

Rethinking Nature in Post-Fukushima Japan

Facing the Crisis

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A Critical History of Japanese Housing from the Perspective of the Human-Nature Relationship

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Abstract The history of elite housing from ancient times onwards was based on a concept of space in which man was an integral part of his natural surroundings. This conception of space derives from the symbiosis between ‘architecture’ and ‘garden’ and is inherent to the long and rich tradition of Japanese and Sino-Japanese thought fed by myths, legends and sacred beliefs, from primitive Shinto cults to the influence of Indian thought through Buddhism imported via China, not to mention the major influence of Taoist concepts of the universe from the Heian period on. These successive influences never put into question the fundamental relationship between man and nature but, on the contrary, gave it new substance, and left their mark on all forms of social expression including architecture, art, the sacred, and mythology. Japanese architecture has always reflected the fundamental relationship between man and nature, which is why the various archetypes of Japanese dwellings from ancient to pre-modern times rely on the intrinsic relationship between architecture and garden.

Summary 1 From Aristocrats’ Palaces to Modern Japanese Housing. – 2 Galleries and Verandas as Links Between the Garden and the House, Between Man and Nature, Between the Outside World and the Inside World. – 3 The Integration of Man into the Landscape. – 4 Habitat, Garden and Ritual. – 5 Conclusion.

Keywords Nature. Natural environment. Housing. Landscape. Garden.

Although the concept of man’s physical inclusion in nature as the very foundation of his existence predates the Heian period (784-1185), as shown by the role nature representations played in Yamato culture, it became, with the trivialisation of the domestic garden in the 9th century, a common reality in Kyoto as evidenced by the spatial structure of the houses, architecture and city as a whole. In this sense, the regions of Yamato and Yamashiro may be considered the cradle of a distinctive housing structure that intrinsically associated man with his natural environment. This special relation to nature constituted the source of one of the most original aspects of the local culture that was later imitated throughout the archipelago. This organic man-nature relationship led, over the centuries, to the development of singular landscape designs that

continue to this day to reflect unique systems of interaction between man and his natural environment. The urban morphology and spatial organisation of houses, palaces and temples in Japan bear witness to the historical and cultural developments of the Japanese people's relationship with nature, and, undoubtedly, to the development of an ecosystem of universal value.

However, the blind development of science and technology over the last a hundred and fifty years or so, often at the expense of culture and life, has upset this age-old equilibrium. Extremely refined but very fragile architectural forms, perfected over more than a thousand years, have been swept away in a few decades in favor of an industrialised form of housing production that is no longer motivated by human, artistic, or spiritual considerations, but by material gain. Japanese sensibility to nature and its architectural manifestation is not an intrinsic and indestructible given!

1 From Aristocrats' Palaces to Modern Japanese Housing

Since the ancient period (593-1185), traditional forms of housing have evolved as follows: the initial development of a refined type of habitat among the highest classes of society, followed by its adoption by the ascending classes, and finally, the dissemination and generalisation of ancient aristocratic models among the middle classes in the early modern era. The aristocracy of the Heian period produced the *shinden-zukuri* 寝殿造-style palace, an architectural housing model that opened onto a garden. This design was adopted by the warrior classes in the Middle Ages (1185-1573) and in the pre-modern period (1573-1868) – in spite of the profound upheavals – before serving as a model for middle class housing from the Meiji period (1868-1912) onwards (Mori 1945). Indeed, the modern Japanese house built on piles and surrounded by verandas, *engawa* 縁側, also opens onto a landscape garden and includes a reception room, *zashiki* 座敷, comprising a *tokonoma* 床間, a type of ornamental altar used to display hanging scrolls depicting landscapes. All these elements were borrowed from the habitat structures produced by the elite classes at different times in history (Fiévé 1996). The same may be said of other art forms reflecting a profound sensitivity to nature, such as the art of flower arranging and the Tea Ceremony, initially developed by the elite, and later adopted and widely practiced by the middle classes. The imitation of the most refined forms of architecture has ensured a remarkable continuity of the Japanese residential space, and its intimate relationship with nature, from ancient times to the present day (Fig. 1).

According to the sources, the recreation of natural landscapes in palace gardens dates back to the ancient period (593-1185). The *Man'yōshū* 万葉集



Figure 1. Isui-tei 倚翠亭 pavilion at Hakusa sansō 白沙山莊, former garden of the painter Hashimoto Kansetsu 橋本関雪 (1883-1945). © N. Fiévé (Kyōto, 2008)

(Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves), the anthology of poems compiled in the mid 8th century, describes the garden of the Island Palace, *shima no miya* 嶋の宮,¹ the residence of Prince Kusakabe no miko 草壁皇子 (662-689), a son of Emperor Tenmu 天武天皇 (r. 673-686), built in 689. This garden, featuring a lake surrounded by rocks, had previously belonged to Soga no Umako 蘇我馬,² which earned the latter the nickname of 'Great Minister of the Lake', *shima no ōmi* 嶋大臣.³ According to the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (Chronicles of Japan), the garden within the Southern Court of Empress Suiko's 推古天皇 (r. 593-628) Palace comprised a lake with an island, a Chinese-style bridge, *kurehashi* 呉橋, and a miniature representation of the mythical Mount Su-

1 *Man'yōshū*, poems 170 to 173, 178 and 179 (Nihon koten bungaku taikei 4. Tōkyō: Iwanami shoten, 1957); *Nihon shoki*, Shintei zōho kokushi taikei 1. Tōkyō: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1952, 166.

2 Soga no Umako served under four successive emperors and was already a minister (*ōmi*) under the emperor Bidatsu 敏達天皇 (r. 572-585).

3 In 612, Shikimaro 芝耨麻呂, an emigrant from the Kingdom of Kudara 百濟 (Paecke), and a kind of highway engineer (*roji no takumi* 路地工), created a garden south of the Emperor's residence with an arched, Chinese-style bridge that gave access to an island at the centre of the lake evoking Mount Sumeru. *Nihon shoki*, *opus cit.* 155.



Figure 2. Shumisen 須弥山 reproduction in the garden of the Reiun-in 靈雲院 temple, Tōfuku-ji 東福寺. © N. Fiévé (Kyōto, 2012)

meru, *Shumisen* 須弥山, the symbolic centre of the universe in ancient Indian Buddhist cosmogony (Fig. 2). Later examples of gardens suggest that the upright rock set at the centre of a pond or lake symbolised the sacred mountain. Located at the centre of the Nine Mountains and Eight Oceans, *Kusen hakkai* 九山八海, the symbolic representation of Sumeru is a recurrent feature of the Japanese garden throughout its history.⁴

However, it was not before the foundation of the Heian capital, Kyoto in 794, that the art of garden design truly began to flourish, and its development at that time was to have a profound impact on the spatial structure of the house. As opposed to the Nara region, the Heian basin is well supplied in water, and the depth to the water table is shallow. This abundance of water enabled the Heian aristocracy to create gardens featuring large ponds fed by artificial reservoirs. Thus was born the aristocratic garden that be-

4 Some notable examples among the numerous examples of gardens featuring representations of Sumeru for the Muramachi period include the «garden of Nine Mountains and Eight Oceans» 九山八海の庭 of Temple of Futamata Onsen-ji 二俣本泉寺 in Kanazawa, The Golden Pavilion 金閣 in Kyoto and its mountain island at the centre of the lake. Examples for the contemporary period include the garden restored by the famous historian and landscape architect, Shigemori Mirei 重森三玲 (1896-1975), when the Temple of Reiun-in 靈雲院 of Tōfuku-ji 東福寺 in Kyoto was restored (Fig. 2).

came widespread from the 9th century onwards. While the Japanese elite imitated the Chinese model by building their dwellings at the centre of a garden, by doing so, they also perpetuated ancient local practices celebrating the natural elements. Indeed, the techniques used in gardens in the Heian period took root in ancient local forms of nature worship. Before the introduction of Buddhism, the Japanese revered various natural elements, such as rocks, waterfalls and trees, as the abodes or manifestations of *kami*.

Archaeological findings reveal that most proto-historical settlements were established at the foot of mountains, near dense forests that were inhabited by *kami*. Since the ancient period and probably even well before, rocks and boulders occupied a very special place in the lives of the Japanese. It was commonly believed that theophany was achieved through an intermediary, such as a cluster of boulders located in a forest or on a sacred mountain and known as *kannabi* 神名備山. With regard to urbanism, such beliefs also played a fundamental part in the spatial layout of the city to ensure the local deities' protection and the establishment of an auspicious site. Thus, in order to fully understand the processes involved in the conception of Kyoto's urban space, one must take into account the links between urbanism and the various sacred sites and places of worship of the Kyoto basin, such as the Three Mountains, *sanzan* 三山, or the Four Rock Thrones, *yon iwakura*, 四岩倉 (Kōzai 2008).

From this perspective, we may suppose that the creation of gardens in urban spaces throughout the ancient period resulted, in part, from the need to find a substitute for wild nature that had disappeared from the new cities built on flat lands and modeled after their Chinese counterparts. For the Japanese of the Heian period, natural elements (rocks, streams, trees) were endowed with energy whose close proximity was necessary for the wellbeing of the household. Chinese landscape garden designs, founded on ancient beliefs conveyed by Buddhism and Taoism, became associated with local forms of nature worship. Pervaded by the Buddhist concept that the entire universe is contained within a limited space, Chinese landscape designs served as the foundation for the development of the Japanese garden, with its artificial hills, *tsukiyama* 築山, vertical rocks, *tateishi* 立石, cascades, *taki* 瀧 (Fig. 3), winding streams, *yarimizu* 遣水, miniature lakes and seas amid lush vegetation whose seasonal changes highlighted the crucial moments of the yearly calendar (Fiévé 2012).

Japanese gardens feature landscapes, *sansui* 山水, real or legendary, more often a Japanese landscape, and in some cases a Chinese landscape. Influenced by Chinese Taoist practices, the rocks erected in the garden generally symbolise mythical islands. The pine trees planted on the boulders are clipped and dwarfed so as to give them the twisted and gnarled appearance of millenary trees, and like the latter, they are supposed to become imbued with the virtues of the rocks on which they grow. The influence of Taoism is reflected in the theme of the Immortals, *shinsen* 神



Figure 3. Midori waterfall 翠滝 behind the Kasumi pond 霞が池 (17th c.), Kenrokuen garden 兼六園庭園.
© N. Fiévé (Kanazawa, 2010)

仙, who are believed to dwell on the peaks beyond the Eastern Sea, Tōkai 東海 (Fiévé 2008c). The three mountain-islands of the Immortals: Penglai (Jap. Hōrai 蓬莱), Yingzhou (Jap. Eishū 瀛州) and Fangzhang (Jap. Hōjō 方丈), which the Japanese associate with existing mountains, Mounts Fuji 富士山, Atsuta 熱田山 and Kumano 熊野山, are frequently replicated in the gardens of Kyoto, both ancient and modern.

Landscape designs were also inspired by famous landmarks, *meisho* 名所, celebrated in literature and poetry or depicted in paintings. The choice of the theme depended on the household head's literary and artistic culture and personal predilection for a given landscape. This is clearly expressed in the opening lines of the *Sakuteiki* 作庭記 (Records of Garden Making), a text written in the 11th century and attributed to Tachibana no Toshitsuna 橘俊綱 (1028-1094):

When setting the stones, first be aware of the [following] basic concepts.

Select several places within the property according to the shape of the land and the ponds, and create a subtle atmosphere, reflecting again and again on one's memories of wild nature. [...]



Figure 4. The landscape of Ama-no-hashidate 天橋立 reproduced in the garden of Katsura rikyū 桂離宮 (17th c.) of the Hachijō family. Since the Heian period, Ama-no-hashidate is classified as one of the Three famous landscape of Japan 日本三景. © N. Fiévé (Kyōto, 2010)

Visualize the famous landscapes of our country and come to understand their most interesting points. Re-create the essence of those scenes in the garden, but do so interpretatively, not strictly.⁵

It is clear from this passage that the landscape garden is a means for the scholar cum garden designer to express his sensibility, and in this sense, the garden not only has a poetic function, but also, it must be stressed, a phatic function. In other words, it serves as a means of social interaction between its conceiver and his fellow men. Indeed, as a work of art, the landscape garden asserts a bond, and establishes a connection with others. For the Heian aristocrats, the garden was a means of self-acknowledgement and of relating to one another in a concrete, physical relationship based on the shared tradition of *meisho*. The poetic work of

5 「石を立てん事、まず大旨をこころふへき也。地形により池のすがたにしたがひて、よりにくる所々に風情をめぐらし生得の山水をおもはへて、その所々は◇こそありしかと、おもひよせ おもひよせ たつべき也」(original text quoted in Tamura 1964, 177-9). English translation taken from *Sakuteiki. Visions Of The Japanese Garden* (Takei, Keane 2001, 153).

the garden's creator – the lettered man living on the premises – was an intuitive quest for a means of connecting to the World and others (Fig. 4).

2 Galleries and Verandas as Links Between the Garden and the House, Between Man and Nature, Between the Outside World and the Inside World

Leisure gardens were initially designed for the daily wellbeing and pleasure of the Japanese elite. The gardens were generally planned around a lake or pond scattered with artificial mountains and islands connected by bridges. Flowers, shrubs and trees were added in order to mark the changing of the seasons. The gardens were contemplated from the galleries and verandas surrounding the buildings. One could also enjoy the scenery either by strolling around the lake or from a boat adrift on the water. During festivals, dancers and musicians performed on a stage placed on the central island or on boats, while the household members and their guests watched from the buildings' galleries. Ducks and other animals roamed freely about (Fiévé 2008a). In some cases, an aviary was erected near one of the verandas, as illustrated in a painting depicting the Eastern Pavilion of Fujiwara Toshimori's palace in the *Kasuga gongen kenki emaki* 春日権現験記絵巻 (Illustrated Tales of the Miracles of the Avatars of Kasuga, 1309, Scroll V).

The study of domestic space in the Heian period shows that the Japanese of that time did not significantly alter the central structure of their buildings inspired by the Chinese design that came into vogue during the Nara period (710-784). The Heian noblemen continued the custom of building their residences at the centre of large gardens but added wide galleries or passageways that ran around the edifices' central framework, *moya* 母屋 or 'Mother Frame'. During the day, the galleries remained open to the surrounding garden. These galleries consist of a pent roof, *hisashi* 庇 廂, supported by an extra row of posts aligned with the posts supporting the *moya*. In the case of a large edifice, an additional roof, *mago hisashi* 孫庇 or *mata hisashi* 又庇, was added around the first. Of the two Chinese characters used for transcribing the term *hisashi*, the character *bi* 庇 designates roof, whereas the character *xiang* 廂 refers to a lean-to structure. In Japan, *hisashi* (whose etymology derives from "*hi [ga] sasu*", 'where the sun shines') refers to the galleries' pent roof extending from the main roof, whereas *hisashi no ma* ('space of the *hisashi*') designates the wooden floored section of the gallery protected by the former. The galleries were encircled and further expanded by another floored section called *sunoko* 簀の子. At night, the *shinden* was sealed off with heavy shutters, *shitomi* 蒔, of wooden lattice, *kōshi* 格子, placed along the full length of the gallery. During the day, the lower half of the shutters were removed while the up-

per half were raised horizontally and suspended from hooks in the eaves above. As a result, the internal space of the house remained open to the surrounding garden.

This ingenious technique allowed the Heian aristocrats to modify and considerably expand the space of their dwellings without fundamentally changing the core structure. The central framework of a *shinden* was two bays deep and five bays wide, the interstice between each bay measuring around 3 meters at the time. With the one-bay wide galleries, the total length of the *shinden* was seven bays and its depth four bays. Thus the total surface of the galleries encircling the building was more than twice the surface of the central framework or *moya*. In other words, more than twice the floor space of the house consisted of open spaces that were neither inside nor outside but that maintained a constant connection between the surrounding garden and the house (Fig. 5).

The development of these open galleries may be explained by the increasingly important role the courtyard or garden played from the 9th century on since most official events (receptions, ceremonies and rituals), and the daily life of the estate's residents took place there. Straw mats were placed on the floors of the galleries for seating, and canopies were erected for high-ranking figures. For receptions, the seating was arranged according to hierarchy, in decreasing order from the main gallery down to the secondary galleries. Subalterns remained in the courtyard at the foot of the building. *Shinden* architecture with its characteristic open galleries allowing for constant interaction between the sheltered space of the house and the surrounding garden had a profound and enduring impact on the development of Japanese housing throughout its history: initially confined to the mansions of the elite, it was subsequently transposed on the housing structures of all levels of society. Given that the aristocracy spent most their time in the galleries of their residences, it is easy to understand how Heian culture came to be influenced so profoundly by an architectural model that placed man at the heart of the garden and surrounding nature (Ōta S. 1987).

Later, towards the late Middle Ages, the old galleries of the aristocratic mansions gave way to verandas or aisles *en* 縁 or *engawa* 縁側 that connected the rooms to one another and, at the same time, the inner spaces of the residence to the garden (Fig. 9). These architectural elements physically and intrinsically associate the garden with the house. In Japanese, the Chinese readings, *on'yomi*, of the Chinese character *en* 縁 are numerous and they generally have a double meaning: some, like *eni*, *enishi*, *yukari*, *yukuri*, *tayori*, are associated with the notion of "relation", while others, such as *heri* or *fuchi*, are related to that of "edge". Berque (2014) argues that among all these terms, *en* is the only one combining both meanings: one meaning is concrete since *engawa* refers to the physical edge of a building, while the other meaning is abstract since *en* here also refers to "relation".



Figure 5. View on the lake from the inside of Kikugetsu-tei 菊月亭, *sukiya* pavilion of the Ritsurin kōen 栗林公園 (17th c.). © N. Fiévé (Takamatsu, 2010)

Figure 6. M. Kinoshita Ryô, architect, and Mrs. Mechtild Mertz, specialist of Asian woods, on the *engawa* 縁側 at Fiévé's house (formerly built in 1937). © N. Fiévé (Kyôto, 2010)

Thus, *engawa* designates the open gallery symbolising the intermediary space connecting the house to the garden, and at the same time a place where the household members interact with people from the outside world. A familiar relation of the household may ascend to the house through the *engawa* (*engawa kara ie ni agaru* 縁側から家にかかる). An impromptu guest may also sit at the edge of the gallery while the host remains seated on a tatami within the adjacent room. This would be unthinkable, however, for a visitor “without *en*” (*muen* 無縁), in other words, a visitor unknown, and therefore without any connection, to the household (Fig. 6).

3 The Integration of Man into the Landscape

Thus, the spatial design of the Japanese house, regardless of the style employed, integrates the house into the garden and the landscape it recreates. The garden is not just a mere vista that can be admired from inside a building, as is the case in western architecture: the Japanese house and its inhabitants are conceived of as an integral part of the landscape. The recreation of a miniature world within the garden establishes a virtual world in which the intuitive and learned man is able to project himself and travel. The garden is a complex composition that permits the juxtaposition of distinct spatio-temporal dimensions within one place. Although living in an urban environment, man is able to remain in constant symbiosis with the surrounding nature thanks to the material forms provided by the pavilions’ architecture and the garden (Fiévé 2014).

I must emphasise here that while the landscape garden is an artifice, it is also an expression of wild nature. The tradition of nature literature appeared in China around the 4th century with the ideal of the scholar living in seclusion from the world, as expressed by Tao Qian 陶潛 (365-427) and the landscape paintings of Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (v. 345-406). As evoked in Xie Lingyun’s 謝靈運 (385-433) lyrical poetry on the quest for immortality, *shansui* 山水 is, from the outset, an appreciation of the intrinsic qualities of Nature and its primeval forces. Moreover, in the Chinese tradition, there is a fundamental difference between ‘fields and gardens’, known as *tianyuan* 田園, which are artefacts, and ‘mountains and water’, *shansui*, which express untamed or wild nature (Escande 2005).

Imported from China, the tradition of *sansui* was developed and combined with the local tradition of appreciation for ‘famous places’, *meisho*, where aristocrats gathered to enjoy the natural beauty of the site. Moreover, since the Heian era and even earlier, Japanese gardens were designed to evoke renowned landscapes; this explains why the term *sansui* came to designate the miniature landscape replicated in a garden. Though initially a man-made contrivance, the garden came to be seen as an emanation of *sansui*, and in this sense it is an expression of nature’s primeval forces.

This tradition of landscape imitation is not limited to the domestic garden: other forms include 'tray landscape', *bonkei* 盆景 ou *bonsan* 盆山, dwarfed trees, *bonsai* 盆栽, and, to a certain extent 'standing flower' arrangements, *rikka* 立華. Initially developed by the cultured elite, the art of creating miniature landscapes also extended to the ornamentation of objects used in daily life, such as mountain-shaped incense holders, *hakusanro* 博山炉, and inkpots, *kensan* 硯山, ink stones, *kenbyō* 硯屏, etc. The incorporation of such motifs in daily life not only had an aesthetical, but also a magical and religious purpose. In Japan, as in China, such items, to which great value was attached, were the indispensable implements for creating the landscape paintings, *sansuiga* 山水画 that adorned reception rooms and studies.

From an architectural perspective, the tradition of landscape design was initiated in China with the spatial composition of the scholar's den, *shuzhai* 書齋. It was introduced into Japan with the landscape garden, before enjoying a revival in the Middle Ages, with the appearance of study rooms, *sai* 齋, *shosai* 書齋, built as free standing structures within the landscape garden of an estate or as part of a Zen abbot's private quarters, *hōjō* 方丈. The *Dōninsai* 同仁齋, "Study of the Same Virtue", a small pavilion constructed on the grounds of the *Higashiyama sansō* 東山山莊, Ashikaga Yoshimasa's 足利義政 (1436-1490) retirement villa, stems from this tradition. This pavilion is a literary and picturesque world of its own. Both a place for study and a tea house, it also offered the opportunity to commune with the spirit of famous past masters, such as the monk Musō Soseki 夢窓疎石 (1275-1351) whose virtue is alluded to in the edifice's name. Yoshimasa had wished to create a garden modelled on Musō's Saihōji Temple 西芳寺, and his garden contains a number of elements similar to those found in Musō's garden: the path winding through the islands and hills, the waterfall, the same number of pavilions bearing similar names, the rock arrangement imitating the famous cascade of boulders created by Musō at Saihōji. Both gardens feature a 'pavilion bridge', *hashi no abaraya* 橋亭, and a kiosk-shaped boat, *funadomari-tei* 舟泊亭. The transposition of Musō's garden to Yoshimasa's estate in the eastern hills made Yoshimasa's garden a famous place, a *meisho*, a source of life and connection (Fiévé 2008c).

The Japanese teahouse, *chashitsu* 茶室, and its garden, *roji* 露地, also derived from this singular tradition. Indeed, the architectural space of the teahouse was designed to offer a haven of nature and peace and to provide the 'tea man', *chajin* 茶人 with a refuge from the hustle of daily life. Conceived for the townspeople of Kyoto in the 16th century, it is the direct legacy of the Chinese tradition of cottages, *maoshi* 茅室, mountain hermitages, *shanzhuang* 山莊, 'peaceful pavilions', *jinshi* 靜室, and other such retreats (Fig. 7, 8).

The teahouse, like most edifices and gardens, has a name, generally inspired by a literary or religious citation. It is not fortuitous that the name most often used is *sai* 齋, a term associated with the idea of reclusion and



Figure 7. Inside view of the tea house Yūgao-tei 夕顔亭 (1774). © N. Fiévé (Kanazawa, 2010)



Figure 8. Tea house Shōsei-an 松声庵 (Edo period). © N. Fiévé (Kanazawa, 2010)

Taoist purification (Stein 1987, 284), or *hōjō* 方丈, “ten feet square”, referring to Vimalakīrti’s ten foot square retreat. Representing an idealised image of eremitism, the teahouse, or ‘thatched hut’ (*sōan chashitsu* 草庵茶室), as the ancient masters Takeno Jōō 武野紹鷗 (1502-1555) and Sen no Rikyū 千利休 (1522-1591) referred to it, was a place where the tea man could transcend his urban existence by withdrawing from the world like the hermit in his remote mountain hermitage. He who seeks refuge and practices *chanoyu* 茶湯 acquires the virtues of the hermit, *inkyō* 隠, as illustrated by the following passage from *Chōandōki* (Choandō’s Notes) by a disciple of Rikyū describing the poet Kamo no Chōmei 鴨長明 (1155?-1216) in his morning solitude as he rekindles the embers of the hearth in his *hōjō*:⁶

Kamo no Nagaakira [Kamo no Chōmei] recreated Vimalakīrti’s ten foot square hut and became a hermit. There he was content to live away from

6 *Hōjōki* 方丈記 (An Account of My Hut), see the translation of R.P. Candau (1968, 278).

the world and venerate the Buddha Amida. Though his room was only ten feet square, many people gathered there, and while he prepared tea, *chanoyu*, the place could be likened to Jōmyōkoji's [Vimalakīrti] abode.⁷

The characteristic features of these architectural spaces designed for 'spiritual isolation' or seclusion, *kakuri* 隔,⁸ are their gates, doorways, hedges and other devices serving to separate them from the outside world, together with the tablets, *hengaku* 扁額, with carved inscriptions identifying the hut, pavilion or garden. The *hengaku* bears an epigraph, generally a quotation from a classic. The inscription endows the place with the properties of a renowned site (*meisho*). It becomes charged with the *meisho*'s history, culture, and hence human life, and is regarded as its emanation. The epigraph elevates the garden or pavilion it names and enables he who enters it to pass into another world. The garden gates, the miniature, 'crawl-through' entrance to the hut, *nijiri-guchi* 躡口, so low it requires crouching (*nijiru* 躡る) in order to pass through, the *nakakuguri-mon* 中潜門, a middle gate separating the inner tea garden from the outer tea garden, the stone water basins, *tsukubai* 蹲踞, that punctuate Japanese space both religious and profane: all these elements serve to mark the passage from one space or world to another.⁹

The tea garden (*roji*) itself is a spatial composition designed for 'spiritual reclusion', and represents the bridge between the profane world and the closed space of the teahouse. It is a place for purification leading to the Way of the Buddha, as expressed by the following passage ascribed to Sen no Rikyū (1522-1591):¹⁰

Roji designates the seclusion of a thatched hermitage. In the Lotus Sutra, a parable relates how the children of an affluent master flee from their house on fire—representing the Three Phenomenal Worlds – to find

7 「鴨の長あきらハ、維摩の方丈をまなひて隠居し、人にましはらさるをたのしみ、只一すしに、弥陀をねかへり、我堂ハ方丈にたらすといへど、あまたの人を入れて茶湯せしなれハ、浄名居士の獅子の座にハかなへりとそおもふ」 quoted from *Chōandōki* 長闇堂記 (Choandō's Notes) (1960, 380). Kubo Chōandō 久保長闇堂 (1571-1640) studied the Tea Ceremony with the Rikyū (*Rikyū-ryū* 利休流) school before writing this treatise.

8 I have taken up the concept expressed by Masuda Tomoya 増田友也 (1914-1981), translated into English by the term seclusion in the sense of "spiritual isolation" (Masuda 1987).

9 Akisato Ritō's 秋里籬島 *Iwagumi sono.u yaegaki-den* 石組園生八重垣伝 (Garden Stones and Hedges), published in 1827, enjoyed immense success upon its publication. This work is organised according to a thematic classification of the dividing elements of the garden: hedges, *kaki* 垣 (*shikiri-gaki* 仕切垣 and *sode-gaki* 袖垣) are detailed in forty or so entries, bridges and gates, *niwa no kado* 庭門 (around fifty models) constitute the core of the work, while the last pages give a brief overview of upright rocks and rock arrangements, *iwagumi* or *ishigumi* 石組, and other stone elements of the garden: bridges, stepping stones and paving, basins, and lanterns.

10 Tachibana Jitsuzan 立花實山 (1655-1708), quotation from the *Kochūrodan* 壺中壚談, included in the 7th fascicule of apocryphal postface of *Nanpōroku* 南方録 (*Nanpōroku* 1962, 414).

themselves on ‘bare ground’ (*roji*), also referred to as the ‘cart yoked to the white ox’, or as the ‘white dewy path’ (*hakuroji* 白露地), where one may rid one’s self of the dirt and troubles of this world. The notion of the heart’s purity is strongly associated with the term *hakuroji*.¹¹

The Way of Tea, *sadō* ou *chadō* 茶道, as it came to be formalised in the 17th century, is a spiritual practice based on the notion of material deprivation, *muichibutsu* 無一物, ‘having nothing’. As Aldo Tollini (2014) aptly explains in his work, its conceptualisation by Tea Masters is based on notions stemming from Zen truths of which the Tea Ceremony is a physical expression. This practice, however, also incorporated aesthetical concepts and principles developed throughout the medieval period and its roots may also be traced back to the aristocracy’s *waka* 和歌 poetry. This is evidenced by the Tea Masters’ numerous references to such poetry. The Tea Ceremony also derived from the custom of tea gatherings, *chakai* 茶会, practiced in the 15th century by the military aristocracy, and inspired by Chinese practices and the tea tasting parties in vogue in Japan among the aristocracy. The elegance and refinement of presentation, dress, architecture and garden were of the utmost importance in these gatherings.

The paradox of the Tea Ceremony lies in the diversity, not to mention antinomy, of these influences: the spiritual dimension underlying this practice never excluded the aesthetic quest for harmony and beauty. Depending on the generation or school of style—many of which flourished throughout the Edo period – one or the other aspect, spiritual or aesthetical, dominated the art of tea preparation. Nevertheless these two aspects always remained complementary. To quote from the *Nanpōroku* 南方録, for Jōō, the following poem by Teika¹² taken from the *Shinkokinshū* (New Collection of Ancient and Modern [Japanese Poetry]), an early 13th century anthology of poems, perfectly illustrates the *wabi* of *chanoyu*:

11 「露地に草庵寂寞の境をすへたる名なり、法華譬喩品に長 子すでに三界の火宅を出て、露地に居ると見えたり、又露地の白牛といふ、白露地ともいへり、世間の塵勞垢染を離れ、一心性情の無一物底を、強て名づけて白露地といふ」。«The house on fire», third parable of the *Hokekyō* 法華經 (Lotus Sūtra), which the Buddha relates to Ārīputra, recounts how an affluent master rescues his children from his house on fire. In order to convince the children, who are absorbed in their play inside the house and unaware of the danger, he resorts to a subterfuge and tells them that five carts yoked to a sheep, a deer and an ox await them outside. The children rush outside to look and are thus saved, finding themselves on «bare ground» (*roji* 露地). In this parable, by running from the house on fire, which symbolises the Three Phenomenal Worlds, one is saved from the flames of rebirth, old-age, illness, death, anxiety, sorrow, distress, delusion, blindness, the Three Poisons of greed, hatred and ignorance, and the suffering caused by the Five Desires, by seeking refuge in the emptiness of the «bare ground», and by turning to the Buddha’s teachings and the path to enlightenment (Robert 1997, 103).

12 Fujiwara no Sadaie 藤原定家 (1162-1241), better-known as Fujiwara no Teika was a Japanese poet, calligrapher, novelist, anthologist, and scholar of the late Heian period and early Kamakura period.

見わたせば	<i>Miwataseba</i>	Casting wide my gaze,
花も紅葉も	<i>hana mo momiji mo</i>	Neither the cherry blossoms
なかりけり	<i>nakarikeri</i>	Nor scarlet leaves:
浦のとまやの	<i>ura no tomaya no</i>	A fisherman's reed hut
秋の夕暮れ	<i>aki no yūgure</i>	In the autumn dusk.

The spirit of this poem sings the essence of *chanoyu*. The cherry blossoms in spring, the red leaves in autumn may be represented by the beautiful architecture of the *shoin daisu* [...] “By tirelessly contemplating the cherry blossoms in spring or the fiery leaves in autumn, we reach the threshold of material detachment (*muichibutsu*). This may be likened to the austerity of a fisherman’s hut. Those who know not the wealth proffered by the cherry blossom or the autumn leaves cannot live in such a hut. By contemplating this beauty again and again, one may reach the most profound level of *sabi*, that of the fisherman’s hut” [...] “Jōō also said that here resides the fundamental essence of Tea”. (*Nanpōroku*, 398-9)

Still according to the *Nanpōroku*, Jōō goes on to explain his renouncement of material wealth with Teiki’s poem quoted above, which also echoes Yoshida Kenkō’s 吉田兼好 (1283?-1352?) words in his *Tsurezuregusa* 徒然草 (Essays in Idleness):

«Are we only to look at flowers in full bloom, at the moon when it is clear? No, to look out on the rain and long for the moon, to draw the blinds and not to be aware of the passing of the spring – these arouse even deeper feelings [...]. And must we always look upon the moon and the blossoms with the eye alone?».¹³

The *Nanpōroku* goes on to quote a poem by Fujiwara no Ietaka 藤原家隆 (1158-1237), also taken from the *Shinkokinshū*:

花をのみ	<i>Hana wo nomi</i>	Show them who wait
待らん人に	<i>mataran hito ni</i>	Only for cherry blossoms
山里の	<i>yamazato no</i>	There in the mountain village:
雪間の草の	<i>yukima no kusa no</i>	Grass peeks through the snow,
春を見せば	<i>haru wo miseba</i>	And with it, spring.

(*Nanpōroku*, 399)

13 Adapted from *The Tsurezure gusa of Yoshida no Kaneyoshi*, translated by George Sansom (*Asiatic Society of Japan Transactions*, 39 [1911]).

The poem is followed by this commentary:

“The mountain village is a place where one can experience a *sabi* similar to that of the fisherman’s hut. After a while the cherry blossoms wane and the autumn leaves are concealed beneath the snow and the *sabi* one feels in the village’s barren and empty landscape is similar to that of the fisherman’s hut [in Teika’s poem]”. (*Nanpōroku*, 399)

To those who long to contemplate the cherry blossoms, Takeno Jōō and Sen no Rikyū show the desolate landscape of a mountain village in the winter in which a grass blade emerging from the snow expresses the essence of spring. Their message is clear: those who seek the spring in the cherry blossoms or autumn in the scarlet leaves of the maple perceive only the material world and can only experience superficial emotions. On the other hand, a single blade of grass in an otherwise forsaken and empty world can lead to the spiritual understanding of the splendor of spring. The natural landscape in spring is indeed sublime, but a tiny part of it (a blade of grass) suffices to evoke the entire spiritual landscape and true essence of spring. This applies to the practice of *chanoyu*, and explains why the teahouse is a simple, secluded place and the tea garden, a garden without flowers (Fig. 8).¹⁴

To resume our discussion, the domestic garden, tea garden and landscape garden appeared in varying forms throughout history; initially confined to the estates of the Japanese elite, they later became part of the habitat structures of pre-modern society as a whole. One may say without exaggeration that most houses in pre-war Japan had integrated, in one form or other, the age-old tradition of landscape garden. The architecture and gardens not only represented microcosms and legendary landscapes but also living theatres in which people could withdraw from daily life in order regenerate themselves through the proximity of the primeval forces of an ancestral landscape forged by centuries of civilisation and bearing a rich heritage of human moral, spiritual and aesthetical values.

14 This leads me to mention here the *Glass Tea House Mondrian* pavilion (2014), a contemporary creation by the photographer Sugimoto Hiroshi 杉本博司 (born in 1948), built on the Island of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice. In spite of the beauty of its forms and its architectural quality from the point of view of contemporary architecture, this creation probably represents the antithesis of Jōō’s or Rikyū’s conception of Tea as expressed in the medieval and pre-modern sources as *Yamanoue sōjiki* (1586) or *Nanpōroku*. The use of synthetic materials and the transparency of the glass are the very expression of attachment to the material world that they sought to refute. I may even add that Sugimoto’s work is the negation of the intuitive and sensitive quality of the man-nature relation based on Japan’s ancient literary and poetic tradition.

4 Habitat, Garden and Ritual

I would now like to examine two practices, one ancient and the other contemporary, that in my view shed light on the special human-nature relationship in Japanese domestic space.

During the Heian period, life at court was punctuated by numerous celebrations, *nenjū gyōji* 年中行事. At the imperial palace, dozens of celebrations took place in the garden or in the southern courtyard of the complex. The first day of the year, for instance, was marked by the *Shihōhai* 四方拝, the 'Four-directions salute'. During which the Emperor, after a bathing to purify himself, descended from the *Seiryōden* 清涼殿 to the garden below. There he would stand facing North, and invoke the star of the year seven times to protect the realm from calamities. He would then salute the Earth, Heaven and four cardinal points (Vieillard-Baron 2000, 95). On the 3rd day of the 3rd moon, took place a special banquet known as the "party held by a meandering stream" (*gokusui no en* 曲水の宴), during which the guests, sitting on straw mats at the centre of the garden near a stream, engaged in poetic sparring matches. Sake bowls placed on floats in the shape of birds were released upstream from where the guests were seated. The participants were instructed to improvise poetic compositions according to a given theme before the sake reached the spot where they sat; if they succeeded, they could drink the bowl of sake drifting past them. Such gatherings are still held today along the sacred stream of the Kamo sanctuary in Kyoto.

These ancient celebrations remind us that while the Heian gardens served as recreational sites, they were also intended as a space where man could enter into contact with the forces of nature. In this sense, the garden is a spiritual area where man may blend into the natural environment. The influence of ancient vernacular beliefs according to which spirits manifest through the natural elements is echoed in the Chinese conception of the garden. Upon entering the garden space, man becomes once more an integral part of nature. Thus, the garden has always represented a space where, through the earth, water sky, stone and vegetation, man could make direct contact with the natural and spiritual forces of nature. The Japanese garden has preserved this spiritual dimension throughout the centuries.

In 2009-2010, during a secondment in Japan, I was fortunate enough to live with my family in a traditional house in Kyoto that was built in the 1930s (see Fig. 6). During my time there, I was able to experience first-hand living in a space modeled on ancient spatial designs, with tatami-lined floors, reception room with a *tokonoma*, sliding doors redefining the inner space of the house according to the season, a traditional bath, a tea room with a sunken hearth for the tea ceremony. The décor in each room depicted various aspects of nature and reflected the passing of the seasons. The view of Mount Daimonji 大文字 in the background provided a beautiful example of 'borrowed scenery', *shakkei* 借景. A wide gallery



Figure 9. The view on the garden from the Gepparō 月波楼, “Moon-wave pavilion”, at Katsura rikyū 桂離宮 (17th. c.). The “Moon-Wave Pavilion” was named after the last verse of the first quatrain of a poem by Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846): “Come spring, the lake is like a painting || Amidst the maze of overhanging boughs, its tranquil waters stretch over dozens of li || A profusion of pines cover the mountain slope with a thousand hues of green || On the lake’s ripples the moon shimmers like a pearl”.

circumventing the house allowed to one to fully enjoy the view of the surrounding garden and mountains in the distance.

My parents-in-law were staying with me in Kyoto for the New Year, *shōgatsu* 正月, and on that morning, we celebrated the New Year according to the ritual celebrated by the family for generations. As soon as we woke up, we sat on the *engawa* facing the garden in the freezing winter cold, and one after the other, we washed our hands in a stone basin for purification, then saluted the rising sun before eating a piece of knotted algae with a pinch of salt. We then entered the *zashiki* to share a bowl of sake and eat *zōni* 雑煮. The day before, we had decorated the *tokonoma* for the occasion. This simple yet powerful ceremony reminded me of the *Shihōhai* of the ancient calendar of courtly celebrations: although more modest in form, the ritual we performed was the direct legacy of the *Shihōhai*. By performing these simple yet fundamental gestures, my daughter, then aged three, experienced a ritual and a culture whose origins go back to the dawn of time. She saluted the rising sun and thus Mother Nature, the source of life.

5 Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to stress that we were able to perform this ritual because we were living in a house with an *engawa* and a garden, in other words, in a house built according to ancestral models of habitat. My parents-in-law told me that since they lived in a modern apartment, they had given up the practice. My wife who normally lives in an apartment in France, also no longer practiced this ritual, though she had practiced it in her childhood. In this instance, it was the house and its traditional spatial layout that led us to perform this ritual of communion with nature (Fig. 9). While the house's architecture provides a material structure, the dynamics of its spatial layout implies a multitude of functions, both material and immaterial, that shape our experience of the world. In a traditional Japanese house, our physical bodies do not move in the same way as they would in a western house. For this reason, with the modernisation of the housing model and the growing disappearance of the landscape garden, a great number of practices and physical experiences have been irreversibly altered or lost. In this sense, the modernisation of the Japanese habitat in the 20th century has provoked an existential rupture in the man-nature relationship.

It is not that technological progress is necessarily a bad thing and that we should revert to the life-style of our ancestors. For instance, the beautiful house in which I lived in Kyoto was very cold in winter and would have been a lot more comfortable with a few modern fixtures. What I mean to say is that the advent of technological science and the ensuing economic exploitation have led man to deny himself and to cut himself off from his natural environment, and the excessive exploitation of nature's resources is the direct consequence of this unprecedented rupture. Of course, it would be a mistake to think that the great improvements in our living conditions were born from the negative consequences of science and technology alone. The rejection of authoritarianism and fascism, the abolition of the caste system, women's emancipation etc., were also facilitated by technological progress which liberated the working classes from social alienation. However, it is our duty to remind ourselves that the great advances made in improving our condition stem as much from Science as they do from Morality, Ethics, Philosophy and Spirituality.

The sensibility expressed in the architecture of the Japanese house and garden has both a poetic function and a phatic function: it affirms a bond and establishes a link with others. This sensibility is the aesthetical aspect referred to by Michel Maffesoli (1990): a work of art is a means of knowing oneself and of establishing a concrete, physical connection with one another wherein expressing and reinforcing this link is the most fundamental part. The designer's 'sensitive work' is an attempt to create a bond of shared experience with the others and the world.

20th century anthropology, in particular Levi-Strauss (2001), has shown that in traditional societies, man belongs to a place and his habitat is inseparable from the society in which he lives. Without knowing it, humans live their daily lives in a space that is a representation of the world, of their world. The human habitat provides man with self-knowledge and at the same time allows him to be connected and relate to his fellow men. Moreover, traditional habitat also bears the memory of a society. It establishes an indispensable connection between past and future generations and solidarity with the surrounding natural environment. Through their habitats, living cultures are united to their land, climate, vegetation, society and other men.

But the man-nature symbiosis, previously reflected in Japan's traditional habitat architecture, is not an intrinsic and indestructible given of Japanese culture. Let us not forget this!

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