

NAGASAKI GARDENS AND GEORG MEISTER (1653-1713)

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1. Introduction

In Dresden, Germany, in 1692, a curious book appeared titled *Der Orientalisch-Indianische Kunst- und Lust-Gärtner*, translated as "The Oriental-Indian Art and Pleasure Gardener". It is a richly varied account of a gardener's journey to the Far East. Its author, the German Georg Meister, was a gardener by profession and he is the first European garden specialist to report extensively on gardening in the Far East. His specialist information is not found in any other contemporary European source. Following my earlier article that introduced Georg Meister and his book, the present article focuses on Meister's *Chapter 11* on gardens and reconstructs some aspects of garden technique in Nagasaki at the time of his visits [1].



Meister, Georg, (1692): *Der Orientalisch-Indianische Kunst- und Lust-Gärtner ... Dresden/ In Verlegung des Autoris, druckts Johann Riedel/ Anno 1692.*

Meister went two times to Japan, both times privately employed by his countryman Andreas Cleyer (1634-1698?) who served as the V.O.C. director of the Dutch trading post on Dejima. They staid in Dejima from August 7, 1682 to the end of December, 1683 and a second time from August 30, 1685 to November, 1686 or little later, again the departure date is not precisely clear. A lot of information that Cleyer and Meister gained on Japanese horticulture and gardens reached them through the licensed Japanese interpreters, who were attached to the Dutch trade

mission. They also must have made small excursions, accompanied by Japanese, to collect plants or visit gardens. At both stays on Dejima Cleyer made an official visit to the Shōgun in Edo, but Meister did not join these embassies [2].

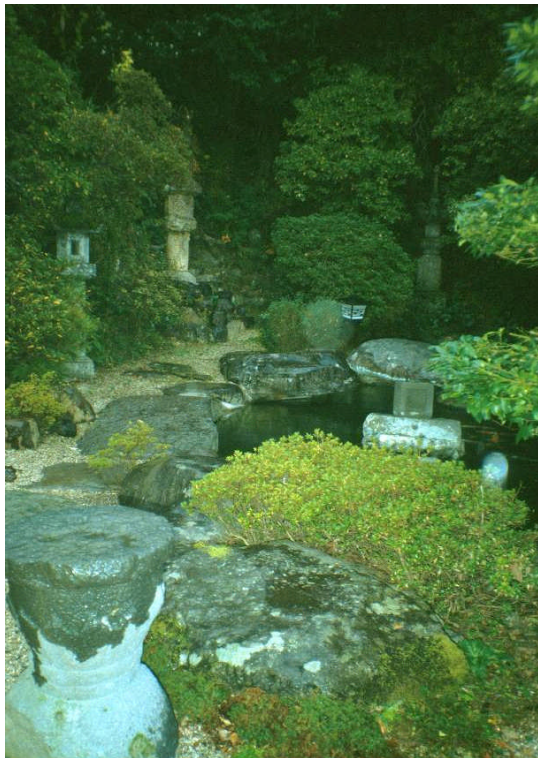
2.About Japanese and Chinese Gardens

Meister presents his information on gardens as a general story giving his *Chapter 11* the title "About the ornamental garden making of the Japanese and the Chinese and what is related to that" (*Von der Japanner und Chineser zierlichen Gartenbau, und vvas dem anhängig*). Some sections that interest us at this point are quoted here in an English translation with a comment. For further reference, the original German is given here as illustration. The chapter begins as follows:

"...Here I add with justice how the Japanese and the Chinese build their gardens and decorate them, not with beautiful sculpture, but with rocks. These people can't imagine a greater delight than to have large rocks in their gardens, which were not placed there by Nature but were found by them and then moved. These rocks and pleasing stones, are taken from some place, and then transported to another place or garden, without suffering any damage. These stones serve them instead of statues made of marble or alabaster. They also are accustomed to erect a large rockery (*hohe Klippen*) in the middle of the garden. This is then done as follows: they make a large soil mound and place, starting from the bottom to the top (*von unten biß oben an*), all kinds of stones on it: stones that are partly covered with moss, or otherwise beautifully shaped by Nature. It is done in such a way that even a thousand Europeans who haven't seen it before, would think that it was God and Nature and not the hand of man that created it. They also know how to divide these rockeries artfully (*artig von einander spalten*); there then they have all kinds of rare grottoes, holes, ravines and passages, out of which they have water fall as in nature..."

3.1. Nagasaki's Temple Gardens and Meister's Text, Daion-ji

In Nagasaki's temple quarter Teramachi we find a few gardens that illustrate Meister's text. Daion-ji is one of these, it is a Jodo-shu temple subordinate to Chion-in in Kyoto. The impressive architecture of Chion-in is described in many a contemporary travel log as each two-yearly Dutch embassy to the Shogun in Edo had to visit Chion-in to pay respect to his ancestors enshrined here. In Nagasaki as a courtesy-preparation before visiting Chion-in, the embassies must have visited Daion-ji. Temple records exist from the early Genroku-period on and should give more information on the 1680's when Meister was in Dejima, but were not checked for this article. The garden of Daion-ji is found at the back of the buildings and is of a peculiar construction technique. In the soft sand stone of the hill side behind is carved out a staircase, on the right side of which is a mini gorge where water comes down with a refreshing sound. An old, historic lantern also of sandstone, partly crumbled because of sandstone dissolved, stands besides the lower end of the staircase. The waterfall is in part also carved from the soft bedrock where slits are made that split the stone apart, suggesting Meister's wording *artig von einander spalten*. At least it looks like man-made, but to be correct, the slits could also have been the result of erosion processes of water.



Daion-ji, Nagasaki, December 17, 1990

The waterfall is further enforced by the adding of other large stones of a kind of mineral that is seen in the streets all over Nagasaki. At present there is no clear date for the construction of this garden, the front part was renovated recently. It is not impossible that this site, probably already with a garden, was visited by Meister. If there was some garden construction present, the most

feasible technique will indeed have been to cut and carve into the soft bed rock, supported as little as possible by the more laborious bringing in of soil and rocks. The same mix of techniques of carved bed rock and placed stones brought from elsewhere, is seen in some other Teramachi temple gardens.

Information on this construction technique typical of Nagasaki could have reached Meister through the interpreters or Europeans having visited it, perhaps he even had seen it done himself.

Meister's text continues as follows:

"...They also have all kinds of basins into which water runs: round, square, oval, and such. In these basins they keep all kinds of fish, above all small ones that shine like gold and glitter like silver. Maybe half of the surface of the basin is covered with green plants of all sorts, plants that in nature usually would grow in this kind of pond or body of water..."

Goldfish were imported several times from China, and centers of breeding existed in port cities like Sakai and Nagasaki for shorter periods before a nationwide popularity made for a lasting introduction in the eighteenth century. We find goldfish mentioned in Japanese records as early as the mid-fifteenth century. Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582) had goldfish in his garden in the Azuchi Castle and with Meister's records we have another puzzle piece of the early goldfish history of Japan.

3.2. Kotai-ji

Following Meister's remarks on garden basins a section describes some garden making techniques that apply well to the gardens at the temple Kotai-ji.

"...If the mountain doesn't supply water, then they supply it with pipes that are laid out in such a way that the water runs down through all the stones and rocks.

In the large rocks and stones they have round or elongated holes, a foot deep, that are filled with earth into which they plant little trees in their manner; sometimes it are trees that bear fruit, but mostly it are plants with all kinds of beautiful and fragrant flowers. Also all kinds of bulbs, which are a rare and pleasant sight. When one flower fades, already the next one is coming out. Hollows are also carved in all the rocks and all kinds of figures are placed there; out of the heads of these likewise grow and blossom trees and flowering plants, or the figures carry large round pots, out of which bloom various beautiful flowers. They also have statues in the conventional sense, sometimes set tightly to the rocks, and others around which it is possible to walk. In the ravines and grottoes they have all kinds of painted idols as well as other images. Also in the rocks are round holes in which they put bird-nests containing eggs, while others place eggs made of porcelain in them. They take these nests from the birds that nest in the forest, because these look much more natural than those made by the industry and hands of man..."

The temple Kotai-ji is found next to Daion-ji. The Soto-Zen temple Kotai-ji had been the base of Ittei Yuton (1562-1659). His name Ittei is written the characters *ichi* and *niwa*, "one-garden". Ittei was a most important priest/politician who had been called to the Fushimi Castle in 1615 by Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu himself. The Shogun asked to convert the Christians among the citizens of Nagasaki to Buddhism; it must have been Ieyasu's idea to control Christianity from within. Reportedly Ittei made many converts, but from the start he was allowing for an element of Christianity in his teachings. His temple Kotai-ji (written with different characters than at present) prospered. After the Shimabara revolt in 1637 and the more severe and general

prohibition of Christianity that it engendered, Buddhist priests were asked again to convert Christians to sincere Buddhists, but under Ittei's followers much Christianity remained hidden. Ittei lived up to a high age, and remained of interest to the early Edo period power elite and this must also have been because of his profound insight into the hidden structures of southern Japan. In 1642 he met with the third Shogun, Tokugawa Iemitsu and had at the end of the summer an audience with Empress Meishō in the Capital Miyako receiving a high priestly rank, the Purple Robes. The Empress had just that year started the construction of her palace that had a geometrically designed flower bed garden with lawn from the next year on. A garden pavilion overlooked a straight canal [3]. It is tempting to suggest a hearsay influence of Western (Dutch) garden art, through information brought by Ittei. After his return to Nagasaki the characters of the name Kotai-ji were changed into the present ones with which it was also written in the statement that went with the bestowing of the Purple Robes. Now Ittei was a high-aged and respected priest, and an acceptable politician to all parties. He founded many a temple in the Nagasaki region; one of these was set up with donations from two Dutch interpreters. After Ittei's death Kotai-ji remained a temple with an interest in Western learning that accompanied hidden Christianity. Meister was a compassionate Christian and the interest of Kotai-ji in anything Western could have formed a base for mutual interests.

3.3. Kobayashi Kentei and Kotai-ji

Kobayashi Kentei (1601-1684) was the most important disciple of Hayashi Kichimon [4]. Master and disciples were all versed in astronomy, geography and arithmetics, sciences that were imported together with Christian teaching. Hayashi was arrested in 1646 on suspicion of being a Christian and, loyal to his master, also Kobayashi underwent imprisonment with labor for 21 years. Once released from prison in 1667, he started teaching astronomy and Kobayashi's *Nigiryakusetsu*, based on a Jesuit textbook, became a standard on Western astronomy in his time. The rest of his life, he lived in Kotai-ji in return for his donation of a set of *Rakan* statues [5].

A major renovation of the temple's garden took place on 1683 when the statues were placed. It is the last year of Meister's first visit to Japan. According to the iconography of *Rakan* there should be sixteen in a set, but at present six are still in good shape and can be seen in the garden at the back.

Further up the hill in the temple's graveyard is found the elaborate grave stone of Kusumoto Ine, the daughter of Von Siebold and his Nagasaki love Otaki. The modest stone of Otaki stands beside.

Kotai-ji has two gardens. One is a small pond garden with a small islet on which a Buddhist figure is placed. An arrangement that suggests a waterfall can only have running water if it is brought there by pipes. Meister mentions this artifice. The larger garden of Kotai-ji is also a pond garden, deeply caved-in in the steep slope of sandstone bed rock at the back of the temple buildings. The ground water that the mountain gives at this point is retained in a nice pond with an island; stepping stones crossing the water are well-laid, a bridge is less pleasing to the eye. In the farthest corner water falls down the slope. Six old *Rakan* statues, about a meter high are set all over the garden.



One of the Rakan (*Bodhisattva*) statues, taken with flash on a rainy night at Kotai-i, December 17, 1990

The statues are lively in their expression of the faces, sometimes even humorous, and technically speaking at least very successful; these must have been carved by a professional and experienced sculptor. The popular attribution to scholar Kobayashi himself, working on the statues when in prison is doubtful. Some of the statues stand in caved-in hollows, resembling the idea of grottoes that Meister mentions. Planting whatever plant in this garden - but also in other Nagasaki gardens such as at Daion-ji - must have been done by carving a hole in the soft rock before filling it with proper garden soil, again fitting well with Meister's observations. Works will have been carried out or have been under way when Meister was in Dejima, and could have been finished the second time that he returned to Nagasaki. Again so far, we do not know whether he visited the site, or whether he was only informed through hearsay.

3.4. Other, Old Temple Gardens in Nagasaki

A fine, old garden is found behind the temple Shuntoku-ji, a temple founded on the site of the old Todos Los Santos Church. The garden is constructed in part on a hard, rocky slope being of the same type as the rock that keeps the waterfall at Narutaki, close to the present Von Siebold Museum. Between the slope and the main temple buildings is a flat and open garden with a small pond. From a stylistic point of view the garden at Shuntoku-ji seems younger, showing a lay out as a standard *hiraniwa* of the late Edo period, it must have been constructed after the restoring of the temple that started in 1828.



Shuntoku-ji, Nagasaki, December 17, 1990

Two other temples in Nagasaki, Daiko-ji and Sanpo-ji, have little pond gardens below a slope facing the main hall; the two are like Daion-ji and Kotai-ji found along the hillside of Teramachi. Sanpo-ji is a Jodo-shu temple and Daiko-ji is of the Ikkoshu-sect [6]. The gardens of these temples were not checked for the present article.

3.5. A "Chinese" Garden in Nagasaki

Not far from Shuntoku-ji, a pleasure retreat is known as Shinden-an. It is a thatch-roofed, cottage-style residence with a garden. It is situated on the hillside, overlooking Nagasaki and its port, and a fine view in the true Far-Eastern hermit ideal could be had before the neighborhood became too much crowded with buildings [7]. It was originally constructed by order of a Chinese interpreter Ga Choshin, or A Niemon. The name Ga Choshin is perfectly Chinese, A Niemon is Japanese. Ga Choshin's father is only known with a Chinese name, Ga Kozai, the Ga family will have been Chinese in origin; Chinese interpreters named Ga are found in Nagasaki up to the nineteenth century Meiji period. Shinden-an is now private property, and still well kept. Construction on the retreat started in the Kanbun period 1661-1672, more than ten years before Meister's arrival. Step-wise rock arrangements in rows contain a garden mound at the back. In the absence so far, of a clear history of gardening techniques in China it is too much to say that this is a typical Chinese garden, however the same step-wise arrangement in rows is seen in an old Kyoto garden likely to have been built under Chinese supervision [8]. This technique of rock setting could explain what Meister was talking about when he wrote:

"...This is then done as follows: they make a large soil mound and place, starting from the bottom to the top (*von unten bis oben an*), all kinds of stones on it: stones that are partly covered with moss, or otherwise beautifully shaped by Nature..."

Given the presence of a Chinese merchants' community in Nagasaki with interpreters wealthy enough to construct this kind of pleasure retreats, Meister's comment gets more credibility. In Europe in these years, usually no proper distinction between "Japanese" and "Chinese" expressions in art was made. But when Meister speaks of Japanese and Chinese in his chapter on gardens we can assume that he actually also had this garden, built by a "Chinese" in his mind. The custom of laying porcelain eggs in birds nests to be discovered by visitors at play sounds also quite Chinese. Figures that have flowering plants growing out of their heads could probably have been ceramic garden-gnome like things.



Shinden-an, Nagasaki, December 17, 1990

4. Conclusion

Not acquainted with Nagasaki's garden history, Meister's story on the gardens of Japan and China seems weird at points. It is even more strange if one has the late-twentieth century image of "the Japanese garden" in mind, an image based on the *sabi*-aesthetics of temple and tea-ceremony gardens of Kyoto [9]. But only a superficial search into late-seventeenth century garden history of Nagasaki, as proposed in this article, shows already how well-observed and well-described Meister's story is. With the coming Rococo-fashion in Dresden and surroundings, his mental picture of statues and rockeries in garden art will have been a great source of inspiration. Meister entered the service of several Electors of Saxony like the famed August der Starke as Oriental Pleasure Gardener (*Orientalische Lust-Gärtner*). Two of his sons Johann Georg Meister and Georg Gottlob Meister, and also Anton Brenig married to his daughter Maria Sophia were all three employed as Royal Court Gardener (*Königlicher Hofgärtner*) testifying to the appreciation and recognition that Meister gained back home. The Electors sponsored the publication of his book [10].



NOTES

[1]. See my article *Georg Meister, -A Seventeenth Century Gardener And His Reports On Oriental Garden Art-*, in *Japan Review*, (Nichibunken, Kyoto), 1991, Vol.2: p.125-143 on the web: <http://shinku.nichibun.ac.jp/jpub/pdf/jr/IJ0206.pdf> and also: Michel, Wolfgang, *Die Japanisch-Studien des Georg Meister (1653-1713)*, in: *Doku-Futsu Bungaku Kenkyu*, Nr.36 (1986, Fukuoka), Kyushu-Universität. The contents of the present article was presented by me at two lectures: *Genroku Nagasaki, Meister to sono shuhen*, (Nagasaki of the Genroku period, the environs of Georg Meister, in Japanese at: *Kokusai Nihon bunka kenkyu senta-*, Higashi Ajia no honso to hakubutsugaku no sekai - Kyodo kenkyukai), 20/10, 1990, and *Barokku . Yo-roppa no Nihon teien joho - Georugu . Maisuteru no tabi*, (Baroque Europe and Japanese

garden information - the travels of Georg Meister, in Japanese) Nichibunken foramu 30, Kokusai Nihon bunka kenkyu senta-, 5/3, 1991.

[2]. The logs of the ships on which Meister traveled do not exist any longer. Meister's name is not found in the V.O.C.-Dejima journals. The question has been raised whether Meister was not a fancy profiteer who never actually visited Japan, and only simply concocted a story, finding a publisher to publish it. A lot of information on the Far East was available, somebody like Montanus for example could write a well-informed book on Japan without ever having left his little town in Holland. And Meister's stories on the Cape of Good Hope and the Hottentot-people could very well have been inspired by Schreyers Reise-Beschreibung (Leipzig, 1681). In spite of this I am convinced that Meister was in Dejima. When Cleyer released him from his service he left him a written testimonial praising him as a gardener and plant-hunter above all at their second trip to Japan. The testimonial, (published in Meister's book and years before Cleyer's death) is dated 25th of November, 1687, and therefore given to him after their return to Batavia. Meister got a bonus and this was paid in 25 Japanese golden *koban* that must have been privately earned money of Cleyer, and Meister must have known the value of it. Back in Amsterdam Meister was relieved that the V.O.C. paid him without any deduction. His employment for Cleyer was illegal according to V.O.C. standards, which explains that Cleyer never mentions Meister in the official Dejima journals. These are suspiciously thin in the period of Cleyer's stay, and it has been suggested that this was because of the problems Cleyer had with the V.O.C. On the whole Cleyer's self-conscious and enterprising approach made for some serious misunderstandings between him and the V.O.C. Once in Dresden, Meister gets an enormous recognition that would not have happened when he was a swindler. For me, a most convincing proof of Meister's visit to Japan is found in his apt and unique description of the gardens of Nagasaki.

[3]. See my: "Themes, Scenes, and Taste in the History of Japanese Garden Art", Amsterdam, 1988, pp.194-199, 216, 217 on the history of this remarkable garden.

[4]. Kentei is an artists name for Kobayashi Yoshinobu, he was also known as Higuchi Gon'emon.

[5]. The details of the history of Kotai-ji, Ittei, and Kobayashi given in: Kaneko, Kizan, *Kotai-ji shi*, published by the temple, 1986.

[6]. Kaempfer mentions Ikkoshu temples as goal for excursions in his "The History of Japan", (1728, p.339): "... few Dutchmen ... are permitted once or twice a year, to take a walk into the adjacent country, and in particular to view the temples about Nagasaki: This liberty is oftner granted to Physicians and Surgeons, under pretence of going to search for Medicinal Plants. However, this pleasure walk falls very expensive for us, for it must be made in company of the *Otona*, of our ordinary Interpreters, and other officers in our service, who are handsomely treated by us at dinner, in one of the Temples of the *Ikosju Sect*, and we must on this occasion, even with seeming satisfaction, see our purses strongly squeeze'd for the most common civilities shewn us by the Priests of that Temple..."

[7]. A set of screens painted by Sugai Baikan (1784-1844) was on display at the Nagasaki Municipal Museum in early 1991, showing the retreat on the hillside. I wish to thank Mr. Yokoyama from the Museum for sending me information on this screen and on the history of Shinden-an.

[8]. See: "Themes, Scenes, and Taste", p.89 on the technique of placing stones in rows at Tenryû-ji and on its making under Chinese supervision: p.91 ff.

[9]. The limitations of this image of "the Japanese garden" were discovered at our colloquium *Les jardins japonais d'Europe*, Musée départemental Albert Kahn, Boulogne, Collège International de Philosophie, Paris, October 1997.

[10]. Biographic information on Meister after his return to Dresden found in: Eckhart Berckenhagen, *Unser Titelbild*, in: Das Gartenamt (vol. 2) 1962, p. 30-31, and Georg

Dutschmann, Dresden, *Georg Meister, ein deutscher Gärtner des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Ms 274, material in the Library of the Wageningen Agricultural University, Netherlands.

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CHINESE CHARACTER CHART

A Niemon 阿仁右衛門
Chion-in 知恩院
Daiko-ji 大光寺
Daion-ji 大音寺
Ga Choshin 何兆晋
Ga Kozai 何高材
Hayashi Kichiemon 林吉右衛門
hiraniwa 平庭
Ikkoshu 一向宗
Ittei Yuton 一庭融頓
koban 小判
Kobayashi Kentei 小林兼貞
Kotai-ji (1) 洪泰寺
Kotai-ji (2) 皓台寺
Nigiryakusetsu 二儀略説
Rakan 羅漢
Sanpo-ji 三宝寺
Shinden-an 心田庵
Shuntoku-ji 春徳寺