

ON THE “MOSS” IN THE DRY LANDSCAPE GARDEN OF RYŌAN TEMPLE



Ryōsuke Ōhashi

Japanese-German Culture Institute

In “The Aesthetics of ‘Cutting,’” second chapter and core section of my earlier work The Structure of “Kire” (Ōhashi 1986), published forty years ago, I attempted an analysis of the dry landscape garden at Ryōan Temple 龍安寺. Forty years later, while I still essentially stand by that analysis, I also believe there was room to take it a step further. The examination of “moss” that I attempt in this paper is that very step. To offer a bit of an explanation: not only was an examination of moss in Ryōan Temple’s dry landscape garden absent from my earlier work, but it was also uniformly absent from the vast body of literature on the garden that has accumulated since then. The moss in the dry landscape garden had remained completely “forgotten” from the very beginning. And there was a reason for this.

IN JAPAN, there is a book titled *Sakuteiki* 作庭記 (Records of Garden Making), considered the country’s first theoretical guide to landscape architecture. While there have long been various theories regarding its date of composition and author, the prevailing view today is that it was written in the mid-twelfth century by a man named Tachibana Toshitsuna 橘俊綱.¹ To offer a few comments from a comparative cultural-historical perspective, the well-known manuals on artistic creation in Renaissance Europe include Leon Battista Alberti’s *On Painting* (1435/6), *On Sculpture* (c. 1443), and *On Architecture* (1452). Since all of these were written in the mid-fifteenth century, *Sakuteiki* predates them by three hundred years (Aikawa 2003, 85).

It is true that in Europe, there is *De Architectura Libri decem* (Ten Books on Architecture) by the ancient Roman Vitruvius (Marcus Vitruvius Pollio), which

1. Regarding research on the history of the compilation of the *Sakuteiki*, no major objections have been raised from the time Tsuyoshi Tamura’s *Sakuteiki* (Tamura 1964) synthesized the arguments of various scholars up to the present day.

dates back even further.² However, from that time onward, until the appearance of Alberti's works, there was no theory of landscape architecture, let alone any general theory of the visual arts. This is somewhat puzzling, given that gardens themselves did exist. For example, the "*peristylum*," a Roman-style garden consisting of a courtyard surrounded by columns (*stylos*), is one such example.

In European thought and artistic perspectives, aesthetic interest in "nature" was not treated as a central theme until the early modern period. Intellectual interest in "nature" began with Kant's aesthetics, which sought to find the archetype of "artistic beauty" in "natural beauty."³ However, even in Kant's case, the "garden" was not a subject of consideration. Nor did the "garden" merit its own chapter—on par with architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and so on—in Hegel's subsequent five-volume, voluminous *Lectures on Aesthetics*.⁴ If we explore the background of this intellectual history, we find a teleological ontology dating back to Aristotle. According to Aristotle's view—that "heavy things are naturally drawn downward, and light things are naturally drawn upward; therefore, stones and earth are drawn to the very bottom, and soil, being slightly lighter, is drawn above them"⁵—gardens made of stones and soil did not occupy a high artistic position.

In the East, there was no ontology or theology with such a hierarchical structure; rather, the prevailing view was one that took the way of "nature" as a model for human life. Against the backdrop of this intellectual climate, treatises on garden design appeared in Japan as early as the twelfth century. It should also be noted that references to gardens can already be found in the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 from the Nara period in eighth century.⁶ It is also worth noting that China possesses the *Book of Rites* by Confucius, predating even Vitruvius. While details are omitted here, the chapter "Monthly Ordinances" within it mentions terms like "garden" (苑) and "enclosure" (囿) in relation to court rituals and ceremonies. However, as the character 令 (*rei*) indicates, here 苑 (*en*) signifies nothing more than a place for observing monthly rituals and principles, not a garden for aesthetic appreciation.

2. There are several Japanese translations, beginning with Keiichi Morita's *De Architectura by Vitruvius* (Morita 1969); it is widely recognized as the oldest treatise on architecture in the field. Vitruvius's view that architecture should consist of the three elements of "firmness (*firmitas*)," "utility (*utilitas*)," and "beauty (*venustas*)" has essentially been carried forward into today's architectural philosophy. Alberti's *On Architecture* is also often referred to by the same title; this is because Alberti, while offering harsh criticism of Vitruvius's views, essentially followed his basic framework and structured his work into ten chapters as well.

3. See my essay 'Die Naturschönheit als Schein. Zur Ästhetik bei Kant, Hegel und Adorno aus fernöstlicher Sicht des "Kunstwegs"' (Ohashi 2013, 69–81) I have elaborated on this there, so I will limit myself here to the conclusion.

4. See the four-volume collected works (Hegel 2015) published by Meiner since 2015, vol. 28/1, 2, 3, 4.

5. Aristotle, *Physics*, 214b 10 f.

6. In the entry for "Empress Suiko" (推古天皇) in the *Nihon shoki*, there is the following passage: "In this year, she created the Tea Garden south of Ikaruga Palace, and there she constructed a pond, planted trees, and sowed seeds of flowers and vegetables."

On the other hand, Japan's treatise on formative theory, *Sakuteiki*, though influenced by Chinese thought like Yin-Yang and the Five Elements theory, is essentially a guidebook for garden design as an aesthetic art form.

Even today, there are no shortage of authoritative studies on *karesansui* 枯山水 (dry landscape garden). If one were to ask whether the subject has been thoroughly discussed, there remains the “moss” in dry landscape gardens unexamined. Moss is so commonplace in Japanese gardens that it could be said to be self-evident. So it is a “secret” why this self-evident “moss” remained unexamined.⁷

“Stones” and “Moss” in Japanese Gardens

Let us begin by quoting the very first sentence of *Sakuteiki*.

In places where there is neither a pond nor a watercourse, stones are sometimes placed. This is called *karesansui*. (*Sakuteiki* 1973, 226)

This oldest treatise on garden design is devoted entirely to instructions on how to arrange and position stones. While I will discuss this in more detail later, let us first focus on the term *karesansui* in this quotation. Generally, *karesansui* is often associated with the image of Higashiyama culture during the Muromachi period (fourteenth–sixteenth centuries), particularly after the Ōnin War (1467–1477). For this reason, the theory that *Sakuteiki*—attributed to Tachibana Toshitsuna of the late Heian period (eleventh century)—was a forgery from the Muromachi period was once put forward. However, it has now been confirmed that the forgery theory is incorrect (See note 1). In the context of this paper's line of inquiry, this means that the term *karesansui* dates back to the Heian period.

This also calls for caution regarding discourses that immediately link the aesthetic sensibility of *karesansui* to the concept of *wabi-sabi* わび・さび. This concept represents the aesthetic sensibility of medieval Japan, epitomized by Zeami, the master of Nō theater (fourteenth–fifteenth centuries), and had not yet taken shape during the Heian period. One often encounters arguments that, by applying this concept too readily, give the impression that these arguments have explained the beauty of *karesansui*; however, such arguments often merely use the elusiveness of *wabi-sabi* as a smokescreen. Mirei Shigemori, a contemporary practitioner and theorist, emphasized the concept of *yūgen* 幽玄—which dates back to the Heian period—as a description of *karesansui* in his acclaimed book *Karesansui*

7. For a detailed examination of the dry landscape garden and the rocks within it from a broad perspective spanning literature from all eras and regions, see Graham Parkes's essay “The Role of Rock in the Japanese Dry Landscape Garden: A Philosophical Essay” (Berthier 2000, 85–155). A discussion of the rocks in the Ryōan Temple dry landscape garden is presented on pp. 133 ff. of the same work. The views of Keiji Nishitani and Shin'ichi Hisamatsu are also cited.

(Shigemori 2008).⁸ Given the date of the term *karesansui*, this approach seems more legitimate.

However, even when used to describe *karesansui*, the concept of *yūgen* still leaves room for further scrutiny. This is because when Zeami made extensive use of this concept in his *Fūshikaden* 風姿花伝 during the medieval period, he discussed *yūgen* with a variety of nuances. These include the “*yūgen* of waka poetry,” which is understood through the written word and heard with the ear; the “*yūgen* of Nō plays,” which is appreciated with the eye; furthermore, the *yūgen* of human figures such as “imperial consorts, court ladies, courtesans, lovers, and handsome men”; and the “*yūgen* of flowers” in plants and trees, and so on.⁹ The nuances of *yūgen* cited by Zeami possess a more vibrant brightness than the *yūgen* in the literature in Heian-period.¹⁰ This raises the question: if we were to apply this concept, what kind of *yūgen* would be found in *karesansui*?

In addition, when the Zen master Musō Soseki 夢窓疎石 (1275–1351) and other Kamakura-period Zen masters—who created *karesansui* gardens in various locations—referred to *karesansui* as *karisansui* 仮山水 (Shigemori also points this out in Shigemori 2008, 57, among other places), the term “*kari*” (provisional) must also be kept in mind. Here, “*kari*” can be described as a composite state of “emptiness” and “form,” as expressed in the Heart Sutra’s phrase “emptiness is form.” The spread of Zen Buddhism lies behind the shift from the concept of *karesansui*—already in use during the Heian period—to its designation as *karisansui* in the Kamakura and Muromachi periods. Furthermore, if Zen practitioners of the Muromachi period used the expression *karisansui*, it is necessary to examine how the two concepts of “*kari*” and “*yūgen*” were related at that time. However, this paper will not delve into these aesthetic concepts. Instead of it, I would like to focus on the formal structure of *karesansui* and attempt to interpret the meaning of “moss” through structural analysis.

8. In Chapter 2, “The Formal and Substantive Beauty of Karesansui,” Mirei Shigemori interprets *yūgen*—a concept dating back to the *Kokin wakashū* 古今和歌集—as the aesthetic sensibility of *karesansui*.

9. See my book *The Establishment of ‘Geidō’: Zeami and Rikyū* (Ōhashi 2021, 93 ff). In conceptual examinations of *yūgen*, Yoshinori Ōnishi’s *Yūgen and Aware* (Ōnishi 1939) continues to hold a definitive position as the standard work. Ōnishi states that Zeami’s concept of *yūgen* “seems to be limited to a beauty that is far too gentle and soft” (see Ōhashi 2021, note 132); the “limitation” he refers to takes on a positive rather than a negative connotation when examining the secret of “moss” in dry landscape gardens, as will be seen below.

10. Yoshinori Ōnishi is the leading scholar to have discussed the concept of *yūgen* alongside *aware*, but how might his theory of *yūgen* be received abroad? Anna Zschauer’s recent publication, *Ästhetik und japanische Moderne. Interkulturelle Fallstudien* (Zschauer 2025), examines Ōnishi’s concept of *yūgen* in detail. Her magnum opus was a doctoral dissertation submitted to the University of Hildesheim; it received the highest grade of *summa cum laude*, was awarded the Karl Alber Prize, and was published by Alber in 2025. Incidentally, she notes that the “central part” (der zentrale Teil) of this work is formed by three case studies. Namely, “three case studies that constitute an inseparable connection between aesthetics and hermeneutics: *mono no aware*, *iki*, and *kire*” (Zschauer 2025, 17).

As mentioned above, *Sakuteiki* is devoted to the question of what kind of stones to use and how to arrange them, and what the stones are meant to represent. I would like to first draw attention to the fact that the “stones” referred to here are not stones quarried from a quarry, but they are all “natural stones.” In French-style gardens, all stones are cut into geometric shapes to serve as components of a geometric composition, and none retain their natural form. Here, one can discern the influence of Descartes’s idea of humanity as the “master and owner of nature,”¹¹ as well as the ideology of absolute monarchy embodied by Louis XIV, the Sun King, known for the phrase “The State is I” (*L’État, c’est moi*). Let us recall that the French-style garden Hegel refers to is the garden of the Palace of Sans-Souci. There, the trees are neatly trimmed and lined up along the garden paths, visualizing the perspective that nature is made to submit to the spirit.¹² In contrast, in English-style gardens, at least the trees are allowed to grow in their natural state, as if to recreate the natural landscape of the outside world. However, underlying this garden style is a historical consciousness that involves the construction of Roman-ruin-style architecture or Greek-temple-style pavilions, using reminiscences of the classical world as a motif. From this, we can see that English-style gardens are not merely a celebration or a reproduction of nature, but they are underpinned by a historical consciousness. There are neither locations nor motifs involving the selection and arrangement of natural stones. The sensibility of Japanese gardens—selecting natural stones and arranging them aesthetically—may seem ordinary to those who live in Japan and are accustomed to seeing them, but from the perspective of Western aesthetics, it is extremely unorthodox.

What about “moss,” then? In Western gardens—better, in Western aesthetics in general—moss is not only rarely mentioned but is not even regarded as an aesthetic element in the first place. In fact, the same is true of Japan’s *Sakuteiki*. Although moss is so ubiquitous in Japanese gardens as to be self-evident, there is virtually no conscious awareness of it. To be precise, there are two very brief mentions of it in *Sakuteiki*. One reads as follows:

On a hill in a field, create intersecting ridges,... and from time to time, place moss and the like. (*Sakuteiki* 1973, 224)

In the context of the entire treatise on garden design, this passage carries almost no weight. The other passage reads as follows:

11. Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, in *Œuvres de Descartes*, Edition Adam et Tannery, Tome VI, p. 62.

12. In Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art*, delivered at the University of Berlin from 1818 to 1828, the student notes from the *Lectures on Aesthetics* of 1820–21 (Hegel 1995) contain a very brief appendix on “gardens.” (Hegel 2015, vol. 28, pp. 1, 33) However, this is not a thematic discussion. Furthermore, Greek vases—which are highly regarded today—are never mentioned in Hegel’s theories of art and aesthetics.

When stones from mountains or riverbanks collapse... and, as the years pass, moss begins to grow, this is not the work of human hands.
(*Sakuteki* 1973, 241)

This second passage, though it has never previously attracted much attention, offers a suggestion of utmost importance for this paper. Namely, that moss is “not the work of human hands.” In other words, moss is not a “formative element.”

Moss is never discussed as a formative element in the history of gardens in both the East and West, nor in the history of studies on Japanese dry landscape gardens. This is only natural. Moss grows naturally, covering the ground, and presents an aesthetic scene—particularly in Japanese gardens—but it is not an element that defines the “form.” This is somewhat surprising when one considers that moss has long been a familiar part of people’s lives in Japan, has been celebrated in poetry, and even appears in the Japanese national anthem. The line in the national anthem, “May your reign continue for a thousand, eight thousand generations, until the tiny pebbles grow into mighty rocks, covered in lush moss” is based on an anonymous poem from volume seven of the *Kokin wakashū*, compiled in the early Heian period. Furthermore, if we go back even further to the *Man’yōshū* 万葉集 of the Nara period, numerous poems about moss emerge.¹³ Moss has been a plant deeply cherished by the Japanese people since ancient times. I would like to make special mention of Miho Tanaka’s truly vivid essay, *Walking with Moss* (Tanaka 2007), which I recently discovered. I came across this essay because it was cited in *Louange des Mousses* (Brindeau 2012), another exquisitely sensitive and excellent work by Véronique Brindeau, a French scholar of Japanese studies. Brindeau’s book is also a beautiful essay in which she, moved by the green moss covering the ground of Japanese gardens, describes it through the lens of her delicate sensibility.

Moss is, so to speak, a foundational element of Japanese gardens, but it is not a formative element. To reiterate the reason: it is “not the work of human hands.” It is simply too self-evident. However, therein lies the paradox of the self-evident. Namely, precisely because it is self-evident, the meaning of its existence is forgotten. This is similar to how everyone breathes air, yet this fact rarely comes to mind in daily life. Philosophically speaking, the fact that something exists and is not nothing—something so self-evident—has, paradoxically, become the “wonder” (the Greek “*thaumazein*”) that runs through the history of philosophy and has shaped the history of ontology. The same is true of “time”—the concept that everything that exists comes into being and ceases to exist within the flow of time. Because something is self-evident, it remains hidden from our field of attention and is forgotten. This paradox of self-evidence also applies to “moss.”

13. In Shōkichi Harigaya’s *Dictionary of Plant Tanka* (Harigaya 1960, 159–160), thirteen poems about moss by ancient poets were included.

The “Moss” in Ryōan Temple’s *karesansui*

The *karesansui* described in *Sakuteiki* is a representation of mountains and rivers in which the water has dried up and the vegetation has been removed. Zen master Musō referred to this as *kari-sansui* (provisional landscapes).¹⁴ The stones and sand placed in the garden bring this “provisional” landscape into being. Here, “provisional” does not mean that there is a “real” landscape somewhere else; rather, it means that the landscape itself—or indeed, all phenomena in the universe—is “provisional,” and that “form is emptiness.” What expresses this as an artistic creation, and thus symbolically, is “provisional landscape.” By placing only stones and sand, this artistic composition temporarily sets aside the landscapes of the external world—which are ordinarily perceived as real—allows organic life to wither, and then revives it within a space composed of inorganic stones and sand. Having temporarily parted ways with the external natural world, it is revived and “continues” (*tsuzuki*) through that “cut (break)” (*kire*). The “cutting syllable” in haiku, or the “cut and continuation” in *waka*, manifests visibly within the tradition of Japanese visual arts, and *karesansui* is a quintessential example of this.¹⁵

There are few examples of *karesansui* gardens—commonly found in the tradition of Zen temples—that strictly embody this “temporary” nature. In fact, there is only one: the dry landscape garden at Ryōan Temple.

Ryōan Temple’s rectangular garden is separated from the surrounding natural landscape by an oil-clay wall and features fifteen stones (FIGURE 1). It is a sculptural space composed of stones and sand, severed from natural life. The fifteen stones form five small groups; each group creates a self-contained microcosm while, together with the other groups, forming a rhythmic, interconnected whole. Even the individual stones within each group possess forms that never grow tiresome to behold; while each creates its own independent world, it is also part of the whole. This structure mirrors that of an organic world formed by living beings. Within it, individual parts are independent yet interconnected with others; at times they stand in opposition to one another, forming a single group, an environment, and ultimately, a world. Diverse manifestations of “discontinuity and continuity” emerge there.

However, when surveying the individual stones and the entire group of stones in this way, there is usually a part that slips out of view. It is a part that, because it

14. I will attempt a literal translation of Musō’s *Poem on the Rhythm of Imaginary Mountains and Waters*, while taking care not to compromise the poem’s elegance: “Not even a speck of dust remains as the mountain peaks rise; not a single drop of water remains as the valley waterfall flows; on nights when the moon shines brightly and the wind occasionally blows, the person within this realm finds joy within it” (National Translation of the Great Compendium of Zen Studies 1930, vol. 23, 166).

15. The author attempted to understand traditional Japanese art in general using the concepts of “*kire*” and “*tsuzuki*” as keywords in *The Structure of “Kire”* (Ōhashi 1986).



FIGURE 1: CC BY-SA 2. Kinkakuji and Ryōanji. Photo by Kimon Berlin. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/kimon/11079963295/>



FIGURE 2: “Ryōan Temple” as depicted in the *Miyako rinsen meishō zue*. Courtesy of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies Collection.

acts so subtly in bringing the whole into being, tends to slip out of view—namely, “moss.” The presence of moss recedes and remains hidden in and of itself. Yet, once you become aware of it, a world begins to open up that is different from the one seen when looking merely at the group of stones.

In my reflections from forty years ago, I wrote that moss is “that which offers salvation in a dry landscape garden devoid of any foothold”—namely, the “color” of the moss surrounding the stones and the oil-clay wall. I also pointed out that “color” “separates the external natural world, where organic life thrives, from the internal world of form, which is severed from that organic life, thereby forming the ‘space’ between the two.” I also pointed out that the deep color of this oil-clay wall, matured over the years, creates a sense of atmosphere by enveloping the stones and sand—which remain unchanged by the passage of time—that the green of the moss resonates with this atmosphere and imparts emotion, and that it is a realm of “ma” (間, between) that both connects and separates the tangible and the intangible, among other things. I still stand by those observations today. However, the existence of moss itself has receded into the background within these observations, overshadowed by the perspective of “color.”

I initially wrote “the moss surrounding each of the fifteen stones,” but some of the stones are significantly smaller and lack moss around them. For example, in the group of three stones at the western end, two are significantly smaller and are not surrounded by moss. In the case of large stones, if they were not surrounded by moss and instead came into direct contact with the sandy ground, the homogeneity and continuity shared by the “stones” and the “sand” would come to the fore, diminishing the uniqueness of the stones’ forms. As a result, the vitality of the entire garden—jointly formed by the stones and groups of stones—would also become flat and uninspiring. On the other hand, in the case of small stones not surrounded by moss, if they were encircled by moss, they might risk being buried within the ring of moss. Large stones, by contrast, stand out from the sandy ground precisely because of the small amount of moss surrounding them. Conversely, for small stones not surrounded by moss, the moss exists in a sense of “non-presence.”

This moss is not something which Ryōan Temple planted in modern times out of aesthetic preference. Moss is also depicted in the illustration of “Ryōan Temple” in *Miyako rinsen meishō zue* 都林泉名勝図会 (Illustrated Guide to Famous Mountains and Springs in the Capital, 1709), a bestseller in the late Edo period. Just as it is today, the moss surrounds the large stones in an unobtrusive manner, much like a stubble beard (FIGURE 2). It is interesting to note that, because persons are depicted standing in the garden, this dry landscape garden was not merely a garden to be viewed from a distance back then. However, in the context of our current discussion, let us note that even there, the moss serves as an inconspicuous element that makes almost no claim to its own *raison d'être*.

Going back even further than the Edo period, to the time of the Ryōan Temple dry landscape garden's creation, what was the situation like? The creator of Ryōan Temple's dry landscape garden is unknown. Tourist guidebooks and popular literature attribute its creation to Hosokawa Katsumoto 細川勝元 and Sōami 相阿弥, but their source is the aforementioned *Miyako rinsen meishō zue*. However, this book was written three hundred years after Ryōan Temple's founding by an Edo-period *haikai* poet who compiled the prevailing theories of the time regarding famous gardens and springs throughout Edo; it contains no primary sources. It merely records the prevailing views of the time as they were. To begin with, primary historical sources regarding Ryōan Temple do not exist, as they were destroyed along with the temple during the Ōnin War. However, it is stated with a certain degree of documentary evidence that the gardens of Saihō Temple 西方寺—known by the nickname “Moss Temple”—and Tenryū Temple 天龍寺 were, at least in their conceptual design, the work of Musō; this fact is worth considering when examining the Ryōan Temple dry landscape garden. So, in that case, was moss the central theme at Saihō Temple, as suggested by its nickname “Moss Temple”? In fact, this is not the case at all. There are historical studies indicating that when Musō first designed the garden, “cherry blossoms” were the main attraction (Varā 2012), and, as with the *Sakuteiki*, the core of Musō's garden design lay entirely in the artful arrangement of “stones.” Even there, the moss was “not the work of human hands”; it simply came to cover the garden of Saihō Temple over the passage of time—likely especially during the period of devastation caused by the Ōnin War.

Chronologically, since Ryōan Temple's architecture dates back to the Heian period (its founding was in 1455), it is reasonable to assume that the garden also has some sort of prehistory. This prehistory overlaps with the era when Musō's concept of “artificial landscape” influenced Saihō and Tenryū Temples. If that is the case, although there is no direct historical evidence to prove it, it is entirely plausible—and indeed more natural—to assume that Musō's ideas also extended to Ryōan Temple's dry landscape garden. To reiterate, in that scenario, the core of Musō's garden design lay in the arrangement of “stones,” and “moss” was outside the scope of his considerations.

“Nature Loves to Hide”

The moss in the dry landscape garden at Ryōan Temple is, so to speak, hidden in the shadows of the fifteen “stones” arranged in five groups, yet it brings these stones to the forefront. The expression that best captures this phenomenon is likely Heraclitus's statement: “Nature (*physis*) loves to hide” (*physis kryptesthai philei*).¹⁶

16. Let us also cite Heidegger's perspective. In his *Lectures on Heraclitus* delivered in 1943, he attempted

Natural phenomena before our eyes usually appear right in front of us, leaving no room for doubt. Mountains, rivers, trees, stones, and animals all certainly exist there, showing no sign of “preferring to hide.” What, then, does it mean to say that nature is actually hiding? And if that is the case, what exactly are the mountains and rivers of nature that appear before our eyes?

However, even if nature is present before our eyes, there is actually no guarantee that the landscape we see is nature “as it is.” The nature before us—mountains and rivers alike—is colored by the observer’s state of mind at that moment, their life circumstances, and factors such as changing eyesight, emotions, and values that come with age. Even when nature is represented as an “object” in the natural sciences—no, precisely at that moment—it is objectified and thus hidden “in itself.”

Let us also recall the “*jinen* 自然 (naturalness)” of which Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1263) speaks. Our daily way of life is, for the most part, characterized by simply “living as we please” from day to day. While this, too, is “natural,” people do not usually possess the conviction that this is sufficient. Consequently, since ancient times, a fair number of people have sought the true nature of “*jinen*.”

Zen Master Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253), for example, is a prime example of such an individual. In the chapter “Stream Sounds and the Mountain Colors” (谿声山色) of his *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏, Dōgen writes: “We must not overlook the fact that there are sounds and colors hidden within the mountains and rivers”. The mountains and rivers that appear right before our eyes, which we take for granted without a hint of doubt, contain a “hidden” aspect. Following these words, he also writes, “We should also rejoice that there are causes and conditions for revealing the mountains and rivers” (Ōkubo 1969, 216). These causes and conditions are also those that ripen through spiritual practice. Therefore, “the time when one gazes upon a mountain from the secular world” and “the time when one encounters a mountain within the mountains” (“The Sutra of Mountains and Waters” (山水経), Ōkubo 1969, 265) are vastly different.

Let us also invoke Zeami’s famous words: “To know the hidden flower. If it is hidden, it is a flower; if it is not hidden, it cannot be a flower.”¹⁷ For Zeami, it is through “concealment” (or hiding) that the art of Nō blossoms. In other words, the “flower” appears. Through concealment, the flower of art comes to bloom.

to interpret Heraclitus’s aphorisms. At the core of his interpretation lies the meaning of the Greek term “nature” (*physis*). Its verb form, “*phyō*,” means “to emerge (*aufgehen*).” The way in which nature emerges and openly reveals its existence is the meaning of the Greek word for “truth” (*aleteia*). Furthermore, since the prefix “a-” in the word “*aleteia*” is a negation, “*a-leteia*” literally means “non-concealment.” Alternatively, it could be understood as “a way of being that has emerged from a concealed state (*leteia*).” When Heidegger, in his later years, spoke of the “Phenomenology of the Inconspicuous” (*Phänomenologie des Unscheinbaren*), the thought of Heraclitus was likely revived within him.

17. See Chapter 7 of Zeami’s *Fūshikaden*, “Besshi kuden” 別紙口伝.

The moss in the dry landscape garden of Ryōan Temple is the moss that, through “concealment” brings forth the appearance of the five groups of fifteen (exactly: thirteen) stones as a “flower.” Depending on the species of moss and the rocks on which it grows, their compatibility varies greatly; sometimes the moss seems to completely cover the rocks, while at other times it does not grow on them at all. However, when it grows in soil, leaving it untended allows weeds to appear, and in some cases, the weeds may even displace the moss. The moss in the Ryōan Temple dry landscape garden grows on the small patches of soil surrounding the stones, situated between the stones and the sandy ground. Therefore, it requires maintenance. The essence of “maintenance” is not an artificial intervention imposed by humans from outside the moss. Rather, it is the work of putting oneself in the moss’s place to support its vitality. Garden masters assist the manifestation of the moss’s true nature in accordance with that nature. Heraclitus’s maxim, “Nature loves to hide,” comes alive here.

The moss in Ryōan Temple’s dry landscape garden has remained hidden for three hundred years. Once I have finished writing this humble essay, it will likely hide away once more.

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