

The Daijoin Temple Garden: Historical Background

Originally established at a different site in 1087, the Daijoin Temple was moved to its present location, after the first structure burned to the ground in a civil war in 1180. The collection of objects on display at the Heritage Center includes important artifacts from Daijoin and its priests, as well as a model reconstruction of the temple and garden.

One of the temple's most celebrated leaders was Jinson (1430–1508), Daijoin's twentieth chief priest. The son of Ichijo Kanera (1402–1481), chief advisor to the emperor, Jinson served as a priest of Daijoin for seventy years. His diary, known as *Jishazojiki*, is one of the most important sources of information about the temple and its history. Temple historians believe that it was Jinson who entrusted the famous landscape designer Zen'ami with the restoration of the temple garden after it burned in 1451. Thereafter, Daijoin and its garden became so famous for their beauty that high-ranking members of the ruling samurai class, including Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa (1436–1490), visited not only to pray, but also to see the temple and its grounds. The portrait of Jinson on display in the Heritage Center made during the last years of his life depicts the priest holding a string of prayer beads in his left hand and a folding fan in his right.

The scale model at the center of the room depicts the temple of Daijoin and its famous garden as it appeared in 1463, after the restoration by Zen'ami. Historical paintings of Daijoin, as well as the diaries and personal records of its priests, allowed historians to construct this model even though the temple buildings had disappeared over a century before. Period paintings reveal that the buildings' architecture harmonized beautifully with the nearby pond and surrounding landscape. There have been other buildings not included in this model in the garden over its history. For example, the garden once contained a famous tea house, Hassoan. Originally situated near the pond, it was moved to the grounds of the Nara National Museum in 1892.

The garden outside the Heritage Center is the only remaining example of Zen'ami's work, which makes it extremely important in Japanese gardening history. In 1958, the Japanese government designated this garden, including the pond and approximately 3,000 square meters of the surrounding grounds, as a "National Place of Scenic Beauty," guaranteeing its preservation for future generations to enjoy.

Although many of the temple's treasures were damaged during a fire in 1451, the Heritage Center collection contains several works of art from Daijoin, including historical paintings of the building and a sketch of the garden showing the pond and the island at its center. These precious items, along with others inherited from the nearby Buddhist temple of Kofukuji that was affiliated with Daijoin at the time, are also important examples of Japanese art from the Muromachi period (1336–1573).