In the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor, on February 19, 1942 President Franklin D. Roosevelt authorized the relocation and internment of 120,000 Japanese who lived in California, Oregon, Washington and Arizona with Executive Order 9066. One-third of internees were Japanese who were not allowed to have citizenship, two-thirds of internees were Americans who were born in the United States. Until internment camps were constructed, 17,000 Japanese including children and seniors were forced to live in fifteen assembly centers for approximately six months. Relocation centers were built in 10 locations; Gila River, Granada, Heart Mountain, Jerome, Manzanar, Minidoka, Poston, Rohwer, Topaz, and Tule Lake in which from 8,000 to 18,000 American Japanese per camp were interned.

Until the 1970s, no detailed studies were conducted on the internment camps and most of camp facilities were demolished or decayed in the desert.

After being released, many internees moved from one place to another to start over. During this process, diaries, letters, and photographs were lost. In addition, since many internees have passed on, it is very difficult to find first hand documents from internees who built gardens in the camps.

However, since the 1970s, substantial research has been carried out on some camps, with the findings summarized in reports and other publications. Most notably, the National Park Service presented the history of the Manzanar Relocation Center in Cultural Landscape Report Manzanar Historic Site.

Multiple Japanese gardens were built in all ten internment camps. Japanese gardens in Manzanar Relocation Center have been called “Momoyama style gardens,” and summarized as “an important means for the expression of Japanese American cultural values within the regimented organization of the camp.” The question arises: why would internees facing such hardship due to their nationality decide to build gardens to express their culture? It is thus important to analyze the purpose and role of Japanese gardens in the internment camp to assess their value.

All ten internment camps in the continental United States were built in remote locations with harsh climactic conditions. The sites were fenced with barbed wire, and guarded. Shelter was a simple barracks, and its interior was divided by curtains into rooms of 16'x20' for four persons, 20'x20' for 6 person, and 20'x24' for 8 persons. When the first internees arrived, most of the barracks still did not have such basic facilities as toilets, showers, laundry room, dining hall, or multi-purpose room, and some camps lacked a school and hospital, and were without infra-structure such as sewers, electricity, and a reservoir system. We can sense the environment of the early internment camp in the description by Eddie Sakamoto; “At the beginning there, I felt like a prisoner because they had four watchtowers, and the soldiers with their guns, you know, was watching from on top of the tower. And anybody try to go out, not escaping, but try to go out, they shoot you, without giving warning. In camp, the future is uncertain.”

When the internees arrived at Manzanar, the barracks had unfinished walls and floors, a heating stove, a single hanging light bulb, and metal sleeping cots. Internees were given canvas bags, which they stuffed with straw to create mattresses. After the
arrival of internees, separate latrine buildings were built in each block by internees. There were eight toilets for men and 10 toilets for women, a shower room, however there were no stalls for privacy.\(^6\)

As a result, internees were forced to finish the camp buildings and infrastructure for themselves, construct new reservoirs, cultivate farmland and tend animals to supply their food. We can feel their disappointment and chagrin from the following poem by James Shinkai;

\[
\text{Out of the desert’s bosom,} \\
\text{Storm swept with wind and dust,} \\
\text{Out of smiles and curses,} \\
\text{Of tears and cries forlorn;} \\
\text{Mixed with broken laughter} \\
\text{Forced because they must;} \\
\text{Toil, sweat and bleeding wounds,} \\
\text{Red and raw and torn.} \\
\text{Out of the desert’s bosom} \\
\text{A new town is born.} \(^7\)
\]

**GARDEN CONSTRUCTION**

Internment is generally the confinement of people done by a government to police people and confiscate their assets. Japanese internment in the United States, however, was unique in that these camps confined people with American citizenship based only on their ethnic background. The camp gardens were also for viewing and living, not solely for food production.

Legal and social discrimination led many Japanese immigrants to work as farmers or laborers before WWII. Despite such pressures, many Japanese were successful in business, which increased anti-Japanese sentiment. Ironically, Japanese gardens became popular among wealthy Americans and they hired Japanese to construct Japanese gardens on their estates. Gardening became a popular occupation among Japanese in California. Reportedly, one-third of the Japanese living in California had gardening businesses by 1934. These Japanese gardeners formed the League of Southern California Japanese Gardeners in 1937, published a monthly journal “Gardener’s Friend” and provided technical support and legal advice.\(^8\) As a result, camps which confined Japanese from California had many professional gardeners.

Conditions and facilities in the camps varied. Administrators in Gila River, Granada, Manzanar, and

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7. Embrey, 1972, 44.
8. Helphand, p.158
Topaz supported garden construction and large scale gardens were made in these camps. Small ornamental Japanese gardens, however, were made in all. Poston is notable as the famous Japanese American sculptor Isamu Noguchi became the chief landscape planner.  

Most internees of Manzanar were from urban cities in California. Since most of these Japanese were professional gardeners for residential gardens, beautiful gardens were built in Manzanar. The landscape photographer Ansel Adams was so impressed with these gardens that he took many photographs of them. We can still observe the refined gardens from photographs and excavated ruins.

**MANZANAR RELOCATION CENTER**

Manzanar is in east-central California in the southern Owens Valley. Located west of U.S. Highway 395, it is 220 miles north of Los Angeles and 250 miles south of Reno, between the towns of Lone Pine and Independence. Today, it is a five hour drive from Los Angeles. Mount Williamson, the second highest peak in the Sierra Nevada at 14,375 feet, is ten miles southwest. Its mean annual precipitation is slightly less than five inches. Its climate is characterized by extreme temperature differences between summer and winter, low precipitation, and frequent sand storms.

Manzanar was selected for the first internment camp on March 5th, 1942, and started housing internees by the end of the same month. The total area of Manzanar was 6,000 acres but the residential area 550 acres received 9,666 Japanese by June 1942. By November 1945, when the camp was closed, 90% of Manzanar internees were from Los Angeles and the rest were from other parts of California. Manzanar internment camp was composed of 35 blocks with 14 barracks. The capacity of one block was approximately 200 people.

We were all sent to the camp by train. Windows of the train were all covered with black curtains not to show where we were heading. We arrived at a town called Lone Pine after many hours of train ride, and were packed into trucks and went to the camp. It was April when we arrived there. The construction of the camp was not finished. We even did not have glass in the window.

After WWII, Manzanar was abandoned and most of its structures were destroyed or relocated. After Manzanar became part of the National Park Service, the barbed wired fence was reconstructed along the original property line of the camp and the Manzanar Interpretive Center was built. Excavation of the barracks and other camp facilities began in 1992, and a model barrack building was constructed. Today, visitors can see photographs, furniture, dishes, and other items used in the camp.

**THE LANDSCAPE PROGRAM IN THE INTERNMENT CAMP**

Manzanar is known for sand storms. Because all ground cover and bushes were cleared for the construction of barracks, the problem of blowing sand was worsened as “sand mixed everywhere, even in clothing and food.”

By the end of April 1942, internees had cultivated 120 acres of farm land and constructed eight miles irrigation canal. Once the irrigation canal was completed, War Relocation Authority (WRA) made a landscape plan to mitigate the sand problem. Internees and WRA staff were encouraged to plant trees and grass. Subsequently, 21,000 trees and 25,000 shrubs and grass were planted by June 1942. The Manzanar Free Press reported the problem of sand had been greatly reduced after planting trees. Internees also made community gardens and private gardens in front of their barracks. On June 30th, Manzanar Free Press reported on an early Japanese garden with cactus constructed by William Katsuki:

> Among the center’s greatest attractions is the unique garden designed by William Katsuki, former Bel Air landscaper, in front of

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14. Wehrey, p.42
his home between buildings 5 and 6 in Block 24. The three large Joshua trees planted between the buildings, the six smaller trees along the west side of Bldg. 5, the four small lakes with numerous miniature bridges and the rock garden all combine to present an attractive sight to the passersby. Katsuki started to work on his garden on April 29 by carrying home rocks from all around the center. Later he borrowed a wheelbarrow to do the hauling. Then the neighbors helped him in getting a truck. The Joshua trees came from Death Valley, 65 miles away.

By July 1942, internees obtained permission to construct pond gardens because they helped to improve the environment. As a result, almost half of barracks in camp had gardens and 28 ponds were constructed.

SMALL JAPANESE GARDENS FOR INTERNEES

As internees completed unfinished barracks and cultivated farmland, they also planted trees, constructed community gardens, and ornamental gardens in the common space and around their barracks. Internees then received approval to build more substantial Japanese gardens in front of the hospital and the orphanage.

First, internees constructed a Japanese garden in front of the hospital building for patients, their families, and staff. The garden, located in front of the staff room so patients had easy access, was designed by Jintaro Ogami, with stones set by Ryozo Kado.16 Excavation revealed a small mound with a waterfall that fed the pond.

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Trees were planted along the stream to provide shade and children were allowed to play with the water. The pond's bottom was paved with concrete but the edge was framed with rocks. Concrete was molded, stained, and textured to look like tree limbs complete with wood grain.\textsuperscript{17}

Jintaro Ogami's son Arthur recalled that he spent most of his time constructing this garden.\textsuperscript{18} Ryozo Kado, who immigrated to the United States from Shizuoka prefecture in 1910, was a specialist in setting stone. He was responsible for the rock walls at the camp's front gate, the stairs, and terraces. Because it was difficult to find wood in the camp, Kado made the faux wood with colored concrete. Margaret Yoshida, who was 18 years old at that time, recalled that Kado was highly respected by internees as a leader of the garden construction efforts.\textsuperscript{19}

The WRA also approved Cherry Park, the garden in front of the orphanage between Block 23 and Block 29. There were 101 orphans in the orphanage. William Katsuki led the construction of Cherry Park for these children. Cherry Park has not been excavated. However, based on the remaining documents and photographs, it is known that there was a tea house, a wisteria trellis over the stream, and many cherry trees donated by Uyematsu who owned a nursery in Montebello, California.\textsuperscript{20} In both gardens, trees and rocks were brought from outside the camp.

Japanese gardens were constructed for dining halls. Most dining halls were not completed in the spring of 1942, and internees were made to wait in line outdoors. Internees proposed to build Japanese gardens to provide shade and relaxation for these people.

The garden in Block 22, excavated in 1993, was built under the direction of the second generation Japanese American, Harry Ueno, although most of the other Japanese gardens were built by first generation Japanese. Ueno was a leader of the Kitchen Workers' Union, and the central figure of the Manzanar riot after the completion of the garden in Block 22. On December 6, 1943, he led 1500 internees in protest against the WRA.\textsuperscript{21} Most were kibei, a term referring to second generation Japanese Americans sent to Japan for education in Japanese schools. When the relationship between the United States and Japan worsened, many kibei returned and their loyalty was questioned. Tension between the WRA and kibei internees caused the riot that killed two people and injured ten.

The garden in Block 22 was planned by such a leader of kibei, and constructed by more experienced gardeners Saburo Takemura, Akira Nishi, and Japanese working in the kitchen. The camp policy had a restriction of ordering only three sacks of cement at a time. Ueno successfully erased and forged paperwork, returning eight times, colleting three sacks each time, and acquired 24 sacks of cement for the garden. Ueno also collected many materials such as chicken wire for reinforcing concrete, carp and trout in garbage cans for the pool, old barrels, cart wheels, and a stump of cottonwood. Because the pond was constructed getting three bags of cement many times, this garden was called “Three Sacks Pond.”\textsuperscript{22}

Excavation revealed that the garden was 110' x 25' with no hill though a waterfall ran from the north side to the guitar shaped pond. The waterfall and the rock composition along the water were constructed by Takemura, a professional gardener in Los Angeles. A concrete bridge was built over the pond and there was an island with planting in the pond. Many trees were planted around the pond so that people could enjoy the view of the garden in the shade. Thus, Ueno, who had strong resentment against the treatment of internees, built the garden of Block 22 to provide a relief for people waiting for food in the intense heat. The guitar shaped pond was named as “Otowa pond.” Otowa is the name of waterfall in Kiyomizu temple in Kyoto, whose water is known for longevity.

After completion of the garden in Block 22, many gardens were built for other dining halls. Internees

\textsuperscript{17} Beckwith, Jan. 2008.
\textsuperscript{18} Burton, p.182
\textsuperscript{19} Goto, Kimi Margret Yoshida interview, 2009.
\textsuperscript{20} Helphand, p.186.
\textsuperscript{21} Tamura, p.17.
even had a reader’s poll for the best garden in the Manzanar Free Press in August 1943. The garden known as San-shi-en (three-four garden) was constructed by Kubota, Kayahara, and Murakami and completed on September 23rd, 1942 at Block 34. The excavation in 1999 found a stream on the north side with a pond in the south side. There was no hill in this garden but an island called Turtle Island was found in the pond area along with many trees that were planted around the pond for shade. The standing stones of the waterfall in the ruin somewhat resemble the dry waterfall in Daisen’in. In addition, a garden near Block 12 Mess Hall was excavated in 1996. This garden also had a waterfall and concrete-lined pond. The waterfall ran from a hill with a few locust trees for shade. There were a turtle island and a crane island, traditional elements symbolizing longevity.

**LARGE GARDENS**

In Manzanar, internees built not only many small gardens in each block, but also a large scale Japanese garden for all internees. This garden is called Merritt Park, located in the western firebreak, between Blocks 33 and 34, originally called Rose Park, then Pleasure Park, and then renamed in honor of Manzanar’s director Ralph P. Merritt. The garden was approximately three acres of land, 100’x160’, constructed by Kuichiro Nishi, Takio Muto and four other gardeners. A waterfall was composed with massive rocks from which water flows into the concrete lined pond, and then out along a stream. Water was supplied from pipes and the amount was controlled with a faucet built behind the waterfall. A big upright rock beside the waterfall may be a crane island, and there is a rock called turtle island in the pond. A stone bridge was built over the stream with two pointy rocks. At the edge of the pond, the 10’x10’ concrete foundation for a pavilion, called Tea House, still remains. Merritt Park was a large example of a hill-and-pond garden. Since Merritt Park was approved by WRA, all rocks were stabilized with concrete and the pond and stream were lined with a significant amount of cement. In addition, many massive stones were used, raising the question of how internees brought such large stones to the site.

The men who made the Merritt Park garden had diverse talents. For instance, Muto, who made the master plan, was a university educated floriculturist, which was unusual for a Japanese immigrant, and an expert in crossbreeding new cultivars of plants. Nishi had a large-scale nursery business. He was an expert nurseryman and landscape designer. His nursery was known for grafting, but the government suddenly shut down his business and sent him to the camp at Fort Missoula, Montana. His son Henry recalled: “Since we could not abandon our nursery, we rented our property to the government for a part of veteran’s institution located in the west of Los Angeles when

27. Ibid, p.123.
the war started. When we were interned, we donated all of our land to the government. We heard that the plants in the nursery were used for the landscape of veteran’s institution.  

After being confined in Missoula, Nishi joined his family in Manzanar in the fall of 1942. Nishi formed a gardener’s group with former gardeners and nursery owners and began the construction of Merritt Park. The Public Works Department paid $16-$19 per month to the construction team and provided materials. Nishi ordered more than twenty species of roses and 100 different kinds of flowers from his nursery. Internees were allowed to use WRA trucks to transport construction materials such as stones and plants. However, since the camp did not have a crane or a bulldozer, digging the pond and composing stone arrangements were done by hand.

Internees generally had few conversations with WRA staff, and WRA staff never joined the garden construction. Therefore, all construction was done by internees including driving the WRA truck. When they travelled outside the camp to collect garden stones, however, American soldiers drove the truck and watched the internees. After completing Merritt Park, Nishi and his group continued to work in the garden for maintenance and were paid by WRA. Henry Nishi described his father’s motivation: “I think my father decided to make the garden for internees. It was not for Americans or for leisure. In fact, we were prisoners. The garden was made for the prisoners in the camp.”

When the garden was completed, Nishi erected a memorial stone. The memorial still remains, however, the stele with Japanese writing placed next to the memorial was lost. Unfortunately, there is no photograph of the stele with readable resolution. Only an English translation remains: “To the memory of fellow Japanese immigrants who, although ushered to this place with the breaking of friendly relations between the two countries have come to enjoy this quiet, peaceful place.” The park was dedicated “for the enjoyment of the people and to the memory of the time of our residence here.”

Once the garden was completed, Merritt Park became the most photographed place at Manzanar. In the camp, internees were forced to sign the pledge of loyalty to the United States and young internees were encouraged to become soldiers. Many young internees volunteered to go to battle. Consequently, the Japanese garden in Merritt Park became the photographic place not only for weddings but also for young Japanese American soldiers leaving for battle.

Among Japanese gardens in Manzanar, the following are gardens whose gardeners are known:

- Block 4: Mokutaro (Mark) Nishimura, Chotaro Nishimura
- Block 6: Ryozo Kado
- Block 9: Ryozo Kado
- Block 22: Harry Ueno, Saburo (George) Takemura, Akira Nishi
- Block 34: George Murakami, Goichi (George) Kubota, Seiichi Kayahara
- Hospital Garden: Ryozo Kado, Nintaro Ogami, Bunyemon Wada
- Cherry park: Manjiro (William) Katsuki
- Merritt Park: Kuichiro Nishi, Takio Muto

THE ROLE OF JAPANESE GARDENS IN THE INTERNMENT CAMPS

During three years of internment, 150 internees died in Manzanar, which is 1.5% of the entire internee population. Considering the harsh weather, the poor living conditions and the high population density, the death rate was extremely low.

According to WRA policy, all meetings and publications at the camps had to be in English. Japanese was spoken only in the privacy of the barracks. Although using Japanese language in the camp was restricted, internees practiced many cultural activities, including ikebana (Japanese flower arrangement), kendo (Japanese fencing), and haiku (Japanese poem). These activities helped to ameliorate internees’ sense of despair.

It is notable that internees were allowed to search for boulders and plants outside of the camp. They

29. Ibid.
went out so often that local people became upset. An article in the Inyo Independent newspaper asked:

And why is it Mr. Nash [WRA administration official], that a truck laden with Japanese can go almost a hundred miles round trip from Manzanar to near Darwin to secure two Joshua tree for use in adorning a rock garden being built at Manzanar. And here we are joining with the nation in a scrap rubber drive to secure rubber to keep the needed wheels of our nation moving.33

Although Japanese were confined as the result of anti-Japanese sentiment, many of the Americans who oversaw these interned Japanese felt pride with the beautification of the camps. Arthur Kleinkopf, the education superintendent at Minidoka, described Japanese gardens in that Idaho camp in his diary 1942-1946:34 “Had Mark Twain been here he might want to re-write his description of the sagebrush. It has been transplanted to many rock gardens around the barracks together with moss, cactus, and desert grass. It adds much to the artistic beauty.”

In Sakuteiki, (or Records of Garden Making), Japan’s first treatise on gardening, the first principle of design is “to reflect on one’s memory of nature in accord with the existing land.”35 In this vein, the gardens at Manzanar borrowed the mountain scenery in the distance, and used the local rocks and plants. Most Japanese gardens in the US built before WWII were designed either to introduce exotic Japanese culture or to represent the wealth of the owner. In such gardens, imported garden elements were displayed as a showcase. To the contrary, gardens in Manzanar were built with limited materials found on site. In all likelihood, they were constructed closer to the principles of Sakuteiki than were any other Japanese gardens in the United States. Ansel Adams, who photographed the camp in 1943, commented on Japanese gardens in the desert: “I believe that the arid splendor of the desert, ringed with towering mountains, has strengthened the spirit of the people of Manzanar. From the harsh soil they have extracted fine crops; they have made gardens glow in the firebreaks and between barracks.”36

Why, then, did these Japanese make Japanese gardens in the camps? If the purpose was to create shade and ponds, they could have just as well constructed western gardens. When being Japanese itself was suspect and Japanese were confined in these remote places, why did they still build Japanese gardens? We can see an answer in Arthur Ogami’s words when he was a twenty-three year old man living in the camp: “I think the gardens express that just because we’re here, we have to do something to refresh our feelings. I think that the garden is something that they want to express that there is hope for peace and freedom. And you can go to these gardens and feel it.”37

Japanese immigrants established their life in the harsh racial discrimination in the United States. Due to their nationality, they were suddenly deprived of their property and jobs, and confined in a camp. No one knew when they would be released, or if they would be released, or how they would be treated if released. The sense of despair and anxiety probably promoted nostalgia and desire for attachment to their original home country, Japan. Their pride as Japanese and love of their culture caused them to build Japanese gardens in the camps. Internees identified the beautiful landscapes they created with Mount Fuji or Otowa Falls, or with Crane Island and Turtle Island, representing longevity and hope.

A poem by one internee describes the garden as a metaphor:

In the desert, a garden,
Alive
Spring has come again.
In the garden in the desert
A stream
Water from winter’s melted snow.
I put my hand in the flowing water,
And feel winter’s melted teas between my fingers.

32. Helphand, p.192.
33. Tamura, p.16.
34. Kleinkopf, ”Relocation Center Diary,” 21 June 1942.
35. Tamura, pp.177-180.
36. Helphand, p.179.
In the garden in the desert,
A young pine tree grows.
My son …

One of the practical functions of constructing gardens was to create space in which to protect children from the intense heat. More importantly, however, how could parents change the sizzling hell into a paradise? How would these young children, the second generation born as Americans, live in the camp and then survive in the United States? Construction of Japanese gardens was one of the answers. Indeed, however miserable the heat and dust of Manzanar, many internees who were young in the camp recall their experience happily. Kimi Yoshida, who was in Manzanar from age 18 to 22, described camp life as follows:

Manzanar was so hot in the first year. We had constant sand storms. The room was full of sand when we woke up in the morning. When we went out to wash faces, our faces got dirtier by the time we came back because sand blasted on our wet face. Outside was hot but we spent most of day outside because inside was hotter. However, as many trees were planted, the sand problem got much better by the second year. It was so beautiful with many gardens and parks. Children were allowed to play with the

38. Helphand, p.199.
water of the garden. We did fishing, picnic, baseball every day. It was like a long vacation.39

Whatever the conflicting realities of camp life, in Kimi Yoshida’s memory, there was not the image of barbed wire and watch towers, but rather gardens with beautiful water streams.

Although, Merritt Park has been compared to a large, Momoyama-era stroll garden with its abundant water; unlike Momoyama era gardens, Merritt Park was not composed of rare stones to show the power of military lords. Perhaps they are better called gardens of Showa period, built with untraditional materials. As Japanese, internees needed the symbolism of Japanese garden to express their desire for “peace and freedom.” They were gardens created in a desert with local materials using traditional Japanese gardening techniques to represent the landscape of Japan and the promise of longevity. The gardens in the internment camps offered hope and joy to viewers, whether internees or the American staff.

CONCLUSION

In 1972, Manzanar became a historic site of California and in 1985 it became national historic site. In 1988, President Ronald Regan admitted the unfairness of the internment decision, and later President George W. Bush publicly apologized for the internment. Since then, excavation surveys are being conducted annually in June with volunteers, including family and friends of internees. The National Park Service also is collecting interviews of survivors and copies of documents scattered throughout the country.

Although much progress has been made, much work remains. For instance, most gardens were built by first generation immigrants whose diaries and notes were written in Japanese. Thus, research into these Japanese documents is needed by persons who read Japanese. Another issue is the resetting and interpretation of stones uncovered in excavations, but not shown in old photographs. Collaboration between American and Japanese researchers will help determine how internees constructed the gardens with limited tools and materials, and what the gardens looked like. And, when we discover why Americans could feel pride in Japanese gardens at the same time they trained their weapons on interned persons of Japanese descent, we will answer one more question about the role of Japanese gardens in the United States.