

The zen rock garden
at ryoan-ji temple in
japan and the ruins of
machu picchu in ...



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The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization have branded the Peruvian natural wonder of Machu Picchu and the Japanese Zen rock garden of Ryoan-ji temple as two of the world's heritage. It is because of the innate beauty and mastery of artistic human skills that these two monumental sites were considered as the jewels of the world. More so, the Machu Picchu and Zen rock garden of Ryoan-ji temple have been acknowledged as national treasures that symbolized the tradition of the past that have transcended into the present context of cultural understanding. These sites should be preserved and conserved in order for future generations to appreciate the wonders of history and the richness of a culture.

The Machu Picchu is an archaeological marvel that projects mystery and at the same time the ingenuity of the Incas. The term Machu means old while Picchu denotes a " peak, a mountain or a hill. " During the colonial period, this mountain was divided into two sections, the first one was the Machu which means old and the other one was Wayna meaning new. More so, some experts believed that this great ruins have once been called " Patallaqta" which means the " town on the heights" where the remains of Pachakuteq," first emperor and founder of Tawantinsuyu," was stored (Lumberas " Machu Picchu"). The stone structures at Machu Picchu were built to provide the priests and priestesses of Inca with a sacred ground to perform their ceremonial rites.

More so, this place was also used as an astronomical observatory. Many believed that the " Intihuatana stone" possessed divine powers that can give a glimpse of the world of the spirits. In addition, this stone marked the time

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of the “ two equinoxes and other significant celestial periods” (Gray “ Macchu Picchu, Peru”). Historically, before the construction of Machu Picchu, this location at the Andes mountain was inhabited by “ Manco Khapaq and his wife Mama Oqllu” who both have an influential background on mythology and magic.

After Manco Khapaq, many “ lords or governors” have emerged that spread the concept of conquest. This event lead to the rise of Pachakutec Inca Yupanki whose name means “ the Inca who rules everything and who returns the land. ” He liberated Cuzco from the Chancas and from then on the Incas were able to conquer several neighboring tribes that resulted in the formation of Macchu Picchu (Lumberas “ Machu Picchu”). Meanwhile, the Ryoan-ji Temple which means “ temple of the peaceful dragon” was named by UNESCO as a world heritage in December 1994.

This temple houses the Zen monks of the Myoshinji school of the Rinzai (Murphy “ Ryoanji”). The Ryoan-ji Temple was originally from the Fujiwara famliy dating back from the Heian period. In 1450, during the Muromachi period, the temple was constructed by a military official named Hosokawa Katsumoto (Sacred-destinations. com “ Ryoanji, Kyoto”). More so, the Ryoan-ji Temple is famous because of its Zen garden. After 49 years since the birth of the temple, the world renowned Zen rock garden was made which until to this day is considered as one of the ancient and the most featured or viewed Zen garden.

The Japanese concept of wabi sabi which is a form of art in Japan that looks for the beauty in nature, was evident in the “ raked white pebbles” in circular

patterns and random arrangement of huge stones that were placed in a rectangular frame. In this type of garden, minimalism is the dominant idea. This particular theme was adapted in order to effectively simulate a natural scenery to create a sense of trance to viewers (Japan-Zone. com “ Zen Gardens”).

The ruins of Machu Picchu and the Zen rock garden of the Ryoan-ji Temple are both exquisite man-made creations. The main function of the two structures are based on the inhabitants' faith and spiritual beliefs. Both were utilized as a place to reach enlightenment or converse with the gods. However, it may seem that Machu Picchu and the Zen rock garden of the Ryoan-ji Temple are two similar entities but these two have other characteristics that differentiate the two apart including geography and physical characteristics. In terms of geography, the Machu Picchu is situated on top of the Andes mountains.

Its scenery is composed uncultivated natural landscape of rainforests and wildlife which are very far from the hustle and bustle way of living of the modern society. Most probably, the Incas chose this elevated place to construct their sacred ground in order to be physically near to the heavens - gods. Meanwhile, the Zen rock garden is located at the heart of Kyoto which is now an urban city in Japan. This type of setting shows the harmonious coexistence of the old and the new elements in cultural practices. In general, the geographical orientation of Machu Picchu represents the oneness with nature while Zen rock garden of the Ryoan-ji Temple demonstrates isolation from the material world through immersion in nature.

Also, Machu Picchu has an extensive land area which many experts believed that was the first form of urban settlement in a rustic setting while the Zen rock garden is more of an intimate nature scene situated in a limited space. Aside from the geographical differences, these two world heritage sites are also different in terms of physical features of the structures. The ruins of Machu Picchu is composed of two sections, which are the agricultural and urban sections. The agricultural part are made up of terraces of maize and coca that formed curves around the side of the mountains to hide the physical flaws of the irregularly-shaped mountain. Accents of stacked stone outlined the terraces.

In effect, it makes the mountain looked more fluid rather than rigid resulting to an exquisite scenery (Lumberas " Machu Picchu"). Moreover, the urban section of Machu Picchu consists of sanctuaries for worship, storage rooms, baths and houses which are all made from granite. These artificial structures showcased the high-level workmanship of the Incas that is presently celebrated in the modern age for their ingenuity in aesthetics and architecture (Gray " Macchu Picchu, Peru"). Meanwhile, the Zen rock garden of Ryoan-ji Temple had been designated as one of the few distinguishable treasures of " Japanese culture.

" The garden measures 30 meters by 10 meters forming a rectangular shape. The most intriguing and eye-catching element in this garden are the 15 rocks of different sizes. In the white raked sand and gravel background, there are 5 major groups of rocks with each having 5 rocks, 2 rocks, 3 rocks, 2 rocks and 3 rocks respectively. Some of the rocks are accented with moss plants to break the monotony of the whiteness of the white sand and gravel.
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More so, the Zen rock garden is also called a Karesansui, which is a type of style in dry landscape, because unlike the typical gardens, Zen gardens do not have grass, plants, shrubs and trees (Murphy “ Ryoanji”).

The simple lay out of the rocks enclosed by a low wooden fence suggests austerity. Moreover, the reason behind the strategic placement of the 15 rocks is to enable viewers to have different angles in viewing the 14 rocks. However, the Zen monks believed that when a viewer sees all 15, it is a sign that they have achieved completeness or spiritual enlightenment. This concept is based on Buddhism. To make the experience at the Zen garden a meaningful one, viewers should try to have a wholistic view of the entire area to appreciate the vastness and simplicity (Sacred-destinations.

com “ Ryoanji, Kyoto”). It seems that both the ruins of Machu Picchu and the Zen rock garden of Ryoan-ji Temple are recognized as works of art of their respective cultures, the Peruvians and Japanese. The utilization of natural raw materials such as rocks, granite and sand of both sites indicated the creativity of the people of Peru and Japan. They used similar materials but employed it in different ways. For Machu Picchu, blocks of granite were used to construct a city on top of a mountain that required not only creativity but also mathematical and engineering skills.

It is because of the advanced knowledge of the Incas about construction and urban planning that made Machu Picchu an interesting piece of natural wonder. On the other hand, the Zen rock garden of Ryoan-ji Temple is revered because of its abstract simplicity. Opposite from Machu Picchu, people are in awe of the garden not because of its religious inclination, “

technical achievement” and absolute scale but from its minimalist features that motivate people to reflect on themselves and their surroundings (Sacred-destinations. com “ Ryoanji, Kyoto”).