

Kinkaku-Ji, Golden Pavilion

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The Kinkaku-Ji, or Golden Pavilion, was a grand garden built in Kyoto, Japan, in the Muromachi Period, year 1397.¹ During this time, Japan was in a state of political turmoil, military rivalry, but also intense artistic creativity.² The garden was created because of the new Shogun (military dictator), Ashikaga Takauji rising to power, and his reinstatement of Kyoto as the imperial capital. Consequently, he re-established links with the Chinese Song Dynasty, which led to the emergence of the signature Zen school of imperial Buddhist practice in Japan. Then, sites such like the Kinkaku-ji were created because of Zen Buddhist practice--born from the “necessity of building ‘nature’ out of confined urban lots.”³ Other characteristics of the Muromachi period included the emphasis on appreciation of natural beauty as well as the Zen Buddhist ideal of the individual.⁴ The creation of Kinkaku-Ji was not until Ashikaga Takauji’s grandson, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu’s retirement. Ashikaga Yoshimitsu was said to be “a man of taste and connoisseurship” and was the first shogun to “show an interest in art and culture.”⁵ As the Shogun retired, he designed and built the main building of the Kinkaku-Ji, seen in Figure 1 and 2, on the site of a ruined thirteenth-century villa. Each floor of the pavilion served different purposes, but the central purpose of the building was to serve as a private viewing site for the retired Shogun.⁶ The views of the landscape as well as the rest of the estate were all carefully framed and incorporated into a complete composition. Overall, the Kinkaku-Ji is a large

¹ Francis D.K. Ching, Mark Jarzombek, and Vikramaditya Prakash. “1400 CE,” in *A Global History of Architecture* (3rd ed. New York: Wiley, 2017), 459.

² Mitchell Bring and Josse Wayembergh, “Kinkakuji,” In *Japanese Gardens: Design and Meaning* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), 26.

³ Ching, Jarzombek, Prakash, “1400 CE,”457.

⁴ Ichirō Ishida, Brown, M Delmer, "Zen Buddhism and Muromachi Art," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 22, no. 4 (1963): 423-425.

⁵ Bring, Wayembergh, “Kinkakuji,” 26.

⁶ Ching, Jarzombek, Prakash, “1400 CE,”498.

compound of traditional Muromachi garden elements such as rock, pine, and water, and is heavily influenced by Zen Buddhist ideals recognized within the natural elements of the landscape.

The overall garden, seen in Figure 1, is in total 230,000 square meters. It contains a wide entryway, two ponds, and an assortment of buildings--the Golden Pavilion, the surrounding temple buildings, and a “garden within a garden” teahouse area on the north east side.⁷ Between the Mirror Pond and the Upper Pond, there is a dense foliage of an assortment of trees (e.g., pine, maple), as seen in Figure 2. Additionally, there is a waterfall near the Upper Pond, as well as islands of varying sizes floating atop the Mirror Pond. On the islands are carefully assorted rocks and dynamically shaped pine trees. The view in Figure 2 is taken from the side opposite to the Golden Pavilion from the South-East, and it shows the mountain ranges, the dense foliage in front of the mountains, as well as a glimpse of the floating islands on the Mirror Pond. Figure 2 also shows the technique in which Japanese garden designers typically use, which is to borrow distant vistas in their designs to enlarge the visual sphere of the relatively small garden, and to reinforce its connection with the natural world.⁸ From Figure 1, one can notice that most of the paths in the garden are twisting and winding around the larger natural elements. There is nothing in the composition that seems stiff or robotic, almost as if the landscape was untouched in this natural state.⁹ The overall structure of the garden echoes the idea frequently found in Muromachi gardens, which is the enhancement and appreciation of natural beauty, and that the natural objects must not merely surround but motivate the structural design of the overall garden.¹⁰

⁷ Bring, Wayembergh, “Kinkakuji,” 28.

⁸ Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, “Nature as Muse: The Gardens of China and Japan,” in *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 295.

⁹ David Slawson, Zōen, *Secret Teachings in the Art of Japanese Gardens: Design Principles, Aesthetic Values*, (1st ed. Tokyo; New York: New York, N.Y.: Kodansha International ; Distributed in the U.S. by Kodansha International/USA, through Harper & Row, 1987), 60.

¹⁰ Ishida, Brown, Delmer, "Zen Buddhism and Muromachi Art," 423-425.

Each portion of the Kinkaku-Ji landscape is intentionally constructed with fascinating structural and compositional properties. All landscape aspects are selected and molded with the consideration of the natural site, and each added natural aspect is loaded with symbolism. For example, the rocks are considered as the ‘bone’ structure of the garden.¹¹ They are often carefully selected, and the placements are meticulous. On the corner of the Pavilion in Figure 2, rocks can be seen lining the sides of the building, as well as at the bottom of the small island along with the pine tree. These rocks surrounded by water evoke the “nine mountains and eight seas” story in the Buddhist myth of creation.¹²

Each landscape entity (i.e., the lakes, the waterfall, the rocks, and the floating islands) carry significant meaning for the landscape, which are all associated with Muromachi Zen Buddhist ideals. The central ideal was the following: “the individual was identified with the universal and was consequently a reservoir of unlimited potentiality. It followed that the various phenomena of the outside world, which were but manifestations of one’s own heart, also had unlimited potentiality.”¹³ This idea is manifested in the way one would enjoy the garden through changing one’s position within the garden. This process of experiencing the garden in a spatiotemporal way was deeply and internally in tune with the religious experience of Zen.¹⁴ As one strolls around the garden, the content of one’s subjective experience is made up of scenic, visual, and symbolic characteristics of the natural elements. Thus, the natural elements that compose the garden are inseparable from the overarching Zen Buddhist ideal.

¹¹ Slawson, Zōen, *Secret Teachings in the Art of Japanese Gardens: Design Principles, Aesthetic Values*, 61.

¹² Rogers, “Nature as Muse: The Gardens of China and Japan,” 301.

¹³ Ishida, Brown, Delmer, “Zen Buddhism and Muromachi Art,” 420.

¹⁴ Ishida, Brown, Delmer, “Zen Buddhism and Muromachi Art,” 430.

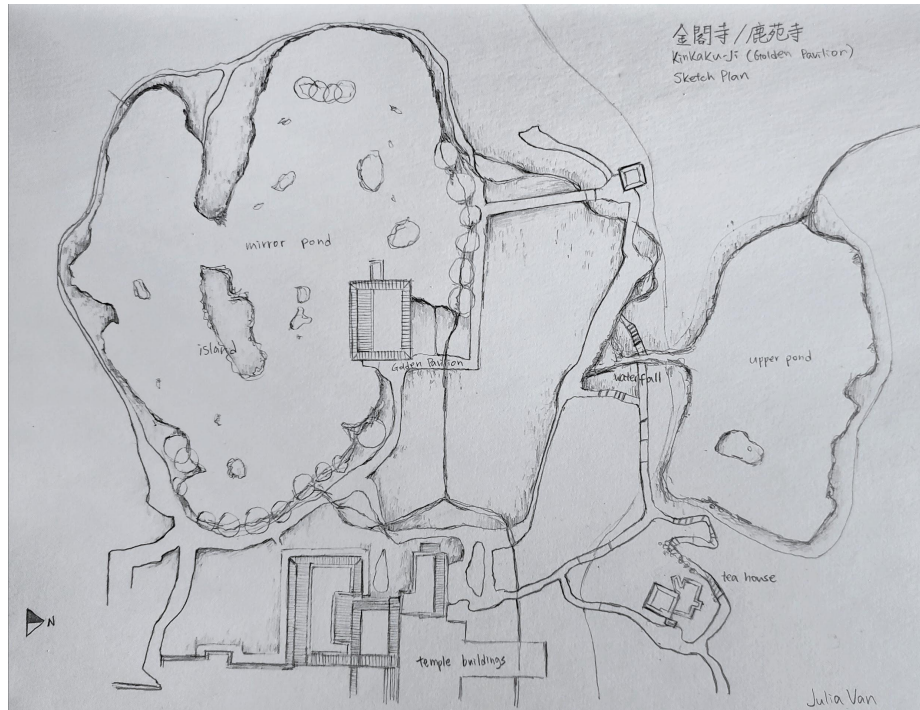


Figure 1. *Sketch Plan*. Sketch by Julia Van, March 9, 2021. Photograph from Bring, Mitchell., and Wayembergh, Josse, “Kinkakuji.” In *Japanese Gardens: Design and Meaning*, 34-35. McGraw-Hill Series in Landscape and Landscape Architecture. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981.



Figure 2. *Sketch View*. Sketch by Julia Van, March 9, 2021. Photograph from Francis D.K. Ching, Mark Jarzombek, and Vikramaditya Prakash. “1400 CE.” In *A Global History of Architecture*, 497. 3rd ed. New York: Wiley, 2017.

Annotated Bibliography

Bring, Mitchell., and Weyembergh, Josse, "Kinkakuji." In *Japanese Gardens: Design and Meaning*, 25-38. McGraw-Hill Series in Landscape and Landscape Architecture. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981.

Bring and Weyembergh is a comprehensive and complete guide for the plans and views of Kinkaku-Ji. There are multiple images that show the building from multiple perspectives--there are several different plans and photographs that can be used to describe the layout of the garden. Bring and Weyembergh allow one to take advantage of the provided photographs and come up with one's own descriptions of the garden layout via observation of the images. This also allows one to create sketches of the garden by using the illustrations from this book. This source will be used for general visual analysis and sketches.

Francis D.K. Ching, Mark Jarzombek, and Vikramaditya Prakash. "1400 CE." In *A Global History of Architecture*, 455-500. 3rd ed. New York: Wiley, 2017.

Ching et al. provide a chronological analysis of landscape architecture. There are also images of the building the way it is today, as well as the landscape plan of the area. There are also images of the Kinkaku-Ji building interior which will help with more formal analysis of the overall garden. In addition, the source discusses the history of the Muromachi period, which will allow one to place the Garden in its historical context as well. Compared to the other survey source, this source is slightly broader as it covers the landscape architectural styles from all over the world. This source will be used to supplement the broader historical context of the landscape.

Ishida, Ichirō, and Brown, Delmer M. "Zen Buddhism and Muromachi Art." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 22, no. 4 (1963): 417-32.

This journal by Ishida and Brown gives insight into the connection between Zen Buddhist values and ideas and art from the Muromachi period. The authors provide an in-depth analysis of how the specific figures of Zen Buddhism had influence over art. Ishida and Brown also mention the relationship between man and nature, and reference multiple poems about gardens or landscape. In addition, the authors directly talk about Muromachi architecture, which is helpful for one's analysis of the Kinkaku-Ji. Zen and Zen Buddhist thought are inseparable from

Japanese gardens in general, as every reading in this bibliography has mentioned it. This source will be used to relate landscape architecture elements to the ideas of Zen and Zen Buddhism.

Rogers, Elizabeth Barlow, "Nature as Muse: The Gardens of China and Japan." In *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History*, 281-310. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001.

Rogers provides broad information about Japanese Gardens in chapter eight. This book contains background information for the Kinkaku-Ji (Golden Pavilion) and puts it in dialogue with other buildings--both the ones that influenced this building, as well as the ones it influenced. For example, the text mentions that the Kamakura period precedes the Muromachi period, and it is possible to analyze how the Muromachi style gardens differ from the Kamakura style gardens. This source will be used to provide background and placing it in a context and a timeline of Japanese gardens at large.

Slawson, David A., and Zōen. *Secret Teachings in the Art of Japanese Gardens: Design Principles, Aesthetic Values*, 56-133. 1st ed. Tokyo; New York: New York, N.Y.: Kodansha International; Distributed in the U.S. by Kodansha International/USA, through Harper & Row, 1987.

Slawson et al. talk about the role of scenic effects of Japanese gardens and mention the Kinkaku-ji in the text directly. There are references about the materials that are frequently used in Japanese gardens. Furthermore, this book provides helpful examples of visual analysis for Japanese gardens in general, which is useful for visually analyzing the Kinkaku-Ji. Furthermore, scenic effects, sensory effects, and cultural values of Japanese Gardens are discussed in the book. These effects directly relate to how people interpret and navigate the Japanese garden, which is crucial to the analysis as well.