

Observations on Pure Land Gardens and Definition of Terms

NAKA Takahiro

Professor, Kyôto University of Art and Design, JAPAN

Reports were presented by Mr. Sugimoto Hiroshi and Mr. Satô Yoshihiro regarding the Byôdô-in Temple and a group of Pure Land gardens in Hiraizumi, respectively. Both reports discussed the background to the designers' philosophies and described the characteristics of the space arrangements based on findings obtained through in-depth excavation surveys. While these reports dealt with the well-known Pure Land gardens that exist in Japan, there are also some other Pure Land gardens that go unrecognized. This report is intended to discuss such Pure Land gardens, including those recorded in documents, and add a few comments about the definition of terms.

1. Pure Land gardens in the Nara and Heian periods

Summarized as "abhorrence of living in this impure world, seeking rebirth in the Pure Land", Pure Land thought was introduced to Japan along with Buddhism. The gardens which embody this thought in combination with temple buildings are referred to as "Pure Land gardens," which is a relatively new term that came into popular use after World War II.

In the Nara period (710–784), the Amida Jôdo-in Hall on the premises of the Hokke-ji Temple had already been designed to embody Buddha's land of purity and constant delight by creating a lotus pond in front of the Amida-dô Hall. It should be noted that Pure Land gardens became popular in the Heian period (794–1192) in Kyôto. In the middle of the Heian period or later, when mappô (the latter days of this world) thought grew in popularity, aristocrats of the court looked for salvation from Amida Buddha more earnestly than ever before. It seems that Pure Land gardens started to be created as many Buddhist halls were built.

Pure Land thought in the Nara period is believed to have differed from that in the Heian period. While emphasis was placed on memorial services for the dead in the Nara period, rebirth of one's self in the Pure Land was sought in the Heian period.

2. Pure Land gardens and Amida Buddha

In Mahayana thought, Buddha-land (Buddhaksetra) is assumed for various Buddhas in the worlds of the ten directions. In general, a "Pure Land garden" is defined as "a garden style of Buddhist temple where an Amida-dô Hall and a pond were built together to reproduce the Pure Land Paradise in this world" (Iwanami's Japanese Garden Dictionary). In a broader definition, however, a Pure Land garden is not restricted to a style where a pond is arranged in front of an Amida-dô Hall. In fact, there are different Pure Lands, as represented by Shakyamuni's Mitsugon Pure Land and Yakushi Nyorai's Jôruri Pure Land. For example, in the garden at the Jôruri-ji Temple, the three-story pagoda (which enshrines Yakushi Nyorai) on the east side of the pond and the Amida-dô Hall on the west side are considered to represent respective Pure Lands. The Buddha Hall at the Môtsû-ji Temple no longer exists, but it is known that the main hall (the Enryû-ji Temple) on the north shore of the pond enshrined Yakushi Nyorai.

Pure Land gardens became increasingly popular in the middle of the Heian period or later. This boom dates back to the Amida-dô Hall at the Muryôju-in Temple built by Fujiwara Michinaga in 1020 (the 4th year of Kannin). Designed to embody Amida Pure Land in this world (which is said to be located far in the west), the Amida-dô Hall was built with its front looking to the east, enshrining the Nine

Figures of Amida Buddha as its principal image. A pond with a central island was created in front of the Amida-dô Hall. Later, various halls were built around the pond, including the Kondô Hall and Godaidô Hall in the north of the pond and the Yakushi-dô Hall in the east. The Muryôju-in Temple turned into a major center to pray for recovery from illness and other benefits in this world, including the peace and security of the Fujiwara Regent Family. The temple was later renamed the Hôjô-ji Temple, which was considered befitting of its status. Michinaga took to his deathbed in the Amida-dô Hall to pray for rebirth in the Pure Land under the guidance of Amida Buddha.

Michinaga had deep faith in Buddhism. He started to visit temples many times in his youth, and built the Jômyô-ji Temple to hold memorial services for ancestors. In his later years, he further devoted himself to faith in Amida Buddha, and the Buddhist Last Rites Ceremony was held in accordance with the Essentials of Birth in the Pure Land, written by Genshin. *Teishin-kôki*, a diary kept by Fujiwara no Tadahira (Michinaga's great-grandparent) writes that he had replicated the Illustration of Rebirth in Nine Stages (based on the theme of the Section of Rebirth in Nine Stages in the Meditation on the Buddha Infinite Life Sutra at the Kôfuku-ji Temple). The Image of Nine Possible Levels of Birth into Amida's Paradise depicts a scene where Amida Buddha appears with Buddhist saints to welcome those who wish for rebirth in paradise on their deathbed. The Muryôju-in Temple can be considered a site which embodies this image with the Amida-dô Hall and the garden in a three-dimensional format. It is of interest to note that more than 30 Amida-dô Halls with Nine Figures of Amida Buddha have been confirmed on record, but the Jôruri-ji Temple (in Kamo, Kizugawa City, Kyôto Prefecture) is the only one that exists today.

Built by Fujiwara no Michinaga in prayer for peace and security of the land and his rebirth in the Pure Land Paradise, the Hôjô-ji Temple was an extensive "temple in proximity to a pond." Meanwhile, the Byôdô-in Temple built by Yorimichi is characterized by a novel layout featuring the Amida-dô Hall, though relatively small, built on the central island of

the pond. It should be noted that Michinaga's villa in Uji was dedicated for this purpose. Mr. Sugimoto's report provides an in-depth analysis of how the world of Amida Pure Land was embodied by taking advantage of the location at the Byôdô-in Temple. Interestingly, the Byôdô-in Temple, which was initially a space for Yorimichi to seek rebirth in paradise, was later used as a space to hold memorial services for Yorimichi.

This may be linked with the fact that, in the Kamakura period or later, memorial services held at Pure Land gardens built by samurai families again became an important theme.

3. Characteristics of the group of Pure Land gardens in Hiraizumi

Pure Land gardens spread from Kyôto to the rest of the nation. According to Mr. Satô's report, all the characteristics of Pure Land gardens, which were built in Kyôto independently from each other in the middle of the Heian period or later, were systematically arranged throughout the town in Hiraizumi to embody the political ideals of the Ôshû Fujiwara family.

The Môtsû-ji Temple is a large temple modeled on the Hosshô-ji Temple, which was built by Retired Emperor Shirakawa in rivalry with the Hôjô-ji Temple. The pond located in the south of the main hall (the Enryû-ji Temple) and the *yarimizu* stream meandering from the northeast into the pond are modeled on the typical techniques of *shinden*-style gardens. The garden at the Môtsû-ji Temple can be considered as a "Hôjô-ji Temple style" Pure Land garden. It should be noted that the Môtsû-ji Temple did not have an "Amida-dô Hall" because, as it is believed, the Muryôkô-in Temple for Hidehira, the third Lord, built on the premises of the Môtsû-ji Temple, was modeled on the Amida-dô Hall at the Byôdô-in Temple. Meanwhile, the Chûson-ji Temple, which can be considered a forerunner of the group of Pure Land gardens in Hiraizumi, was built by Kiyohira, the first Lord, for "peace and security of the land," as described in *Chûson-ji Konryû-Kuyô-Ganmon* (pledge for the construction of the Chûson-ji Temple).

The historic and cultural values of the group of Pure Land gardens in Hiraizumi can also be found in their influence on town planning in Kamakura.

4. Pure Land gardens in Eastern Japan, and development in the Muromachi period

Having conquered the Ôshû Fujiwara family and established the Kamakura Shogunate, Minamoto no Yoritomo built the Yôfuku-ji Temple in Kamakura in 1189 (5th year of Bunji) in prayer for the rebirth in paradise of people who died in battles, as well as his own peace and serenity. The temple premises had three Buddhist halls (Nikai-dô Hall, Amida-dô Hall, and Yakushidô Hall) with an extensive Pure Land garden in front of them. It seems that Yoritomo was impressed by the Pure Land temples in Hiraizumi. According to *Azumakagami*, the wall painting behind the Buddhist image in the Nikai-dô Hall was a replica of that of the Enryû-ji Temple. The layout of the buildings and garden also show Hiraizumi's influence in many aspects.

The Ganjôju-in Temple (in Nirayama, Shizuoka Prefecture) is also believed to have had a Pure Land garden, but its details are not known. It is said that the temple was built by Hôjô Tokimasa in prayer for Yoritomo's victory in subjugating Ôshû. The Kabasaki-dera Temple (Kabasaki Hachiman-gû) in Ashikaga City, Tochigi Prefecture (where the Ashikaga family came from) was constructed in full scale by Ashikaga Yoshikane (from the Minamoto family), who was then back in his homeland, in prayer for victory in subjugating Ôshû. In fact, excavation surveys have confirmed the presence

of an extensive Pure Land garden. Recently, this area was designated as a historic site, and a project is underway to restore and maintain the garden. It is also worthy of note that research activities have been conducted in recent years regarding Pure Land gardens in Eastern Japan which are considered to have been influenced by Pure Land gardens in Hiraizumi (Ôsawa Nobuhiro "Pure Land Gardens in Eastern Japan," etc.).

Pure Land gardens where memorial services were held for people who died in battles were also built in the Muromachi period (the Nanbokuchô period, 1336–1573). Ashikaga Takauji, who established the Muromachi Shogunate, built the Tenryû-ji Temple for the repose of the soul of Retired Emperor Godaigo, and built a pond on the west side of the Buddha Hall against the background of Arashiyama. Musô Soseki, who designed the garden, created a new style having both a Pure Land garden and dry landscape garden at the Saihō-ji Temple. Thus, Pure Land gardens were built into Zen sect temples in the Muromachi period, which eventually led to new forms and designs including the Saionji family's Kitayama-dai villa, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu's Kitayama-dono Palace, and Ashikaga Yoshimasa's Higashiyama-dono Palace.

With the rise of this new trend, the garden at the Shômyô-ji Temple, which was completed by Kanesawa Sadaaki in 1323 (in the 3rd year of Genkyô), seems to be the last "Hôjô-ji Temple style" Pure Land garden (Muraoka Tadashi, Report on Preservation and Maintenance of the Garden Pond on the Precincts of the Shômyô-ji Temple (designated as a historic site), 1988).



Fig. Shômyô-ji Temple Garden (Kanagawa Pref.)