

# Ginkaku-ji

## Silver Pavilion Temple and Sand Garden



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# Influence of Saiho-ji and Kinkaku-ji

- The Silver Pavilion is part of the larger Ginkaku-ji garden retreat which Ashikaga Yoshimasa built in 1474.
- Yoshimasa's grandfather, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu had previously built the Golden Pavilion and Kinkaku-ji retreat as a whole (1397.)
- This previous estate was modeled after the Saiho-ji garden (built in the Nara period) in terms of the use of carefully chosen stones, emphasis on details including steps, pools, and cascades, and the reduction of the garden to simple natural forms such as moss and stone.
- This is a Zen-inspired vision of the garden in that it is designed to be viewed from the ground in an intimate way, and for each specific feature to be separately contemplated and enjoyed.
- It so starkly contrasts traditional European gardens, which are often constructed to be viewed from a more particular viewpoint and enjoyed as a whole.



# A European Contrast



Intended to be viewed as a whole and from one viewpoint, giving the viewer a feeling of empowerment.

Luxembourg Gardens, Paris



“Like a cameraman with a zoom lens, the eye was being drawn closer into the image; the previous paradise vision was seen from the clouds, the new Zen-inspired vision had its foundations firmly on the ground. There was no need for a great garden lake, when the power of water could be seen in the small pool of the cascade. By following the process of reduction and moving closer to the abstract, the artist was getting nearer to the raw image. When the pool was made of moss and the cascade of dry stone, the process of reduction was nearly complete.”

Mark Holborn, p. 48 *The Ocean in the Sand*



# Kinkaku-ji/The Golden Pavillion



Kinkaku-ji and Golden Pavillion

- While Kinkaku-ji draws from Saiho-ji and from Zen Buddhism, it is not completely simple and Zen in its conception.
- The golden temple draws from a number of architectural styles and hangs over the water in the tradition of many Chinese pavilions, while the shingle work and the unpainted wood reflect more native Japanese traditions.
- The top floor contains a Zen temple with bell-shaped windows. The ceiling of this uppermost floor was gilded, earning the building its title. This is not seen in the Silver Pavilion temple, which is much more restrained and reflective of a society leading towards zen, and abstraction.
- There is a lake, complete with a peninsula and smaller islands that gives the retreat a sense of space and allows it to create its own horizon--in this way this garden can be looked at as a small microcosm of the larger world and of Japan.
- “The pavillion and garden stand as a magnificent gesture of paradise, to counter the misery that plagues the history of medieval Japan.” -Holborn, p.51

# Ginkaku-ji

- The predominant influence of the Saiho-ji garden was imposed by Yoshimasa here.
- The garden is thought to have been designed by the landscape artist Soami.
- This retreat is significantly more modest and simple than the Golden Pavilion, and reflects a strong connection to Zen Buddhism.



# Connection to Zen Buddhism

- Zen Buddhism is based not around the metaphysical and logic, but around instinct and feeling. There is great emphasis on identifying with the moment.
- The distinction between interior and exterior fades as one becomes one with his surroundings.
- This connection is emphasized in the flow between interior and exterior space in the Ginkaku-ji complex, and the importance of the garden and landscape, specifically the sand garden.



# Ginkaku-ji/Elements and Architecture



- There are two gardens in this complex, one at the foot of the hills and one on the higher slopes.
- A relatively small pond is also included. This pond has an island in the middle which can be reached by two bridges.
- Flat-topped rocks lie around the edge of the island, as at Saiho-ji.
- A stream runs down and is broken by a cascade called the Moon Washing Spring, one of many lunar references in this complex. Such references tie into Japan's animistic traditions, and the belief in spirits as a part of all facets of life.
- The Silver Pavilion Temple itself is a two story structure, modeled after the Ruriden at Saiho-ji. The lower floor was used for meditation (zazen) while the upper floor contains images of Kannon, the Buddhist goddess of mercy.

# Sand Garden and Sand Cone

- In front of the Silver Pavilion, next to the lake, there is a cone of sand around 6 feet high, with a flattened top, surrounded by a raised plateau of sand around 2 feet high.
- This cone is called Kogetsudai, or Moon Facing Height.
- This cone of sand may be understood as a mountain or a volcano, as well as a representation of Buddhist continuous practice and devotion.
- The process of raking the sand garden and perfecting the somewhat “unfinished” cone relates to Buddhism and the idea of continuous practice and devotion. It is redone every morning by Buddhist monks.
- Strips of raked sand contrast with messy unraked strips, creating a contrast between the natural and the kempt.
- The area as a whole is called Ginshandan, or Sea of Silver Sand, making a clear ocean reference.
- Features such as this sand garden suggest an important movement towards the abstract.



# Connection to Tea Ceremony

- There were originally twelve buildings in the Ginkaku-ji complex, one of which was the temple of Togudo, the East-Seeking Hall. At the back of this temple was a small square chamber otherwise known as a tea room.
- It has been said that the tea ceremony may have originated in a room as Ginkaku-ji, where Yoshimasa offered tea to his friends.
- It is also believed that the art of flower arrangement developed along with the tea ceremony, enhancing the beauty of rooms with nature.
- The inclusion of a tea ceremony chamber in this temple may suggest a secularization in Japanese society during the Ashikaga period, or at least in the complex of Yoshimasa. Previously, it would have been very uncommon to designate secular spaces within a religious space.
- This also reflects the strong spiritual associations of the tea ceremony.



# A Social Context

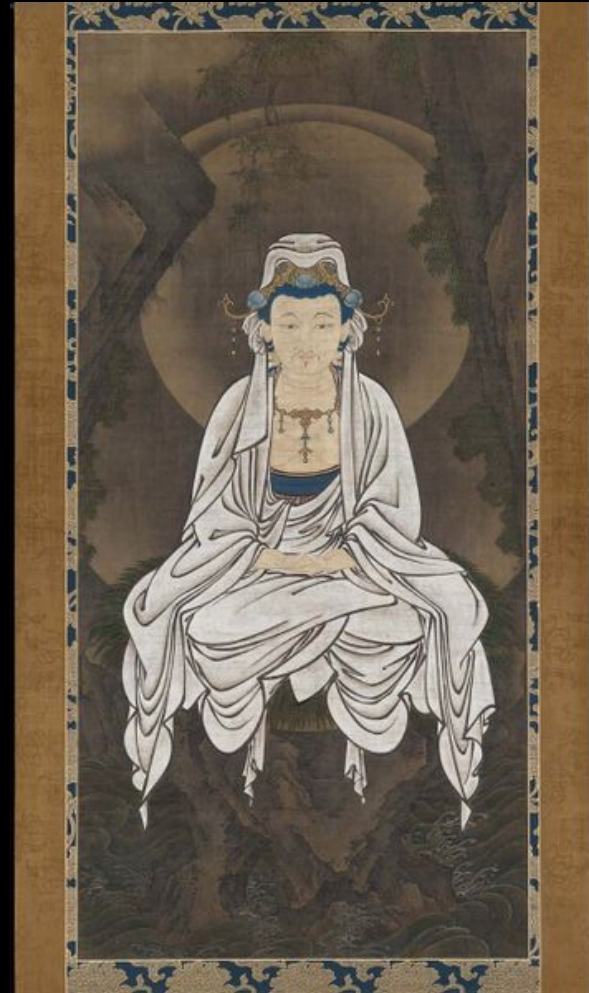
- It is noteworthy that such a beautiful construction came about during a time of such upheaval.
- In 1467 the Ōnin War broke out, and caused major destruction.
- Gardens such as this one offered a refuge, paradise, that was deeply connected to Zen, which was growing in Japan at the time.
- Mark Holborn writes, in the book *The Ocean in the Sand*, “It was the very violence that moved the artist to such purity, calm, and detachment.” p. 55



A rendering of Ashikaga  
Yoshimasa

# Part of a Greater Tradition

- The Silver Pavilion and Sand Garden Complex reflect both Japan's animistic traditions, and the Medieval Zen Buddhist period.
- Zen brought together animism and Buddhism in many different ways, including belief in many spirits/gods.
- Heavy emphasis on visuality and the design of one's surroundings, in conjunction with the underlying Zen philosophy of elements such as the sand garden, make this complex a unique lens through which to understand the progression of Japan's visual culture.



**Kannon, the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy.**

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