

LIFE IN THE HEIAN PERIOD

Isbi wo taten koto — "The art of setting stones."

With these words opens the oldest garden-making treatise in Japan—most likely the oldest in the world—best known by the name *Sakuteiki*, or *Records of Garden Making*.¹ Immediately upon reading this first line, we realize that the *Sakuteiki* will present us with a radically new view of gardening.² The expression *isbi wo taten koto* was used by the author of the *Sakuteiki* to define not only the placement of stones within the garden, but also the act of garden making itself. Although today there are many other words in Japanese to mean "gardening," such as *zōen* or *niwa zukuri*, both of which literally mean "build gardens," there was no such expression at the time the *Sakuteiki* was written. How fascinating to see that the simple act of standing a stone upright was so spiritually and aesthetically powerful (as with the dolmens of Stonehenge or Carnac), and so clearly central to the process of making a garden, that the act of setting stones became an appellation for gardening itself.

The importance placed on stones in Japan stems from several sources. The first is the ancient use of stones as prayer sites, especially

石をたてん事

Isbi wo taten koto

The Art of Setting Stones

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1. The *Sakuteiki* is the oldest treatise the authors know of that addresses gardening as an aesthetic art although there are older treatises that address agricultural-estate gardening, for instance, those of Pliny the Elder.

2. The expression *isbi wo taten koto* was written in various ways in the original text — 石をたてんこと, 石を立てんこと, 石を建てんこと — all of which are pronounced the same way but have somewhat different meanings: "setting stones," "standing stones upright," or "building with stones." While "matters on setting stones" is the most literal translation of *isbi wo taten koto*, "the art of setting stones" is more inclusive and thus preferable.

those found naturally in the landscape, often stones that have a rounded form or a naturally upright appearance. It was believed that through the medium of the stone, gods could be induced to descend from their heavenly abodes to visit earth and bestow their blessings for good health and ample harvests on village communities. These sacred stones, called *iwakura*, are still actively incorporated in religious life even today. In later eras, the spiritual qualities inherent in sacred stones carried over into the use of stones in gardens. New meanings were added as well, meanings that were derived from cultural imports such as Buddhism and geomancy, the latter being an ancient Chinese method of geophysical divination. The author of the Sakuteiki clearly states that stones were a requisite part of gardening, going as far as saying, for instance, in chapter eight, “. . . stones are imperative when making a garden.”³

In addition to the fact that the very word for gardening reveals the importance of stones, we also find another expression in the Sakuteiki of equal interest in this regard. In several places in the text, the author advises the reader to “follow the request of the stone,” *ishi no kowan ni shitagahite*. In current design language we might interpret this to mean “pay attention to the individual characteristics of the stones” or even “follow the character of the stone when making design decisions.” However, the word *request* reveals an important difference between the way we perceive gardens today and the way the writer of the Sakuteiki and his contemporaries did; for them, stones were animate, and the desires of stones warranted consideration. These two expressions regarding stones—the first showing that setting stones is the most central act of gardening and the second that stones were perceived as animate objects—both reveal that at the time the Sakuteiki was written gardens were perceived quite differently than they are today. This is what makes the Sakuteiki so appealing: it offers us a view into another society, at a time distant from our own, when people had distinctly different ways of understanding their world.

3. “. . . stones are imperative when making a garden” is *senzui wo nashite ba kannarazu ishi wo tatsu beki* 山水をなしては必石を立てべき.

It is believed that the Sakuteiki was written in the mid to late eleventh century, during the Heian period (794–1184), an important era in Japanese history since it marks a period of introspection when cultural attributes such as poetry, clothing styles, and so on, which had been imported from China and Korea over the previous centuries, were reexamined and transmuted into a clearly Japanese context. This is true of the gardens as well. The Sakuteiki offers the reader a vision of gardening from a society nearly 1000 years old. It also provides us with a rich source of information about the gardens of that time, insights that are pertinent not only to those who study historical records of gardening, but to anyone who is interested in simply perceiving what a garden is.

The Author and the Text

The oldest surviving version of the Sakuteiki was hand written in flowing brushscript on two long scrolls. However, unlike the later *Illustrations of Gardening* [*Senzui Narabi ni Yagyōzu*],⁴ the Sakuteiki contains no illustrative material. At some point after the Heian period, a set of these scrolls came into the possession of the Maeda family, wealthy provincial lords in what is today Ishikawa Prefecture, in central Japan. From the Maeda family, copies of the scrolls spread to other hands, and one such copy was acquired by the Tanimura family of Kanazawa City. Later, between the years 1779 and 1819 (the late Edo period by Japanese reckoning), the Tanimura scrolls were used in the production of the *Gunsho Ruijū*, a collection of historical literary works that contains more than 1800 scrolls.⁵ One notable aspect of that collection is that it was published using block print rather than script, and at that time some of the alphabetic *kana* script used in the earlier scrolls was interpreted and printed as *kanji*, Chinese calligraphic script. It is not known how the Sakuteiki was referred to in the Heian period; there is no title on the Tanimura scrolls. During the Kamakura period, the text was referred to as the

4. Also pronounced *Sansui Narabi ni Nogata no Zu*, as in Uehara, *Zāen Daijiten*, (Tōkyō: Kajima Shoten, 1994)

5. *Gunsho Ruijū* 群書類定

by the wind. No stones, no plants—just a white sandy beach is all that is needed.

~ The Mist island, when seen from across the pond, should appear as trailing mist in a light green sky, in two and three layers, fine, indefinite, here and there disconnected. Again, no stones, no trees. Only a white sandy beach.

~ The Cove Beach⁵⁰ island is a standard form. However, the design should not be overly rigid like a formal indigo pattern.⁵¹ Within the Pebble Beach Style there are elongated types, bent types, and even back-to-back types. These should be made to look somewhat like a Pebble Beach and yet must also be somehow unique. To complete the scene, spread sand and plant a few pine trees.

~ The Slender Stream Style island should not be overly designed but rather should appear as a slim islet left remaining within the flow of the stream.

~ The Tide Land Style should appear like a beach at ebb tide, half exposed above water and half below, so that the beach stones are partly visible above the water. No plants are needed.

~ The Pine Bark Style, just like a pine-bark print, should be grooved, appearing fragmented—and yet not be so.⁵² Whether stones or plants should be placed is up to the individual designer.

50. Cove Beach, *subama*, refers to a shoreline that contains a series of deeply indented coves. This classic undulating pattern is also the basis for many designs other than gardens including fabric design, the shape of trays, wedding ornaments, and so on. See figure 34, pp. 172–73.

51. Exactly what this formal indigo pattern, *kon no mon*, may have been is unclear.

52. The Pine Bark Style does not refer to actual pine bark but rather to a woodblock print pattern called “pine-bark print,” *matsu kawa zuri*. The bark of old pine trees is rough and gnarled, producing a pattern like that on the shell of a tortoise, broken into small, repeating sections, yet continuing endlessly.

VII. Waterfalls

~ Ways to Make Waterfalls

First, one must choose the Waterfall Stone.⁵³ A smooth stone that appears to have been cut is uninteresting. If the waterfall is 90 to 120 centimeters tall, then it should be made of mountain stones with rough surfaces. Even though it is said that the surface of the Waterfall Stone should be rough, more importantly, it must fit well with the Bracketing Stones.⁵⁴ So, first set a Waterfall Stone with a good surface, one that seems as if it will harmonize with the Bracketing Stones. Then pack soil in and around the base of the stone so that it will not budge so much as a speck, and finally reinforce it with well-fitted Bracketing Stones. After all this, pack all the gaps between the stones with clay and then again with a mixture of soil and gravel.⁵⁵ One should strictly adhere to these steps when making a waterfall.

Next, if the main point of view is from the right side, set a good-looking stone of reasonable height above the left Bracketing Stone; above the right-hand Bracketing Stone, set a shorter stone that will show the stone on the left side to its best advantage. If the main viewpoint is from the left side, then the opposite holds true.

In the area above the waterfall set some flat stones. One should not set these stones as if they were just riprap on a stream bank. Yet do not determine their placement too formally; just make certain that

53. The Waterfall Stone, *mizu ochi no ishi*, is the upright stone in the central portion of the waterfall over which, and in front of which, water was caused to fall.

54. Bracketing Stones, *waki ishi*, are set on both sides of a Waterfall Stone to lend it physical as well as visual support.

55. If the original is read *ishi mase ni tada no tsuchi wo mo irete*, the meaning can be construed as “mixing (*mase*) gravel with ordinary soil,” referred to these days as *krikomi jari*. If, instead, it is read *ishi mase ni tada no tsuchi wo mo irete*, as some scholars claim, the translation would be “put ordinary soil between the cracks (*mase*) of the stones.”

the water does not escape sideways. There should be only a few stones in the middle of the stream that show slightly above the water surface.

Finally, in front of both Bracketing Stones, set complementary stones of about half the height of the Bracketing Stones, and then, further downstream, place some more stones in accordance with the request of the stones already set. In front of the waterfall, the stream should widen and be scattered with stones that split the running water right and left. Beyond this point the water should be made to flow like a Garden Stream.

Since there are many different ways in which water can be made to fall, this is best left to the tastes of the individual. If it is preferred that the water fall freely away from the surface of the Waterfall Stone, then a stone with a clean, sharp corner should be chosen and set leaning slightly forward.⁵⁶ On the other hand, if a waterfall with water running down the surface of a stone⁵⁷ is preferred, then a stone with a rounded corner should be selected and set with a slight backward lean. At times this type of waterfall can look like fine threads spilling over into the air. In addition, if one sets two or three stones in front of the main Waterfall Stone, gradually stepping down and away from it, then the water will splash left and right as it falls.

It may be impossible to build a tall waterfall within the precincts of the capital except in the case of the Imperial palace grounds.⁵⁸ It has been said that Ichijō street and the rings at the top of the pagoda at Tōji temple are the same height.⁵⁹ If so, then if one draws water from a wellspring and carefully brings it through the garden in a trench

56. Water falling away from the surface of the Waterfall Stone is known as *hanare-ochi*, or "separated" fall.

57. Water running down the surface of the Waterfall Stone is called *tsutai ochi*, "guided" fall.

58. The palace grounds were particularly large. This would allow for a greater difference between the ground level at the water source and at the place where the waterfall was to be built.

59. In the valley within which the Heian capital was built, the land falls gently from

with a shallow pitch, it should be possible to make a waterfall 1.2 or even 1.5 meters in height.

The width of a waterfall and its height are not necessarily related. If one looks at waterfalls as they appear in nature, tall waterfalls are not always wide and low ones are not necessarily narrow. The width of the waterfall is dependent only on the width of the Waterfall Stone; however, waterfalls that are 0.9 to 1.2 meters in height should not exceed 60 centimeters in width. Waterfalls that are both low and broad have a number of problems. One is that the waterfall tends to look overly low. Another is that the waterfall can be mistaken for a dam. Lastly, low waterfalls reveal the source of the water flow⁶⁰ behind them and consequently lack depth and appear insignificant.

On the other hand, waterfalls appear graceful when they flow out unexpectedly from narrow crevices between stones half-hidden in shadows. At the source of the waterfall, just above the Waterfall Stone, some well-chosen stones should be placed so that, when seen from afar, the water will appear to be flowing out from the crevices of those boulders, creating a splendid effect.

~ Regarding the Types of Waterfalls

The types of waterfalls are: Twin Fall, Off-Sided Fall, Sliding Fall, Leaping Fall, Side-Facing Fall, Cloth Fall, Thread Fall, Stepped Fall, Right and Left Fall, Sideways Fall.⁶¹

north to south. According to Kyōto City's planning maps, Ichijō street (at Kawabata St.), which was the very northern edge of Heian capital, is 50.6 meters above sea level while the ground at the base of the pagoda at Tōji, which was at the very southern edge of Heiankyō, is at 22.6 meters above sea level; a difference of 28 meters. The pagoda itself is actually 57 meters in height, so the author of the Sakuteiki was off by half. The distance from Ichijō street to Tōji's pagoda is about 5200 meters, so the average slope across the Heian capital was approximately two percent.

60. The "source of the water flow" — the stream that feeds the waterfall from above — is referred to as the "throat" of the waterfall, *taki no nodo*.

61. Twin Fall, *mukai ochi*; Off-Sided Fall, *kata ochi*; Sliding Fall, *tsutai ochi*; Leaping Fall, *hanare ochi*; Side-Facing Fall, *soba ochi*; Cloth Fall, *nuno ochi*; Thread Fall, *ito*

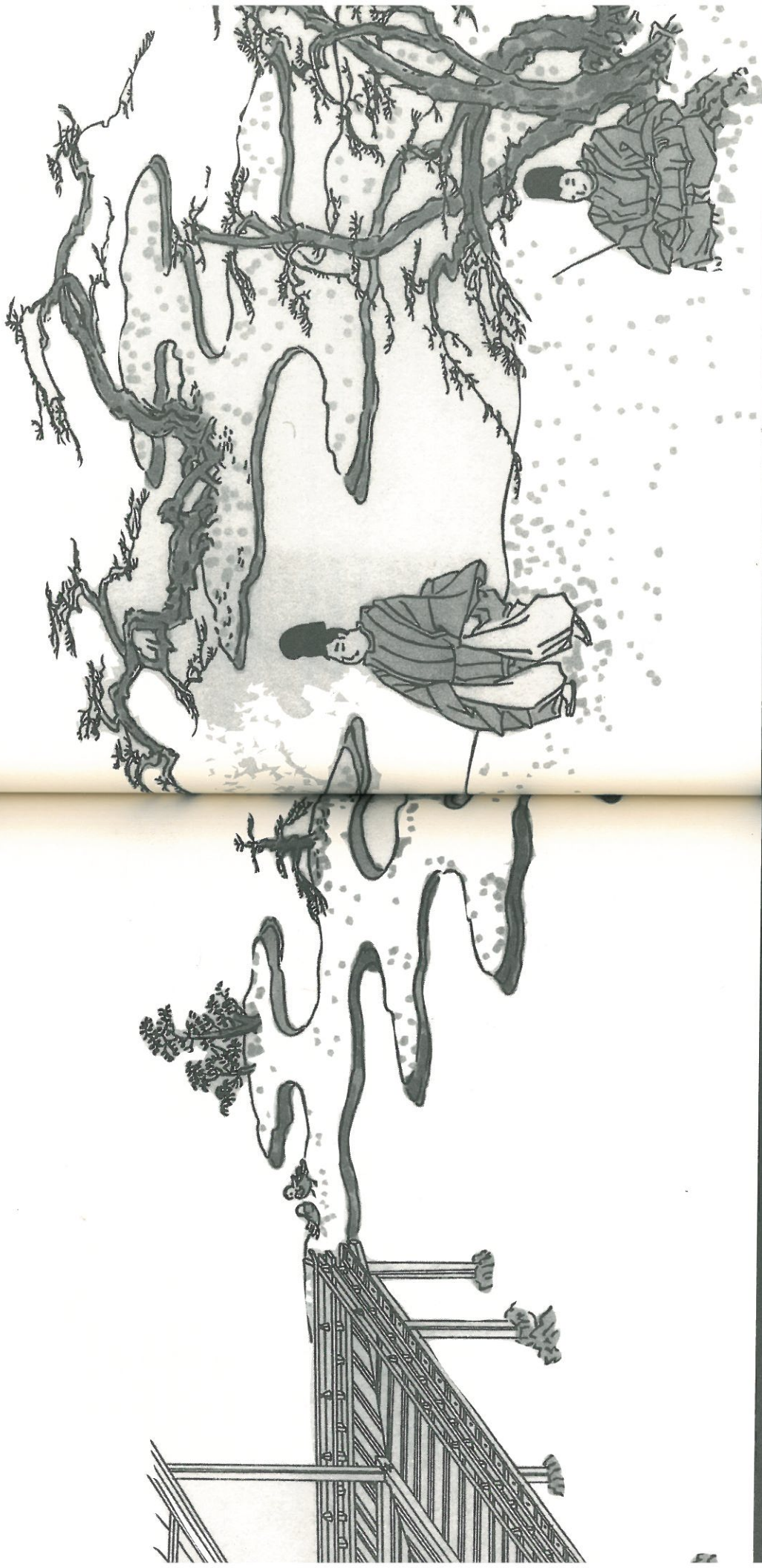


FIGURE 34: Cove Beach, *Subhama*

In this scene from the *Sumiyoshi Monogatari*, the hero has come to the ocean shore at Sumiyoshi (near present-day Osaka) to seek his lover who has run away. The pines (*matsu*) in the background create a pun on his "waiting" (also *matsu*); the ducks, which mate for life, are an image of fidelity. The convoluted, sandy shoreline, formed by constant battering by wind and waves, and the tortured pines that grew along such shores, were the images used to create *subhama* in Heian-period gardens.

~ The Twin Fall has double streams that match each other beautifully.

The Off-Sided Fall has water flowing over it somewhat to the right. In front and slightly to the left of the Waterfall Stone, set a stone with a well-shaped top that is about half the height and width of the Waterfall Stone. Water falling over the Waterfall Stone will hit this stone and splash off to the right in a white spray.

The Sliding Fall has water slipping right down the surface of the Waterfall Stone.

The Leaping Fall is made with a sharp-cornered Waterfall Stone. Water running to it from above is not allowed to slow down before falling, forcing it to leap away from the surface of the Waterfall Stone.

The Side-Facing Fall has a Waterfall Stone the front of which is set facing slightly off to one side, allowing the side of the fall to be seen from the front.⁶²

The Cloth Fall employs a Waterfall Stone that has a smooth surface. If the water running to the waterfall is allowed to pool before it cascades, it will flow slowly down the face of the Waterfall Stone and appear as a cloth hung out to dry in the sun.

The Thread Fall is made with a Waterfall Stone that has a saw-toothed corner at the top. This will cause the flowing water to split into many fine lines, appearing like a cascade of threads hanging off a spool.

The Stepped Fall is made with two sets of waterfall stones, one above the other, allowing the water to fall naturally in two or three steps.

ochi; Stepped Fall, *kasane ochi*; Right and Left Fall, *sa yū ochi*; Sideways Fall, *yoko ochi*.
62. Here again, the "front" or main viewing angle is referred to as the *hara* direction. See footnote 15, p. 155.

It has been said there are many ways to make a waterfall, but no matter what, they should always face the moon, so that the falling water will reflect the moonlight. There are Secret Teachings about building waterfalls and many things written in Chinese texts.

Fudō Myōō has vowed that "all waterfalls over 90 centimeters in height are expressions of my self."⁶³ Needless to say, those of 1.2 meters, 1.5 meters, 3.0 meters or even 6.0 meters are also symbolic of Fudō. All waterfalls are surely expressions of a Buddhist Trinity: the two flanking stones, to the right and left of the dominant stone, probably represent the Buddha's attendants.⁶⁴

According to the *Rituals of Fudō*: "Those who see my form, aspire to enlightenment. Those who hear my name, reject evil and master virtue," and so forth. Thus the name Fudō, The Unmovable. In order to behold my form it is not necessary to know the form of Shōkoku Dōji.⁶⁵ Always be aware of waterfalls, for although Fudō Myōō takes many forms, the most fundamental of all these are waterfalls.

VIII. Garden Streams

Regarding Garden Streams

~ First the direction of the stream source must be determined. According to the scriptures⁶⁶ the proper route for water to flow is from east to south and then toward the west. Flowing from west to east is considered a reverse flow, thus a flow from east to west is standard practice. In addition, bringing water out from the east, causing it to flow under one of the residence halls, and then sending it off to the southwest is considered the most felicitous. This is

63. Fudō Myōō is a Buddhist deity who, as an incarnation of Dainichi Nyorai, works to purge the world of evil. See Fudō Myōō, p. 101.

64. The Buddhist Trinity is *sanzon bosatsu* and Buddha's attendants are called Nidōji, Two Attendants. See explanation, p. 107.

65. Unlike the Nidōji mentioned in the previous footnote, Shōkoku Dōji [Blue Black Dōji], probably refers to Fudō himself. See explanation, p. 109.

66. The word "scriptures" in this section refers to the *Sixhu wujing*, *Four Books/Five*