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HISTORY: FUJITARO KUBOTA'S LIFE, INSPIRATION, AND GARDEN STYLE

Fujitaro Kubota: Inspiration Sources and Garden Styles

The Kubota Garden mission statement incorporates respect as one of three key principles guiding the maintenance and development of the garden. To fully realize this objective it is vital that Fujitaro's style and the interconnections between his gardens and the Japanese tradition are clearly understood. The conclusions made are based on direct evidence where available while also drawing upon close study of the similarities between representations of Japanese gardens common when Fujitaro started working as a gardener with the Japanese-style gardens he built throughout his career.

This stylistic analysis of Fujitaro's work is based on the understanding that design and reception of Japanese gardens is historically dynamic. Although the mannerist fashion that dominated Japanese gardens during the 19th and early 20th centuries is now widely dismissed, that fashion had been the prevailing narrative in guidebooks and garden manuals since the middle of the 18th century. In the intimate, reflexive relationship between audience and artist, an "authentic" Japanese garden when Fujitaro started working in Seattle was different from our contemporary understanding.

The record about what Fujitaro may have studied, as well as his access to possible Japanese garden design source materials (books, postcards, prints, etc.), is limited. Even such basic information as the extent of his travel to Japan during his life, or his ongoing engagement with his family in Japan, is minimal. Despite this lack of certainty, it is possible to situate Fujitaro's work within contemporaneous trends in Japanese garden design. The designs he executed are remarkably close to the forms and elements espoused by the available literature at that time (Conder, 1893, 1912 and Newsom, 1939). His use of rockeries, and the expansive, park-like spaces captured in early photographs of the Kubota property appear to be a combination of the large lawns and rock walls found in Edo period gardens with the Olmsted Brothers naturalistic design work for Seattle parks - making the case that Kubota was likely combining the gardens that he would have seen while visiting Japan with a sensibility cultivated in his adopted homeland.

One key conclusion is that Fujitaro was not an iconoclast with a deliberate disregard for tradition, but rather a master craftsman who showed a lifelong commitment to cultivating his skill and his art. In the vogue of the past half-century or so, such a conservative approach to

following rules as they are written might seem 'square'. However, such an approach is not widely embraced even among Japanese gardeners at the time of this writing; when Fujitaro started his career as a gardener, the idea of rejecting tradition would have been even more extreme.

Classifying Fujitaro Kubota's Garden Styles

The Kubota Garden Foundation's collection of historical images was used to understand the development of the Kubota property and for the types of gardens Fujitaro built for clients and for himself over his career. There are several garden styles built by the Kubota Gardening Company that are recognizable from the archival images:

- Hill-and-pond gardens (*tsukiyama*) (Japanese Garden, Necklace of Ponds)
- Large-scale works (The Mountainside)
- Rockeries
- Pocket gardens

The hill-and-pond gardens created by Kubota are recognizably Japanese. The word *tsukiyama* means "artificial hill" and it is this eponymous feature that is the defining element of *tsukiyama*-style gardens. An area is excavated to create a pond with the excavated soil mounding as a hill that would serve as a backdrop for the garden. These hills would be set with stones, would often incorporate a small stream and waterfall, and would be planted in to represent fanciful mountain scenes. The *tsukiyama*-style incorporated a set number of other features that are defined in careful variety in the garden manuals like *Tsukiyama Teizo Den*. Japanese Gardens: an Illustrated Guide to their Design and History. Josiah Conder's 1893 adaptation of this manual for an English-speaking audience elaborates these elements in slightly more detail than the Japanese originals. The chapter titles of Conder's text provide a tidy list of Japanese garden features as follows: stones, lanterns, pagodas, water basins, enclosures, wells, bridges, arbors, ornamental water, vegetation, and garden composition. Each of these chapters provides examples and sets forth elaborate rules about the appropriate use and meaning attributed to each feature and style. When describing the creation of the Japanese Garden at Kubota Garden, Tom Kubota described his father using this process of construction.

Interestingly, Fujitaro did not include all of these features in his gardens - water basins, wells, and fences are notably absent from his designs - but the features he did employ are recognizably laid out in the manner

described in the texts. This pattern can be recognized in the comparison on the opposite page, pairing plates from garden manuals with gardens built by Fujitaro.

Hill-and-pond gardens were a staple of the Kubota business: the oldest preserved promotional materials are photos of hill-and-pond gardens. The waterfall at Seattle University campus incorporated the basic structure of hill, waterfall, pond, and islands. The same set of elements appear in a picture of a demonstration garden built for a 1962 trade show. (Images of these gardens are below in the section '*Tsukiyama Gardens*'). The waterfall gardens of the post-war period differ from the gardens illustrated in the garden manuals but they follow similar precedents: the core principles of stone placement that are employed in Kubota's hill-and-pond style gardens are used as the building blocks for each of the smaller waterfalls that compose the scene as a whole.

Fujitaro's large-scale works also have their design roots in the garden manuals. The hill-and-pond gardens are evident in early photographs of the Kubota property: images of Kubota standing with guests on the original Heart Bridge, or photos of Fujitaro's sons on the property while work was being done to create the Necklace of Ponds. The grand lawns, punctuated with Japanese-inspired waterfalls and planting details, exhibit a park-like sensibility that would also feature in his work in the late 1950's and 1960's at the Bloedel property on Bainbridge Island (now Bloedel Reserve). During the 1960's several other large-scale waterfalls were created, including the grand waterfall at the Mountainside built in 1962.

Another of Kubota's garden types, rockeries, have a potential precedent in a type of Japanese wall commonly found in the countryside, but it is likely that these were an adaptation of a local practice found in hilly Seattle. If Kubota were running a volume business during those early years, one possibility is that rockeries would have been a ready source of income that played well to his skills with stone and the diversity of his plant palette.

Lastly, the Foundation photo archive has images of "pocket gardens" - planting boxes and other narrow, urban sites that utilize an abbreviated set of Kubota's design elements: carefully set stones, pruned conifers, and an assortment of shrubs to fill out the design. While the Seattle University campus is quite large, several pocket gardens built by Kubota at Seattle University can be considered examples of this type of work.

Classifying Fujitaro Kubota's Gardens: Elements

In categorizing Fujitaro's gardens according to the style of construction, the list of materials and plants he used in his designs also provides a useful approach to understanding his work. He used many elements of Japanese gardens: natural boulders, earthwork to create hills and slopes, a variety of bridges, stepping stones, and lanterns are all recognizable elements drawn from the Japanese tradition. Yet some common garden features are unusually absent in his design work: stone water basins, wells, arbors, fences and gates, and garden buildings.

Fujitaro incorporated a range of plants in his design work, notably carefully trained pines. Yet he also utilized a range of other conifers not typically associated with Japanese gardens. This choice of plant materials is often cited as a departure from the perceived strictures of Japanese tradition. But in the garden manual *Japanese Gardens*, Josiah Conder introduced a list of plants used by Japanese gardeners with the disclaimer, "(T)he following list of Japanese domesticated trees, shrubs and plants may be found to some extent wanting in completeness," adding that while the plant names offered may be unfamiliar, "to omit

all mention of them would be misleading and fail to give a correct idea of their rich diversity ... they imply an important addition to the landscape artist's stock of material for designing" (Conder, 1964, 110). The list that he provided ran to 12 pages of plants names, set out in paragraph form. Unfortunately, the middle class gardens of the Edo period that would have used the plants named in Conder's list are no longer extant. In this regard, we might regard Fujitaro as the messenger for a type of Japanese garden that has been lost in the shuffle of time, a marker for an overlooked historical diversity.



One of the woodblock prints from the Edo-period printings of Tsukiyama Teizo Den. The placement of stones on the hillside, used to support the main waterfall stone group, can also be seen in early photographs of the grand waterfall at Kubota Garden. (Source: *Landscape Gardening in Japan*, Figure 27, by Josiah Conder)



Photo of the Mountainside as viewed from the Zig Zag bridge at the Necklace of Ponds KGF Photo #574, dated 1975

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Sources of Inspiration: World's Fairs, Garden Manuals, and Travel to Japan

The gardens built for World's Fairs and private estates may have played a minor role in Fujitaro's decision to become a gardener, but are less likely to have provided material for his study of Japanese garden design. When the Meiji Emperor took power in 1868, the new government set to establish Japan as a respected nation on the world stage. World's Fairs were a new phenomenon at this time, a prime opportunity for national image building, and the decision was made to present a Japanese pavilion at the 1873 Universal Exposition in Vienna.

The success of the Vienna Exposition established a formula that endured in Japanese World's Fair pavilions, yielding many of the Japanese gardens built in U.S. cities: Philadelphia (1876); Chicago (1893); St. Louis (1904); and San Diego (1915). Fujitaro could have had access to the Japanese Tea Garden in San Francisco, built for the 1894 exposition, but is unusual in that G.T. March, an Australian antique dealer who had immigrated to the United States by way of Japan, played a significant role in the design. The notable exception from this period was the Japanese garden not built for Seattle's Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in 1909, although an abbreviated garden in front of the teahouse on "Tokio Street" is preserved in archival photographs.

By the turn of the 20th century Japanese architecture had exerted a profound influence on American architects and houses – Frank Lloyd Wright had been deeply impressed by the Japanese pavilion at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Architects Greene and Greene, practicing in Pasadena, California from 1894-1922, had been to both the Chicago and St. Louis expositions and were openly emulating Japanese carpentry in their design of Craftsman-style houses. This influence included gardens and a Japanese garden became a *de rigueur* component for the estates of the wealthy. These private Japanese gardens were documented in magazines such as *The Craftsman*, *American Homes and Gardens*, and even in *Scientific American*. In Seattle, one Japanese garden remaining from this period is still extant: Katie Black's Garden, located on the north end of Beacon Hill. Frank Black, owner of Seattle Hardware Co., had built a Swiss chalet on three acres of land on Beacon Hill in 1896. In 1914 Frank offered to take Katie, his wife, on a grand tour of Europe as an anniversary gift; she replied that she would rather have a Japanese garden built.

Fujitaro started building Japanese gardens in Seattle after the first great wave of fascination with Japan had crested.

Garden Manuals

The gardens built for World's Fairs and private estates might have played a role in Fujitaro's decision to become a gardener, but they are less likely to have provided material for his study of Japanese garden design. Tom Kubota described Fujitaro's approach to the Japanese Garden on the family property as one that closely followed a set pattern: "In those days, [Fujitaro] used to study some Japanese garden design, and most of it ... is more conventional, 'they build it like this,' and, 'it should be like this,' so [Fujitaro] followed that pattern and built this." (Tom Kubota, interview with Don Brooks). When asked about any books or other guides that Fujitaro might have used, Allan Kubota did not recall seeing any books (personal communication, 2018). However, it is possible that any books Fujitaro had were lost during the 1942-1945 internment.

Garden manuals have a long and well-respected role in the Japanese tradition. The oldest of these texts, the *Sakuteiki*, was written in the 12th century and is still studied today. Over the following centuries, numerous new texts elaborated on existing principles or articulated new modes of garden design, thus establishing garden design as a treatment of serious inquiry among elites. The manual that Fujitaro is most likely to have encountered, in one form or another, was *Tsukiyama Teizo Den*, first published in 1735 by Kitamura Enkin. Akisato Rito republished this text in 1828 and it was further adapted and republished several more times during the 19th century.

Comic illustrator Honda Kinkichiro's version of *Tsukiyama Teizo Den* utilized the lithographic process available in the 1880's to create illustrated drawings of various garden designs. Honda provided these illustrations for Josiah Conder's book *Japanese Gardens: An Illustrated Guide to their Design and History* (1893), the first English monograph on Japanese garden design. Honda used variations of his drawings in his own 1909 book *Zukai Teien Zoho*. Josiah Conder lived in Japan from 1877 until his death in 1920 and is best known as the founding professor of the Department of Architecture at the Imperial College of Engineering in Tokyo. Honda, in 1902, presented a lecture about Japanese gardens, accompanied by "lantern slides," to the American Institute of Architects in Chicago; the notes from this lecture, along with reproductions of the slides, was published that same year. The list of books that relied upon the illustrations from *Tsukiyama Teizo*



A lithograph produced by Honda Kinkichiro. Many of the features are recognizable from Fujitaro's gardens.



Bridge over pond in a private garden with a Kubota Gardening Company sign
KGF Photo #114, dated 1926

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Den to explain the proper rules and true nature of Japanese gardens to Western audiences is quite long – it is easier to state that *Tsukiyama Teizo Den* featured prominently in nearly every book about Japanese garden design being published. Between 1890 and 1920 seven separate publishing companies produced editions of *Tsukiyama Teizo Den*, sometimes with separate authors listed, but all under variations of the original title. In the 1930's as many as 10 new books were being published in English every year. It is unknown if Fujitaro may have utilized the English or Japanese versions of the *Tsukiyama Teizo Den* but he would have been comfortable with the written Japanese used in academic writing from his experience studying at an agricultural school in Japan.

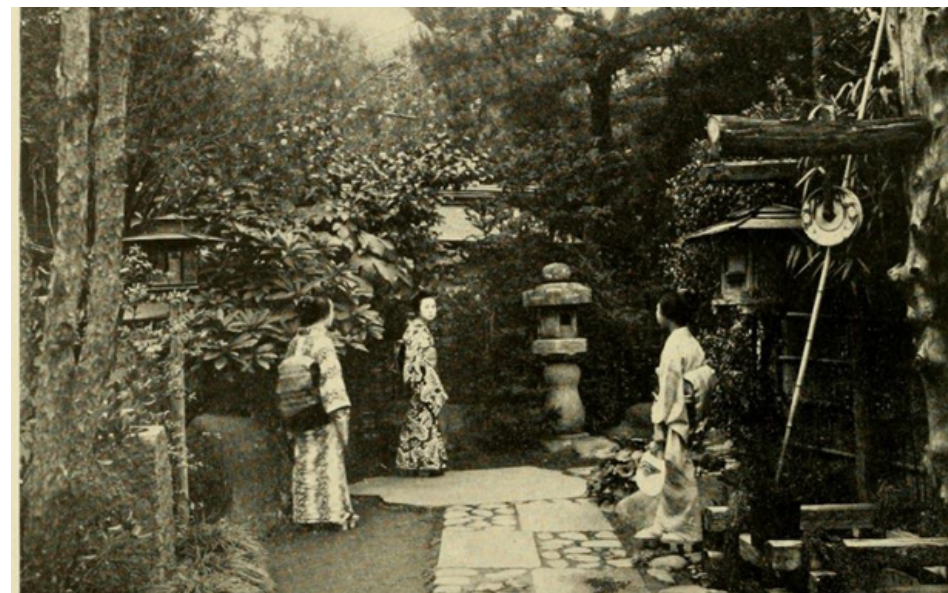
Direct study of gardens while visiting Japan is the second major source of knowledge and inspiration for Fujitaro's work, based on statements from both Fujitaro and Tom Kubota. According to Tom's statement, Fujitaro's travel to Japan could have been as frequent as every year. As with the other elements of Fujitaro's life during this period, details remain elusive. There are no confirmed travel dates that place Fujitaro Kubota in Japan during the early 1920's. An image in the Kubota Garden Foundation archive dated "1920-0-0" shows the Kubota family on board a ship bound for Japan (KGF Photo #69) does provide evidence of travel. Yet the only confirmed dates are trips in 1931 and 1939 per the Pacific Coast Architectural Database (<http://pcad.lib.washington.edu/person/5033>).



Girl in a kimono in front of Kubota Gardening Company sign
KGF Photo #110, dated 1926

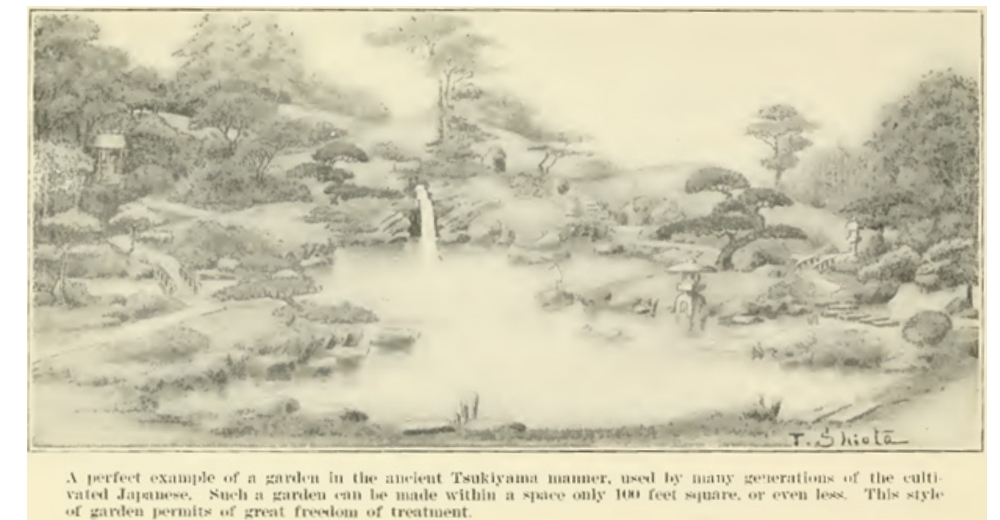
In the Kubota Garden Foundation archives, there is a picture postcard of the Joju-en garden at Suizenji – as this postcard is the only concrete evidence of Fujitaro's study in Japan, it bears some consideration. There is a caption on the front of the postcard that reads (in Japanese), "(100 views of Kumamoto); Overall view of Suizenji Joju-en, where there is a cold mineral spring." While the postcard in the archive is not dated, the image shown is still available in reprints and through antique book auctions, in addition to other images from the "100 views" series. Searching auction lots listed on the Internet in 2018 returned one auction lot for the identical image dated Taisho 12 (1923), while another dated image from the same series was dated 1929. It has long been common practice in Japan to re-print images of many years, so this long duration is not unexpected. Significantly, these two dates bracket the years when Fujitaro was starting his business and was most likely studying gardens while in Japan.

The garden of Ritsurin Koen, in Takamatsu, has been put forward as a significant influence on Fujitaro's work but the basis for this is not clear. A 1968 Seattle Times article states that Fujitaro saw gardens in Kochi as a youth and that his appreciation developed from that experience. One possibility is that a lack of familiarity with Japan lead to Ritsurin Koen being equated with 'gardens in Kochi.' Modern travel time from Kubokawa, where Fujitaro grew up, to Takamatsu, where Ritsurin Koen is located, are 5 hours at minimum. It is unlikely that Fujitaro would have



One of the images from the lantern slides presented before the AIA by Honda Kinkichiro.

had the opportunity to make the much longer trip while living in Japan. However, both Ritsurin Koen and Suizenji are the former palaces of Edo-period feudal lords. Although these gardens were built at the grand scale of palaces, they were both in the *tsukiyama*-style, built during the same historical period that produced the garden manuals that Fujitaro appears to have studied, again lending support to the decision to recognize Fujitaro's gardens as a local synthesis of the *tsukiyama*-style.



A perfect example of a garden in the ancient Tsukiyama manner, used by many generations of the cultivated Japanese. Such a garden can be made within a space only 100 feet square, or even less. This style of garden permits of great freedom of treatment.

Takeo Shiota was trained as a gardener in Japan, and made his career designing Japanese gardens in the New York area. He designed the Japanese Garden at Brooklyn Botanical Garden, and also published two books on Japanese gardens in 1914 and 1915.



Postcard from Japan, 1920's. Japanese text reads, "(100 Views of Kumamoto); Garden of Suizen-ji Jojuen, where there is a cold mineral spring". Suizenji was the site of a feudal garden, built in the *tsukiyama*-style at a grand scale.
KGF Photo #120, 1926