

# A critical review of ryoan-ji and noji



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## **A critical Review of Ryoan-ji and Noji**

Japans rich culture and strong connection with the land surrounding can be seen through the two sites, Ryoan-ji Temple and Noji Castle. These two are located in the western part of Japan constructed during the Edo period, or the Tokugawa period which reigned during the years of 1600 to 1867. This era was a huge stepping stone for the Japanese political system as it retained peace for 250 years due to the country being unified under military government. This means Japan saw new light into the development of the middle-class culture and how innovations in economic organisation, the arts and the literature increased.

During the Edo period Economic growth faced a limitation due to society not being based on technological innovations. However, we did see living standards improve as productivity improved along with it and thus it can be said that Japan as a whole grew economically at a moderate rate (Tamaki, 2014).

These landscapes having their final designs built during the Edo period showcase the change from minimalism to landscape that showcase gardens that were strong with ponds, artificial hills and islands with heavily manicured trees and hedges, almost mimicking the art of Bonsai. Where this garden type is great in larger areas such that of the Nijo Castle there must be small gardens that are popular within the urban setting. During the rise of the middle class there has been increase of town houses. The small areas had not much light and had little air meaning only decorative elements. These types gardens were such to visually look at and not walk throughout.

Even though there was political stability bought from Edo period, life was still strict. The country was closed to foreign influences on art and design. As depicted through the Wall panels paintings showcase how this closure to the world has further individualised the local styles to these painting styles. The Panels shown dictate the pure form of painting that captured the local surroundings such as the vegetation and landscapes with some panels showcasing women, men and activities that would take place.

## **Critical Review**

### Introduction

The report written by Charles W. Millard focuses on the Japanese Gardens in summer, specifically in the city of Kyoto. Millard goes to express the idea that the Gardens of Kyoto are linked to that as a “ painting, sculpture and other media, are products of great creative talents”. The conclusion of this report can fall to the side of Millard as there is conclusive evidence that his ideas and elaborately explored and expressed through the various examples provided within the text but also within Kyoto itself.

### Summary

The Report was organised in a traditional format being that of introduction to the topic then supporting paragraphs that provide example with elaborations to support his idea. There is full intensions to persuade the viewer into thinking his idea that the Kyoto gardens throughout its existence being that of nearly a thousand years was for the “ eyes to wonder through and not the feet” thus it its relation to it being of a painting or sculpture is quite compelling.

Millard starts off with the hitting point that these Gardens vary to its western counterpart describing that these Gardens within Kyoto are designed to be walked through with the eye, seen from specific vantage points that in the most part is only located on one side of the park. He further gives the reason being its like a painting, looked at from one particular angle. An angle to which the designer paid close attention to when designing the garden, as if like a painting, it is constructed in layers, lighter greens to white in the foreground with darker shades to black towards the background of the Garden.

Millard then plays with this idea of a “ painting” like view to tell a story through the various views one can construct throughout different planes of the Garden. Following he gives examples to support these ideas which concludes that the Gardens found in Kyoto is “ an expression of what is most profound in the spirit and philosophy of Japan.

## Critique

### The Negative

Millard has a strong argument with key points that would be against my views if I was to critique negatively against it. However, I must add to support this argument further Millard should have gone in further analysis of the smaller, residential type gardens within the middle class of Kyoto. These Gardens were small with little light and limited sun meaning that they were often filled with decorative pieces. This meant that viewer was locked out from walking through the garden and forced to view the space from a specific spot. Even through these Gardens may have been created not by

designers it can be used as a catalyst the move from smaller private spaces into larger spaces that were often public (depending on the place).

The underlying argument which is that these Kyoto Gardens are setup like constructed like a painting would be means that like paintings each individual has a different interpretation of the view especially when one views the garden from at a different time of day, different weather and season of the year meaning what Millard depicts from certain scenes can be completely different to other people causing false accusations to those individuals however with detailed evidence being given it is likely most people will fall onto Millards views of the Garden examples written.

The positive

The idea of the eye wondering through the Garden is a perfect description of the Kyoto Garden design throughout its life. The landscape of Ryoan-ji and Noji as studied in a brief analysis not only prove this idea but demonstrate it through the Architecture and setup of the Gardens within Ryoan-ji that make it so individuals can sit at the base of the Rock Garden to look out. Other example within could be the ankle boundary fence that surrounds a courtyard forest which indirectly prohibits walking throughout with the further evidence of moss covering the entirety of the garden bed. During summer when the Garden is at peak form as the flowers are bright, the greens resonating from plants to the heavily manicured plants only demonstrate the importance of the Aesthetic of the Garden. This high importance and key detail to the Aesthetic for the reason being to amuse its

visitors yet proves how its' the view and the experience of the view that matters.

Millard mentions Ginkaku-ji Garden designed by Soami, who was a Japanese painter and landscape gardener (Britannica, 1998). He mentioned this garden being one of the greatest in the world for its uniqueness of using varying gardens interlaying to create a scene. A larger protrusion of land in the main area of the space is believed to represent the top portion of Mt. Fuji. However like a painting, each any every scene can be interpreted differently and had justified, this opinion which Millard gave is the most plausible

Not only this but we can depict from the Gardens listed within the Essay and other Gardens that the designs had little to no pathways. This was purely intentional to guide the viewer to the vantage points such as the tea house which Millard describes being one of the most important views within the Garden.

## Conclusion

The Report does reflect opinions that can be accurately be justified to an extent that deems reasonable. To further support and strengthen his argument the addition of this idea to the townhouse, residential gardens, can be done

## References

- n. a 2018. Types of Gardens, *Edo Period (1603-1867)* , accessed 01 july 2019 via

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