

Chapter 15

Japanese-Style Ornamental Community Gardens at Manzanar Relocation Center

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Abstract Through the centuries, Japanese ornamental gardens have reflected Japanese culture. In the United States, Japanese-style ornamental gardens offered Japanese immigrants and American citizens of Japanese heritage a connection with Japanese culture, giving them a sense of community, while also giving them a sense of place in a country which did not wholly embrace their presence. Analysis of physical remains of Japanese-style ornamental community gardens at Manzanar Relocation Center in Owen's Valley, California, offers testament to how these gardens allowed the internees to express cultural identity and a feeling of community during one of the most trying times in American history.

Introduction

Being Japanese or of Japanese heritage in pre-World War II America was fraught with discrimination and other hardships, not only on the local community and interpersonal levels, but also at the state and national scale. Indeed, it was not until 1952, and the passage of the Walter-McCarran Act (Niiya 2001:206), that Japanese immigrants were allowed to become American citizens. But before the situation got better it became tragically more difficult. On December 7, 1941 the Imperial Japanese Navy perpetrated, without a formal declaration of war, a sudden and vicious attack on America's Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor. The American people were stunned and outraged; they angrily sought retribution. War between the United States and Japan had begun, and an internal struggle for recognition by Japanese Americans that had been developing for years was intensified.

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Anti-Japanese feelings reached their zenith during these early days of World War II; unsubstantiated rumors of saboteurs and possible invasion of the west coast by the Japanese military heightened anti-Japanese feeling. In the spring of 1942, with the signing of Executive Order 9066 by President Roosevelt, over 110,000 people, two-thirds of them American citizens of Japanese heritage (Burton 1996:11) were removed from their homes along the West coast and interned (imprisoned) in relocation centers. Over 10,000 of these people, mainly from the Los Angeles, California area, were imprisoned at the Manzanar War Relocation Center in Owen's Valley, East-Central California (Burton et al. 2002:163), which is now Manzanar National Historic Site, a designated unit of the National Park Service.

Uprooted, disoriented, and surrounded by armed military guards, these so-called evacuees were moved into cramped, poorly built military-style barrack buildings in the dusty and windswept valley. The evacuees found themselves in an incredibly unfamiliar and stressful situation. To help cope with the physical as well as the mental stress of imprisonment, some of the evacuees (prisoners) turned to creative activities such as arts and crafts and gardening. Numerous families created personal flower or vegetable gardens next to their barracks, some eventually cultivated larger Victory gardens. Many ornamental gardens were also constructed at Manzanar during the early years of the war. The first report of a garden at Manzanar was in a May 19, 1942 article in the camp newspaper, the *Manzanar Free Press*, entitled: "Daisies Bloom, Radishes Sprout" (Manzanar Free Press 1942a); and later the newspaper announced a best garden contest on October 8, 1942 (Manzanar Free Press 1942b). A handful of gardens were also constructed for community benefit, described here as Japanese-style ornamental community gardens, and these can be subdivided on size. The smaller of the two are called mess hall gardens while the larger gardens are referred to as parks. There are two parks at Manzanar: Cherry Park and Merritt Park. Merritt Park was the largest park at Manzanar at nearly 1.5 acres. The mess hall gardens are so named because they were constructed next to residential block mess halls (Fig. 15.1), and it is these ornamental community gardens built next to the mess halls that are described and interpreted here.

This was a time when being of Japanese heritage meant extreme hardships and when some believed that expressing traditional Japanese beliefs, whether it be in writings or other forms of expressions, would lead to further castigation. Yet at Manzanar, with the type of garden features and the overall designs of the mess hall gardens, there is an undeniable public expression of Japanese esthetics and values; expressions of Buddhism, Shinto, and Chinese geomancy are also evident. There are people today who would like to believe that the prisoners, by creating these Japanese-style ornamental community gardens, made a conscious effort to defy the Caucasian demagoguery of the period, to thumb their noses at the Caucasian guards and local residents of Owen's Valley. Were these gardens meant as an outright gesture of defiance, or were the prisoners at Manzanar simply trying to create a place of familiarity and community?

Harry Ueno, a mess hall worker, claims to have come up with the idea of building a garden next to the mess hall (Embry et al. 1986:29). The reason Ueno gave for constructing the first mess hall garden at Manzanar was to break up the monotony of

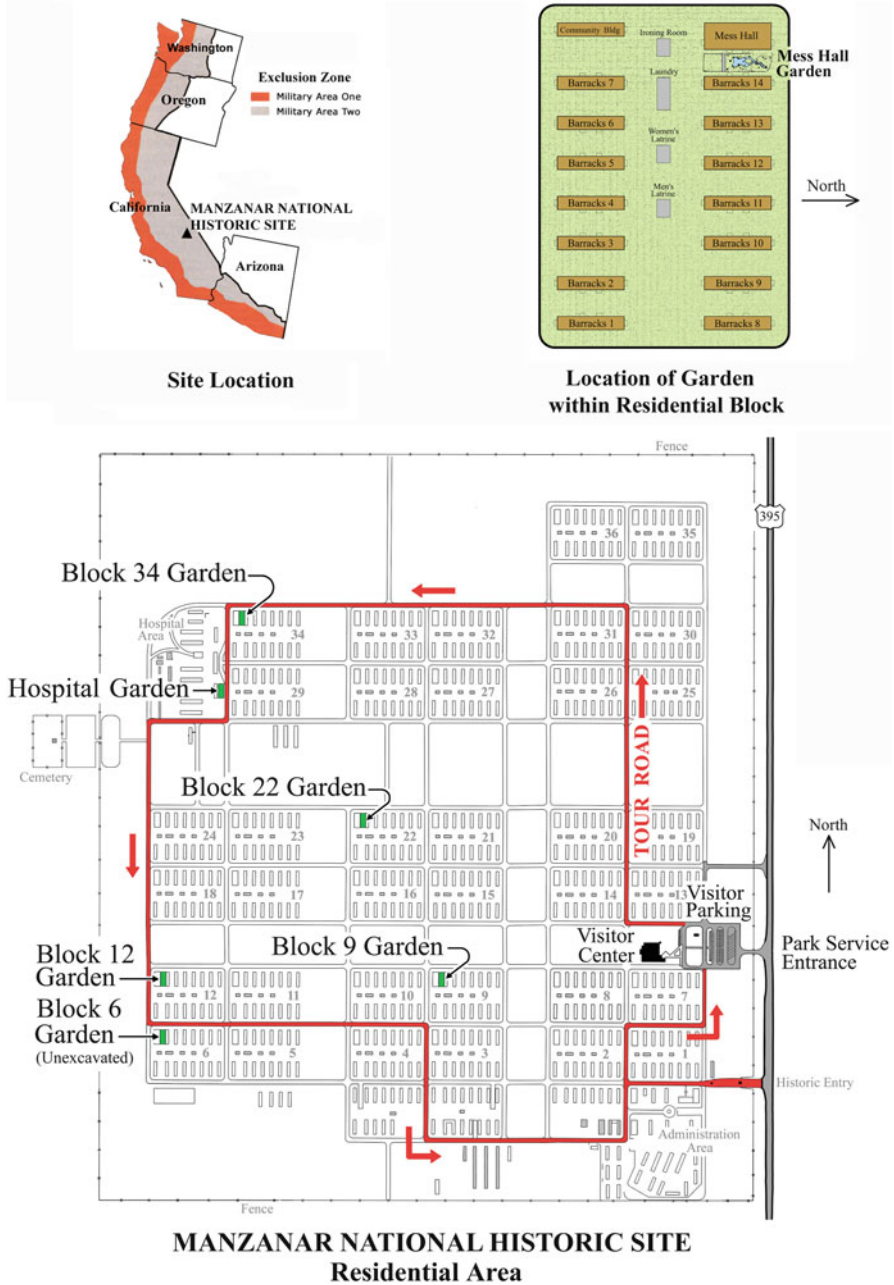


Fig. 15.1 Map showing the locations of the Japanese-style ornamental community gardens, also called mess hall gardens, at Manzanar National Historic Site. *Upper left*—schematic showing location of Manzanar in relationship to the west coast of the United States. *Upper right*—schematic of typical residential block layout at Manzanar National Historic Site showing relationships of buildings to the mess hall gardens

imprisoned life. Ueno suggested building the garden in Block 22 to entertain his fellow evacuees who had to stand for long periods in lines outside the mess hall waiting for their meals (Embry et al. 1986:29). However, Ueno never describes their intent to construct a garden as a political gesture. It would seem that the men who built these gardens were simply trying to create a place of familiarity and community, although there may have been more to constructing gardens than Ueno may have been aware of.

As Kenneth Helphan writes in his work *Defiant Gardens*:

In an extreme situation beyond an individual's control ... the manifestation of the human ability to wield power over something is a potent reminder of our ability to withstand emotional despair and the forces of chaos. Gardens domesticate and humanize dehumanized situations. They offer a way to reject suffering, an inherent affirmation and sign of human perseverance. In contrast to war, gardens assert the dignity of life, human and nonhuman, and celebrate it (Helphan 2006:212).

Relocation Center Layout

Manzanar War Relocation Center was laid out in a grid pattern; the core area contained 36 residential blocks, with each group of four blocks separated by a firebreak. Each block included 20 buildings: 14 barracks, separate men's and women's latrines, a laundry room, an ironing room, a community building, and in the northwest corner of each block, a mess hall (Fig. 15.1). The mess halls, like most of the buildings, were raised off the ground in a "post and pier construction" and consisted of nothing more than a layer of tar paper over a wood frame. Mess halls were constructed in the same fashion as the barracks and were the same length as the barracks but were double the width. The residential area was surrounded by a barbed wire fence.

The mess hall gardens were constructed between the residential mess hall and Barrack 14 in an area that is 100 ft north-south by 40 ft east-west in size, but usually narrower to accommodate sidewalks running alongside the buildings. These gardens were large enough to have water features, distinct rock concentrations, and topographical features. An analysis of the layout of each of these mess hall gardens shows that they were constructed according to age-old Japanese garden principles, in the *Tsukiyama* or "hill," sometimes referred to as hill and pond, style (Fig. 15.3) (Japan National Tourism Organization 2000).

The Gardens

Six Japanese-style ornamental community gardens have been identified at Manzanar thus far, and five have been exposed by the National Park Service for interpretive purposes (Fig. 15.2). These gardens are located in residential Blocks 6 (to date unexcavated), 9, 12, 22, 34, and at the Hospital Block. The Hospital garden differs slightly from the other gardens in that it was not built next to a mess hall; it was however, a community garden, the purpose of which was similar to that of the mess hall gardens.

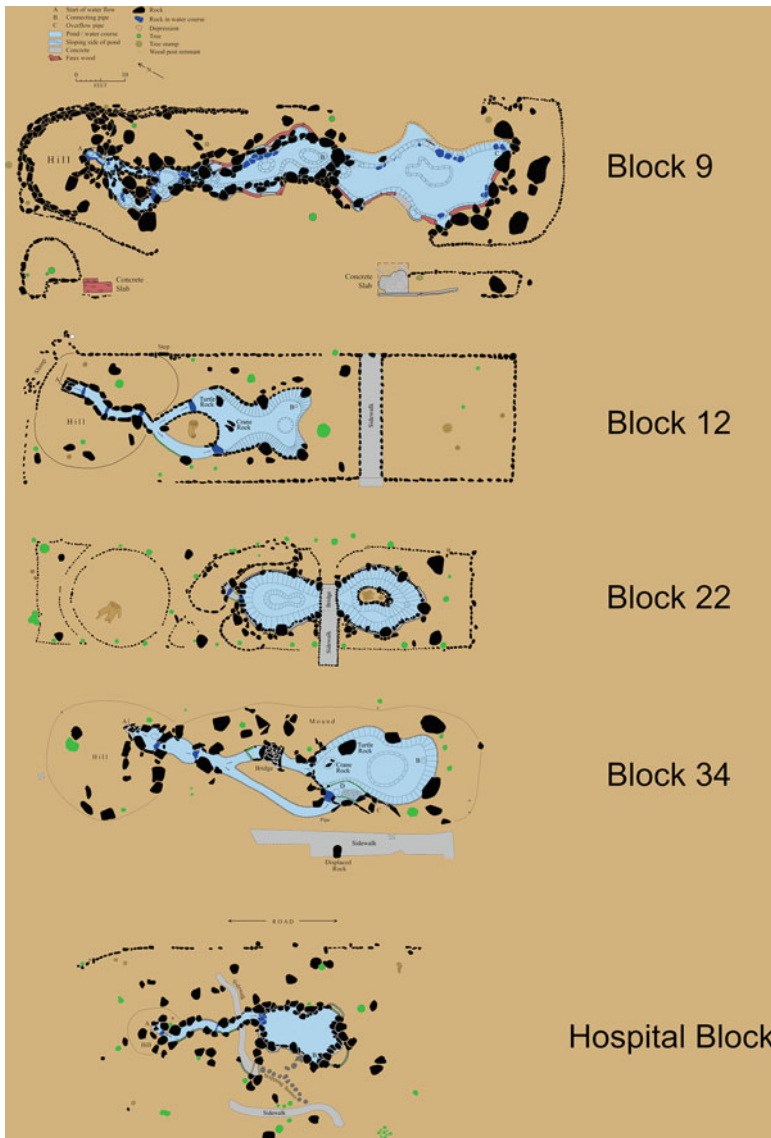


Fig. 15.2 Illustrations of all of the Japanese-style ornamental community gardens at Manzanar National Historic Site. Note: the gardens are to scale. Also note that the absence of rocks around the pond in the garden at Block 9 is due to post-occupation disturbance and does not reflect the original garden design

An astounding amount of effort went into constructing each of these gardens, much of it with the Relocation Center’s administration’s approval. These gardens could not have been constructed without community involvement. The size of the mound and pond vary with the individual garden. Mounds were created from the fill

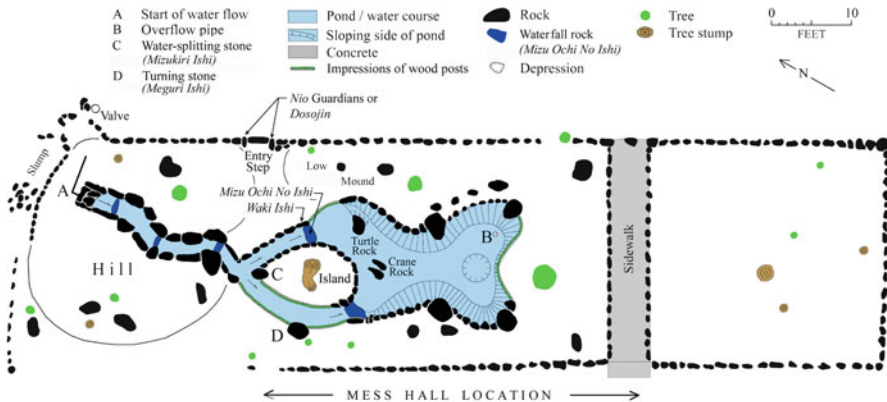


Fig. 15.3 Map of the Japanese-style ornamental community garden at Block 12

removed from the excavation of the ponds and range in size from 232 to 700 sq ft in area and a height of between 12 and 33 in. The ponds range in size from 112 to 822 sq ft in area with depths of between 21 and 33 in. The thickness of the concrete used to line the ponds and streams at each garden appears to be very similar, about one-half inch thick. The amount of concrete needed to build the average size pond has not been calculated, but under the circumstances the number of bags of concrete needed for each garden would have been regarded as considerable. The garden designers would have had to requisition the concrete through the Relocation Center's administration.

In addition to the concrete, each pond also needed approximately 140 ft of water pipe, something that would also have had to have been requisitioned. Water for the garden was acquired by tapping into the water line for Barrack 14's outside water faucet (the only water supply for the barrack) at the southwest corner of the building. More than 100 ft of water pipe was needed to connect the faucet's water line with the garden's water source on top of the hill near the opposite end of the barrack. An overflow/drain pipe is located at the south end of each pond. This pipe was connected to the Relocation Center's sewer system, requiring roughly 40 ft of pipe. Both sets of pipes were buried below the frost line, a considerable effort of work on its own.

Most of the rocks used in the gardens were local granite. Although these stones were obtained locally, the residential area of the Relocation Center was bladed prior to building construction so the stone must have been obtained from outside of the barbed wire perimeter. Some rocks, such as the dark-colored meta-volcanic rock used at the Block 34 garden, and apparently at the Block 6 garden, were obtained from the Inyo Mountains, along the opposite side of Owen's Valley some 5 miles to the east. Most of the granite rocks used were about the size of a grapefruit or slightly larger, although the largest rocks are up to 3 ft in diameter and weighing well over 4,000 lb. (granite weighs over 166 lb per cubic foot). A requisitioned vehicle and more than a couple of men would have been needed to move such rocks.

Traditional Japanese Garden Design

The Japanese people have always had a close relationship with nature, and the garden design reflects this aspect of Japanese culture. The garden layouts and many of the elements found within the mess hall gardens at Manzanar in fact do have their origin in traditional Japanese garden design, examples of which can be found in two ancient Japanese manuscripts. The *Sakuteiki*, called by some the Bible for Japanese garden designers (Sawano 2006:10), is a collection of thoughts on garden design and practical advice on garden construction as well as philosophical discussions of garden design. The *Senzui narabi ni yagyō no zu* or Illustrations for Designing Mountain, Water, and Hillside Field Landscapes dates to the fifteenth century, and also offer advice on garden design. The influence of Buddhism, Chinese geomancy, and Shinto is obvious within these teachings. Shinto was the original, animistic religion of the Japanese people and it enshrines the belief that spirits inhabit certain elements of nature, including rocks, trees, and certain landscapes.

Buddhists believe that spiritual development through meditation can lead to insights into the true nature of life, and that meditation is a way of developing a more positive state of mind characterized by calm, concentration, and awareness. By using the awareness developed in meditation, Buddhists believe it is possible to have a fuller understanding of oneself and of life itself, ultimately culminating in enlightenment (the word Buddhism translates to the “Enlighten One”). Allegorical figures from Buddhism, in the form of rock groupings, for example, became an essential part of garden design.

Geomancy introduced protective elements into the garden. Geomancy is an ancient form of divination that strives to achieve balance between opposing energies or natural forces (better known to most Westerners as Ying and Yang). Geomancy involves the relationships between human beings and the subtle forces of nature, and by identifying those energies that are disruptive to one’s life and balancing them it is possible to create harmonious surroundings that will ensure health, happiness, and prosperity. The placement of rocks, the orientation of a watercourse, and the selection of features could all have an impact on the balance of natural forces. Over time Japanese culture as a whole absorbed elements of both Buddhism and Chinese geomancy.

It is fortunate that rocks are enduring; they were used extensively in the gardens at Manzanar, and most of the gardens were left intact when the Relocation Center was “decommissioned” and dismantled. In *Sakuteiki*, stones are described as one of the most important features in a Japanese garden. Rocks are the scaffold or skeletal matter on which the garden is constructed; those used in the garden should be of a natural shape, unmodified, and should not be used alone but always in groups. Some rocks have symbolic meaning, such as representing a tortoise or a crane, symbols of longevity and happiness, or as Buddha and his attendants. The Buddhist triad, Buddha with his two attendants or Bodhisattvas, is created by using three prominent rocks, where the center rock is much taller than the two accompanying rocks.

Another version of the Buddhist Triad is the waterfall. The esoteric allegory is to the Buddhist deity *F do Myoo* and his two attendants. *F do Myoo* was seen primarily as a protective element in the garden (Takei and Keane 2001:102) and in the form of a waterfall, along with geomantic elements of water flow (direction) or placement of certain stones, was perceived as protecting the household (Takei and Keane 2001:111). In order to create a harmonious balance, water should generally flow from north to south, though the flow of water seems to vary, determined by complex factors. North is associated with water and south with fire; by sending water in a southerly direction, these two opposing forces can be balanced. With all of the preceding in mind, the Japanese garden designers believed that the act of building a garden was an act of celebrating nature; moreover, Japanese garden designers strove to interpret nature and did not try to copy it exactly.

Garden Analysis

By using the example of the mess hall garden at Block 12 (Fig. 15.3) and concentrating on its layout and analysis, the detailed, repetitious, and somewhat painful description of each of the mess hall gardens at the Manzanar War Relocation Center in their entirety can be avoided. Examples of elements that do not appear in the Block 12 garden, but do appear in other gardens, are described later.

The Block 12 garden was designed in the *Tsukiyama* style and the basic layout of this garden as well as the others includes the expected hill situated on the north end of the garden and a stream flowing from the hill down into a pond at the southern. The overall size of the Block 12 garden is 102 by 28 ft; the pond is roughly a figure eight in plan with a constricted central portion. The width of the pond varies from 8 to 14 ft with a maximum depth of 30 in.; a rough estimate of the volume of water that could be held in the pond is 3,500 gallons. The profile of the pond, with sloping sides, is a traditional shape and is referred to as being in the shape of a druggist's mortar or *yagen* (Slawson 1987:209). The garden, as well as the stream and pond, are bordered by an alignment of small granitic cobbles. The mound at the north end of the garden is roughly 30 by 20 ft in diameter and 3 ft high; it is truncated along the east and northeast sides by the rock retaining wall which is a continuation of the garden's granitic cobble outline. Some of the names of the men who built the Japanese-style ornamental community gardens at Manzanar are known, but the names of the men who created the garden at Block 12 have thus far eluded researchers.

In traditional *Tsukiyama* gardens, the mound represents mountains while the stream represents a river, two balancing forces in Chinese geomancy. The northern two-thirds of the Block 12 garden is occupied by the hill and water features—the streams and pond—while the other one-third, separated from the rest of the garden by a concrete sidewalk, was an open grassy area that originally had a single tree growing in the center. The complexity of the northern two-thirds of the garden is balanced by the openness of the southern one-third.

The flow of water begins at the top of the mound and continues down a meandering, narrow course formed by stones set in concrete. This upper stream is narrow and lined with large vertical rocks that create a feeling of water flowing through a deep valley or gorge. A portion of this upper stream is hidden from view by a large stone, a technique that is used to engage the imagination of the viewer. As the water flows down the upper stream, it cascades over three waterfalls. At the base of the hill, the stream splits into two lower streams, each with a different length and character. The eastern stream is short and runs straight into the pond, while the western stream curves out to the southwest then turns to the southeast and enters the pond. Both streams end with a waterfall over which the water empties into the pond. The diverging streams create a teardrop-shaped island, which was originally grassed with a single tree planted at its center.

This garden is an excellent example of the effectiveness of placing stones so that they appear, as in nature, to influence the water flow as well as the horizontal extent of the pond. The stone set on the north tip of the island gives the impression of acting upon the upper stream by forcing it aside to create two separate channels. This stone is called *mizukiri ishi*, the “Water-Splitting Stone” or the “Diverging Stone” (Fig. 15.3). The only stone along the west stream is along the outside curve of the bend in the stream. This well-placed stone, like the water-splitting or diverging stone, also acts to give the impression of exerting itself on the flow of water and is referred to as the “Turning Stone” or *meguri ishi*. Large rocks placed at the “waist” of the pond give the impression of restricting the size and influencing the shape of the pond as do the two large rocks at the ends of each of the two lobes forming the southern end of the pond.

The necessity of placing stones properly to affect a natural feeling cannot be more apparent than when it is used improperly or not used at all. Although this use of rocks can also be seen around the pond at Block 34 garden, the designers of this garden seem to have left out a few rocks. When the visitor views the garden at Block 34, their eye is drawn to the area where the stream splits into two. The visitor will note something odd or unsettling about this area, and it is not until it is realized that the stream splits for no apparent reason does the observer realize why. A single stone, or better still a group of stones, placed at this junction would have created the illusion of a wild stream battering against an unmovable outcrop of rock that forces the stream to split and flow around either side of the outcrop, as with the garden at Block 12. The lack of stones along the outside curve of the western stream also creates a problem. Again, there does not seem to be a reason for the stream to diverge from its path and sharply curve back to the pond. This use of rocks to give the impression of restricting size and influencing the shape of the pond can also be seen at the gardens at Block 22 and, although a little more difficult to discern, at the garden at the Hospital Block.

Waterfalls along the upper stream of the Block 12 garden each consist of three stones set in traditional fashion, with a central “Waterfall Stone” (*mizu ochi no ishi*) and two “Bracketing Stones” (*waki ishi*). This arrangement of stones is an expression of a Buddhist Trinity, with the Buddhist deity *F do Myoo* flanked by his Bodhisattvas or attendants.

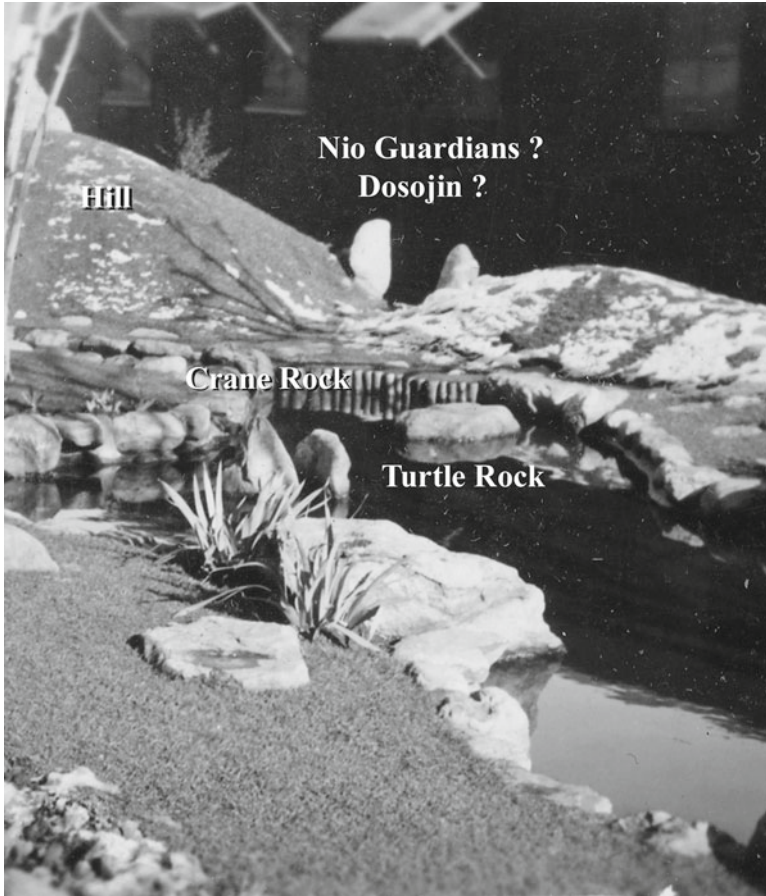


Fig. 15.4 Edited historical photograph of the Block 12 garden. Note the two vertical stones forming the Crane Rock as well as the stones representing *Nio* Guardians or *Dosojin*. The features can be seen under their labels. Turtle Rock can be seen above its label. The garden hill is also labeled. (Photograph courtesy of Yoshiko Hosoi photographic collection, Manzanar National Historic Site)

The pond has both a tortoise rock and a crane rock (Fig. 15.4), both of which are traditional features in a Japanese-style garden and both represent longevity. The crane rock is in the middle of the pond near the south end of the island, the tortoise rock lays just to the northeast of the crane rock near the eastern edge of the pond. The crane rock is made up of two vertical stones set on the end, reminiscent of bird wings, and is oriented so as to be viewed from the southwestern end of the garden (Fig. 15.5). Viewed from any other direction, except from the northeast (the reciprocal angle), the two individual stones would appear as a single stone and the desired effect would be lost on the viewer. This orientation would allow those people standing in line at the mess hall, at the southwestern end of the garden, to see this group

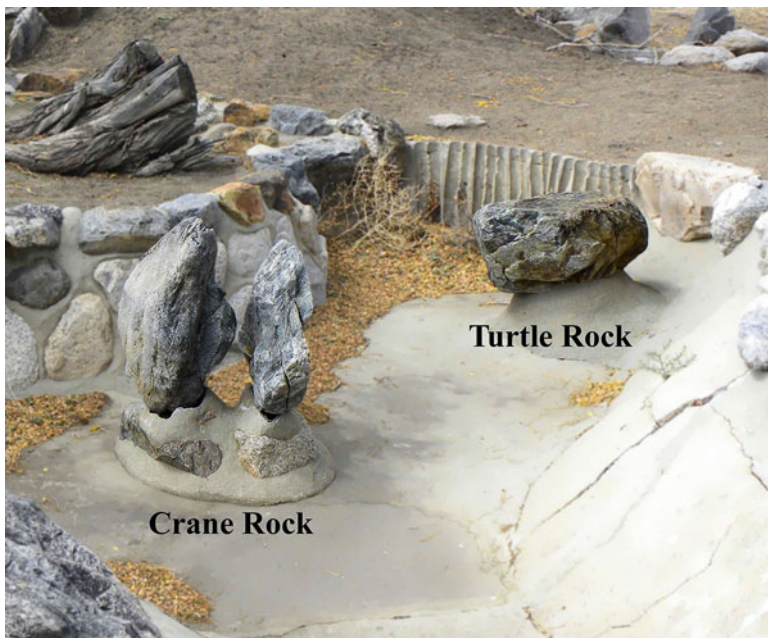


Fig. 15.5 Recent photograph of the Crane Rock and Turtle Rock at the Block 12 garden. Looking northeast from the southwest end of the garden. (Photograph courtesy of Jeffery F. Burton, Manzanar National Historic Site)

of stones as the crane rock. The tortoise rock is a large, well-worn, rounded stone representing the shell of a turtle. This shape gives the impression

of very old mountains worn down by erosion. Its companion, the crane island [rock], on the other hand, resembles the Never Aging Rock . . . in its use of sharp-edged rocks in the vertical position—may be likened to the wings of the crane—to convey the impression of steep, jagged mountains . . . It is this contrast, between towering newly formed peaks and the well-eroded old mountains, that so effectively triggers the aesthetic experience of ageless vitality (Slawson 1987:128).

It is also from this vantage point, at the southwestern corner of the garden, that the large rock at the end of the upper stream obscures the stream's path, allowing for the imagination of the viewer to take over and fill in the missing elements. Both of these elements also can be found at the garden in Block 34.

Photographic evidence reveals that the Block 12 garden had a fence around its perimeter at one point during the occupation of the camp. An entrance to the garden was through the low rock wall bordering its eastern side of the garden, created by using three stones in a way similar to that by which waterfalls are created. Here a single flat-laying stone created the threshold and two vertical stones as jambs along the sides of the threshold, supported the ends of the low retaining walls. These two stones extend well beyond the height of the wall and may represent a pair of stone guardians (Fig. 15.4). These stones may represent either *Nio guardians* or Shinto

Dosojin. *Nio* guardians are a pair of protectors who stand guard outside of Buddhist temples, one on either side of the entrance, and are usually portrayed as fierce-looking figures. They ward off evil spirits and keep the temple grounds free of demons (Schumacher 2011a). Perhaps more familiar to Westerners are the *Shishi* Lion-Dogs that serve a similar purpose. *Dosojin* are Shinto deities of roads and borders that reside in stone markers that are placed at street corners, near bridges, at village boundaries, and along roadways. Similar to *Nio* guardians, *Dosojin* protect travelers and villages from evil spirits. As the deity of the village border, the *Dosojin* protect villages from evil outside influences and catastrophes; as the deity of the road, the *Dosojin* protect pilgrims and travelers from harm (Schumacher 2011b).

Not all of the elements of traditional Japanese garden design at Manzanar are found at the Block 12 garden. Some elements, such as the principles of geologic zones, the presence of a bridge or stepping stones, as well as the concept of *Wabi-Sabi* can be found, however, at other mess hall gardens.

Other Traditional Design Elements

Garden 34 is a good example of what is known as the principles of geologic zones. As the visitor views the garden, it is evident that the stones set on the hill have a more angular shape than those set along the stream, and those rocks set near the pond are even more rounded. The use of rocks in this manner mimics nature and the natural processes of erosion. The garden at Block 9 is another good example of the principles of geologic zones. Slawson rewrites a passage from *Illustrations* to help convey the reason for this technique:

In the setting of rocks, you make their geologic zones your model. You will not go astray so long as you bear in mind the principles of setting rocks from deep mountains in the deep mountains of the garden, rocks from hills and fields in the hill and fields, rocks from freshwater shores on the freshwater shores, and rocks from the seashore on the seashore (Slawson 1987:68).

Drum bridges occur at the gardens in Block 22 and Block 34 (Fig. 15.2). Although these are very modest examples, both bridges have a gentle curve that is typical of the Japanese style Drum Bridge, or *taikobashi* (Missouri Botanical Gardens n.d.)

To the west of the pond at the Hospital garden are 11 stepping stones (*Tobi-ishi*). These stones are set in a curved path with the rocks slightly offset from the midline of the curve. The way these rocks are offset from the midline is a traditional Japanese technique (Sawano 2006:64). Three other stepping stones lead from this path to the pond (Fig. 15.2).

The garden in Block 22 is the only Japanese-style ornamental community garden at Manzanar that obviously incorporated the concept of *wabi-sabi* in its design. *Wabi-sabi* is “an intuitive appreciation of a transient beauty in the physical world that reflects the irreversible flow of life in the spiritual world. It is an understated beauty that exists in the modest, rustic, imperfect, or even decayed, an aesthetic sensibility that finds a melancholic beauty in the impermanence of all things” (Juniper 2003:51). Although it is impossible to see this today because most of the

elements are now missing, there are luckily several historic photographs that show the garden as it appeared during the occupation of Manzanar. What can be seen in the photographs are a rustic wishing well, from which the flow of water to the garden begins, several large tree stumps, an old wagon wheel, and rustic handrails used along the bridge that spans the pond made from large tree branches. The many tree stumps, the rustic wishing well, and the railings for the bridge would have imparted to the garden visitor a sense of age. The remains of the stumps, although in poor condition, were still in place in 1993 when the garden was formally recorded by the National Park Service.

Conclusions

Today's visitor to Manzanar National Historic Site should be struck by the effort and attention to detail that was put into constructing these gardens. Concrete was in short supply because of the war effort, but yet enough was found to satisfy the needs of the garden designers. Some of the material had to be brought into camp from far away, with rocks for the garden at Block 9 coming from across the valley, a distance of more than 5 miles. The effort to move rocks, some 3 ft or more across, meant the use of trucks and the physical labor of many people, as well as military or civilian guards to accompany them when they went outside of the Relocation Center to obtain materials for their gardens.

What, if any, underlying reason may have been in the hearts and minds of the prisoners who designed and built the Japanese-style ornamental community gardens will probably be never known, but the remains of these gardens suggest that building them was a labor of love. The amount of time, effort, and materials (and probable cajoling of the Center's administration to allow all this to happen) was immense. This was an activity that brought a community together and gave some of the people at the Relocation Center a sense of purpose. These activities brought about an interaction between two disparate groups, the prisoners who were building the gardens and the administrators of the Relocation Center who had to approve their activities; as well as allowing the prisoners to make a connection with the military guards and civilians who worked at the Relocation Center. Working with people is the first step to getting to know and understand them.

The Japanese Americans who were imprisoned at Manzanar and created these gardens embraced their heritage, the results of which are lasting monuments to Man's spirit of perseverance and optimism. They are also lasting monuments to Man's inhumanity to his fellow man.

Acknowledgments The principles behind traditional Japanese garden design can be very complicated and may incorporate dozens (if not more) traditional elements that not even a well-schooled garden designer may know. These features described in this chapter were those recognized by the author, who is only modestly versed in the subject. Many more traditional Japanese garden design elements probably exist in the gardens at Manzanar than were discussed in this paper. I would like to thank Jeffery Burton for his inspiration and guidance and to Ross Hopkins for giving me the opportunity to work for so many years at Manzanar. The maps are the product of the author.

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