian region (China, Korea and Japan)
 - Their influences on the ideas, designs and techniques of gardens in each country
 - Similarities and differences identified in the representation of the gardens in each country
- to clarify the Outstanding Universal Value of a group of “Pure Land Gardens” still remained in Hiraizumi; a property included in the Japanese Tentative List for World Heritage nomination.

2. Discussion Points

(1) Relationship between Man and Nature – Gardens as Artistic Expressions

The discussion about the characteristics identified in the historical process of development of the gardens in the region, which has been sublimated from the relationship between man and nature to the distinguished fine art, was made along with the following three points.

- Point-1: Relationship between man and nature lying at the foundation of garden culture
- Point-2: Diffusion and development of garden culture
- Point-3: The way of representation identified in the garden designs

(2) Garden ponds – Change of their meanings

Based on the outcome of the discussion-(1), discussion about the history and attributes of the “Pure Land Gardens” in Japan, through examining the relationship between the representation of paradise and garden ponds in the East Asian region, was made along with the following three points.

Point-1: Garden ponds

Point-2: *Hôchi*; treasure ponds depicted in various types of *Jôdo Hensô-zu*; Pure Land iconographical illustrations

Point-3: Ponds and architectural elements included in the “Pure Land Gardens” in Japan

(3) Paradise and gardens – Essential qualities and diversity of expressions in the East Asia

Based on the outcome of the discussion-(1) and (2), comprehensive discussion about the relationship between paradise and gardens in the East Asian region, including justification of Outstanding Universal Value of a group of “Pure Land Gardens” in Hiraizumi, was made along with the following three points.

Point-1: Garden as representation of a paradise in the East Asian region

Point-2: Uniqueness of the “Pure Land Garden” developed in Japan

Point-3: Representativity and exceptionality of a group of “Pure Land Gardens” in Hiraizumi from the viewpoint of the history of East Asian garden culture

3. Conclusion

The garden culture representing the unique relationship between man and nature has been brought up in the three countries (China, Korea and Japan) of the East Asian region. Many gardens were consequently created reflecting such culture and remained as historical testimonies in China, Korea and Japan.

The common characteristics of garden-making ideas, designs and techniques are observed in the gardens of three countries, inherent ones could also be identified originating in each historical and cultural background on the other.

The most remarkable point in common is that gardens were created as paradises on earth in the way of cherishing nature, blending in nature and representing natural landscape, based on various beliefs and ideas; Buddhism, Taoist immortality thought and the Doctrine of *Yin-Yang* and the Five Agents or Elements.

Gardens are the cultural heritage properties representing a unique garden culture which was evolved and eventually completed through the process of transmission of garden-making ideas from China and Korean peninsula to Japan, fusing with distinctive view of nature in each country.

In Japan, unique garden culture and gardens different from China and Korea were created through the process of transmission of garden-making ideas from those countries, fusing with distinctive Japanese view of nature including religious belief worshipped to natural deities. It is specifically noted that they includes the distinctive style of gardens representing the Buddha realm (Pure Land) as a paradise on earth. Due consideration should be given to the following points for justification of Outstanding Universal Value of such gardens.

- A. The participants of the Meeting reached to the consensus for definition of “Pure Land Garden” as follows.

It is an artistic work of three-dimensional way of representation of the ideal world (paradise) of Buddha; consisting of spiritual realms of Buddhahood realized on earth, where the Buddhas are diligently having Buddhist studies and practices.

It is created, in close relationship with its natural morphology, as a part of a complex that included a main hall in which an image of the Buddha was enshrined, and were situated in front of this hall in order to represent the sublimity of the Buddha's Pure Land. It usually included broad body of water symbolizing the *Hôchi*; treasure pond, depicted in various types of *Jôdo Hensô-zu* (iconographical illustrations of Pure Land), which also served as an indicator of the boundary between this world and the Pure Land, in which were sometimes situated small islands with bridges between them, suggesting the path that human beings could take to rebirth in the Pure Land.

The allotment and its elements of “Pure Land Garden” were based on those of *Shinden-zukuri*; residential garden of the nobility between 9th and 12th centuries. However specific ornamental objects symbolically representing the Buddha realm (Pure Land) were temporarily installed in case conducting the Buddhist ceremonies.

- B. At this moment, no example of “Pure Land Garden” including its archaeological site, which testifies existence of an ensemble of magnificent buildings and *Hôchi* depicted in the wall paintings of Mogao Caves, is identified in China.

The archaeological remain of “Nine-Petaled Lotus Pond” excavated in Bulguksa Temple in Gyeongju could be considered as a scarce Korean example of “Pure land Garden”.

In regard with Japan, the ideas, designs and techniques of gardens, created with combination between man and nature, were transmitted from China and Korean peninsula along with Buddhism, Taoist immortality thought, and the Doctrine of *Yin-Yang* and the Five Agents or Elements. From 8th to 14th centuries, they eventually developed into unique ones fusing with the distinctive Japanese view of nature including religious belief worshipped to natural deities, then resulted in establishment of “Pure Land Garden” as an exceptional type of garden, and left many existing examples and their archaeological sites which could not be identified elsewhere in the world.

C. Of the various types of Pure Land Gardens including Byôdô-in Garden (one of the component parts of the World Heritage property, “Ancient Monuments of Kyôto (Kyôto, Uji and Ôtsu cities)”, inscribed in 1998), a group of gardens in Hiraizumi is the most typical and representative example consisting of Pure Land Gardens as a whole, considering not only from the viewpoint of the process of development and evolution of the Japanese garden styles described in (B) above but also from the fact that these gardens accurately embodied the ideas, designs and techniques of *Shinden-zukuri* residential gardens described in *Sakuteiki*; the Japanese oldest garden-making book of 11th century.

As such, there is strong possibility that it possesses Outstanding Universal Value based on the following three points.

- a. The ensemble of Buddhist temples and gardens and their archaeological remains symbolically representing the Buddha realm (Pure Land) are indicative of Hiraizumi as the terminus of interchange of important human values, as ideas and knowledge concerning the design and construction of architectures and gardens made their way, in the course of the 6th to 12th centuries, from the Chinese mainland throughout the Japanese archipelago.
- b. The temples and gardens of Hiraizumi are an ensemble of superb artistic works designed as symbolic manifestations of the Buddha realm (Pure Land) on earth, and along with the archaeological remains associated with them serve as an outstanding typology of architecture and landscape design illustrating a significant stage in human history.
- c. Japanese syncretistic Buddhist thoughts played a significant role in completing a group of “Pure Land Gardens” in Hiraizumi. They were formed as a result of fusing the world religion of Buddhism transmitted from the Chinese mainland to the northern limits of the Japanese archipelago between 6th and 12th century with not only the Lotus Sutra, esoteric Buddhism and the Pure Land thought but also Shintoism; Japanese native belief of reverence for natural deities. These Buddhist thoughts have been directly reflected in the design and forms of exceptional ensembles of a group of gardens in Hiraizumi – some still existing and some archaeological in nature –, which represented the Buddha realm (Pure Land), thus possesses outstanding universal significance.

4. Main Participants

Dr. LU Zhou

Professor, Tsinghua University, People's Republic of China

Dr. HONG Kwang-Pyo

Professor, Dongguk University, Republic of Korea

Dr. TANAKA Tetsuo

Former Professor, Tôhoku University of Art and Design, Japan

Dr. TANAKA Tan

Professor, Institute for Research in Humanities, Kyôto University, Japan

Dr. MOTONAKA Makoto

Chief Senior Specialist for Cultural Properties, Agency for Cultural Affairs, Japan

Dr. AMASAKI Hiromasa

Professor, Kyôto University of Art and Design, Japan

Dr. NAKA Takahiro

Professor, Kyôto University of Art and Design, Japan

Mr. SUGIMOTO Hiroshi

Sub-manager, Historic City Planning Promotion Section, Uji City, Kyôto Prefecture, Japan

Mr. SATÔ Yoshihiro

Chief Adviser, Lifelong Learning and Cultural Division, Iwate Prefectural Board of Education, Japan