

Comparative Study of Oddly Shaped Stones from 3 Countries of the Northeast Asia

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I. Introduction

Oddly shaped stones are strangely shaped stones, which are arranged in Royal palaces and private houses for viewing for the admiration, with various kinds of symbolic meanings. Unlike Korea and China, in Japan, the stones are called an accumulated mountain, which is not considered as an individual stone, but as a group(組) with a symbolic meaning, when natural stones are arranged. In China, oddly shaped stones represent nature, and also indicate oneness of heaven and humans. In addition, they represent three heavenly mountains(三神山) which desire for perennial youth and long life of a Taoist hermit with supernatural powers in Taoism. In Japan, they represent Xumi mountain in Buddhism, three stones representing three Buddhist saints(三尊石), Penglai mountain(蓬萊山), a crane and a turtle as symbols of perennial youth and long life.

These kinds of symbols about nature in Taoism and three



Figure 1. Oddly shaped stone at an Ami mountain garden in Kyeongbok palace (景福宮 峨嵋山 庭園)



Figure 2. Ryeong stone of banddae of wondae at Ueohwawon in Forbidden City(紫禁城 御花園 元代 方台 英石)

heavenly mountains are common in three countries in the northeast Asia.

In China, the history of admiring strangely shaped stones (奇石) can approximately go back to Qin and Han(秦漢) dynasties, and the oddly shaped stones in the Royal palaces emerged at the time of the six Royal Court(六朝), were flourished at that time, grew prosperous at the time of Song dynasty, got developed for both Ming and Qing Dynasties, and become comprehensive. From Song dynasty, they have started to be developed different from both oddly shaped stones of literary men and oddly shaped stones in a garden with the unique style. In the case of those in Korea, there are stones similar to oddly shaped stones in main road of Anap pond from the time of unified Shilla, and a number of oddly shaped stones have been preserved and descended in the Royal palaces from Choseon dynasty up to now. According to the Annals of the Choseon dynasty, under the rule of King Yeonsan, people were indulged in luxury of oddly shaped stones, under the rule of King Sukjong, it was very popular to carve stones and sculpture an aloeswood by imitating the shape of an oddly shaped stone, as the craftsmen were staying in the garden of the royal palace, and it has been recorded in a document that some people have been even punished for enjoying oddly shaped stones.

II. Oddly Shaped Stones in the Palaces of Korea, China and Japan

1. Type

Among oddly shaped stones in China, Taihu stone(太湖石) is most well-known, and Lingbi stone(靈璧石), Ying stone(英石), Sun stone(笋石), Mubian stone(木變石), Coral stone(珊瑚石), Stalactite(鍾乳石) and Kun stone(昆石) are also

included.

2. Footstone(臺石)

The footstone is the foundation(底座) on which the stone table is laid, in order to separate the stone table from the ground or the surroundings, so that the footstone is uniquely and aesthetically presented, leading to the better viewing with admiration of the stone table. In China, there are five kinds of them. Namely, one of them is standardized Xumi podium, of which size of a quarter of the whole, of which shape is mainly a rectangle, of which edges are a hexagon, a octagon and a circle, the support part is long and diminutive without an established shape. Besides, Xumi podium has been transformed, and Gaochun(高椿) Complex type is applied to a small the stone table of which upper part is a stone tomb, the lower part is a pedestal(臺座), and the middle part is a column(柱狀). In addition, in a stage(壇), the plants and the stone table are together planted in a stone stage(石(磚)壇),



Figure 3. Taeho stone of Jeonhwadae at Ueohwawon in Forbidden City(紫禁城 御花园 砖花台 太湖石)

and another pedestals with different kinds of type are either a rectangle or an oval, mostly using natural raw ore.

The footstone of a royal palace from Choseon dynasty is a simple type of a stone tomb, which is either formed as a square, a rectangle, a hexagon or a octagon, cutting off the edges, or directly planted on the ground without a stone tomb. The body of a stone tomb is either carved with the letters of small Yingzhou(小瀛洲) island, which is one of three heavenly mountains(三神山), or the patters of flowers or goblins.

In Japan, pedestal stones are not used, but natural stones are directly arranged on the ground.

3. Features

In China, people say that the features of oddly shaped stones of the royal palaces are to be expressed that you can take the spirit when you look out from a distance, while you can take the quality when you look out close to them (遠望以取其勢, 近看以取其質)(linquan gaozhi(林泉高致) written by Guo xi(郭熙) from Song(宋) dynasty).

The oddly shaped stones of the royal palaces have mysterious and prominent features of nature mixed with viewing for aesthetic admiration, and their main ways of representation are the shape, the surface, the color and the quality. The shape has three features, first, that of the absolute majority of oddly shaped stones is strangely and oddly shaped in hundreds and thousands ways(千奇百怪), and standing erect, which gives strong movement as it is not lying at an angle(橫臥) but standing erect. Second, it looks similar to either animals or plants, and does not stand as a symbol for a specific shape. Strangely and oddly shaped form(奇形怪狀) in a natural condition is valued much, so that too much of artificial touch or vulgar understanding should be avoided. Third, the most perfect and beautiful shape in a traditional way is what we can see from all four directions. The size is about 1m, and it is closely related with it location and the size of a space. The features of the surface of oddly shaped stones are originated from their natural patterns. The complexion(顏色) of oddly shaped stones in the Royal palace has much more diversity than those in private houses. Many of them appear grey, while the rest are mixed with black, brown, blue, red, yellow and white. The complexion(顏色) of strangely shaped stones(奇石) are mainly caused by the patterns of stones and rocks. Most of oddly shaped stones at the Royal palaces are



Figure 4. "Kunrun" stone on mountain-shaped footstone at Baita mountain in the royal garden made in the middle of Qing dynasty(西苑 白塔山 清中期 山形座 '昆崙'石)



Figure 5. Lingbi stone on Xumi footstone at a ten thousand buddha building in the royal garden, made and transformed in the late of Qing dynasty (西苑 万佛楼 清末期 变体 须弥座 灵璧石)



Figure 6. Ying stone sitting together of a square-shaped tomb at Ewayuan in Forbidden City made in the middle of Ming dynasty(紫禁城 御花园 明中期 方盆合座英石)



Figure 7. Transformed wood stone with complex sittings of a circle shaped tomb at Ewa yuan in Forbidden City in the middle of Qing dynasty(紫禁城 御花园 清中期 圆盆复合座木变石)

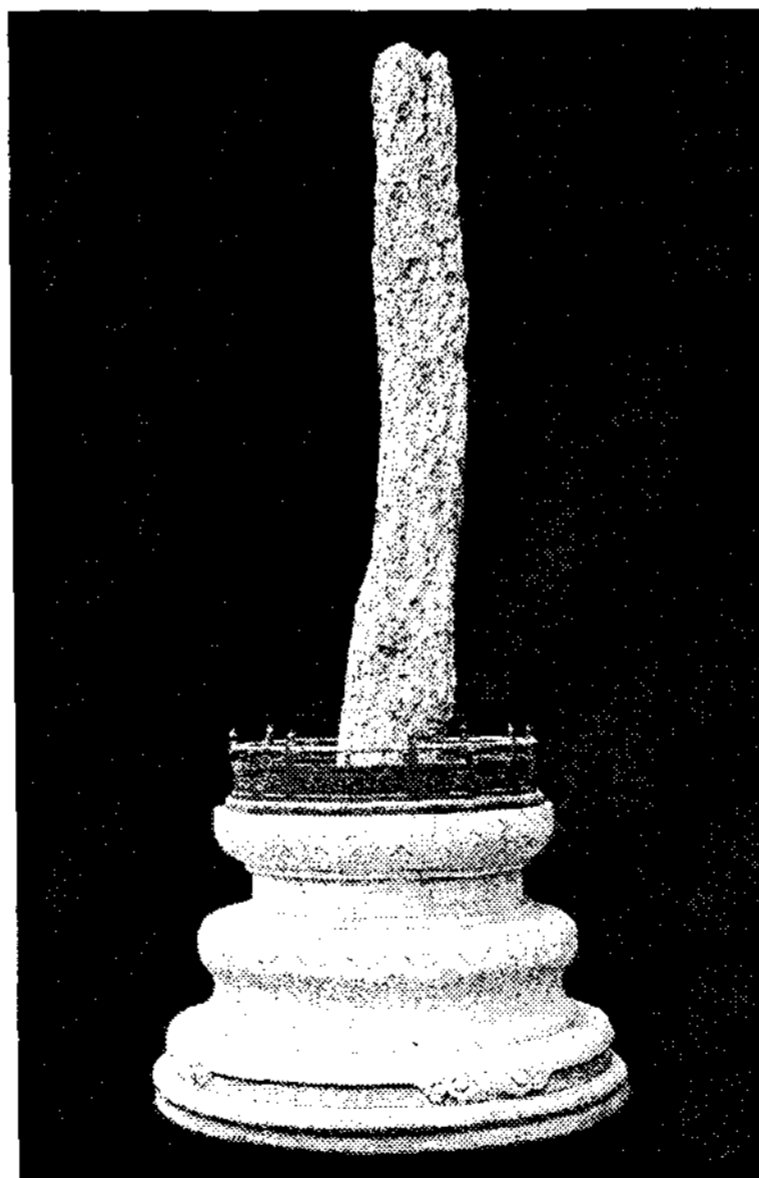


Figure 8. Sprout stone with a bowl-like pad of a flower garden at a Ningshou palace in Forbidden City in the middle of Qing dynasty(紫禁城 宁寿宫 花园 清中期 器座式 笋石)

worn away, and their colors are washed out by weathering for a long time. Oddly shaped stones have the solid and firm foundations, and the three most significant stones for viewing with admiration, such as Taihu stone, Lingbi stone and Ying

stone, are all limestones with the very solid foundations.

Slim(瘦) wrinkled(皴) exposed(露) transparent(透), that is, transparent(透) wrinkled(浚) excellent(秀) slim(瘦) (with holes, wrinkles on the surfaces of stones, the scent of stylish dignity,

slim body, and sharp edges), presented by Mifu(米芾) from Song dynasty are the aesthetic standards of the shapes and representations of oddly shaped stones from Song dynasty, which has significantly affected on strangely shaped stone (strangely shaped stone(奇石)) art in the next generations in China.

Oddly shaped stones of a palace from Choseon dynasty have taken the natural shapes capturing the uniqueness of stones, including strange(奇怪) animals and nature, like in China. The size of them is about 1m, which seems like famous stones that are collected from all over the country.

It is recorded in Choseon anthology publication that oddly shaped stones at private houses in Korea have been admired by noble families.

Oddly shaped stones at private houses symbolize Penglai mountain, which is one of three heavenly mountains who aspire after perennial youth and long life in Taoism, designed to heal a fatal disease of excessively loving the nature, and arranged to be admired by people who have made a tour over a number of mountains in their youth, while have become enough to 'lie down to enjoy oddly shaped stones' in their houses in old age.

The shape is odd with many holes all over the stones, ha-

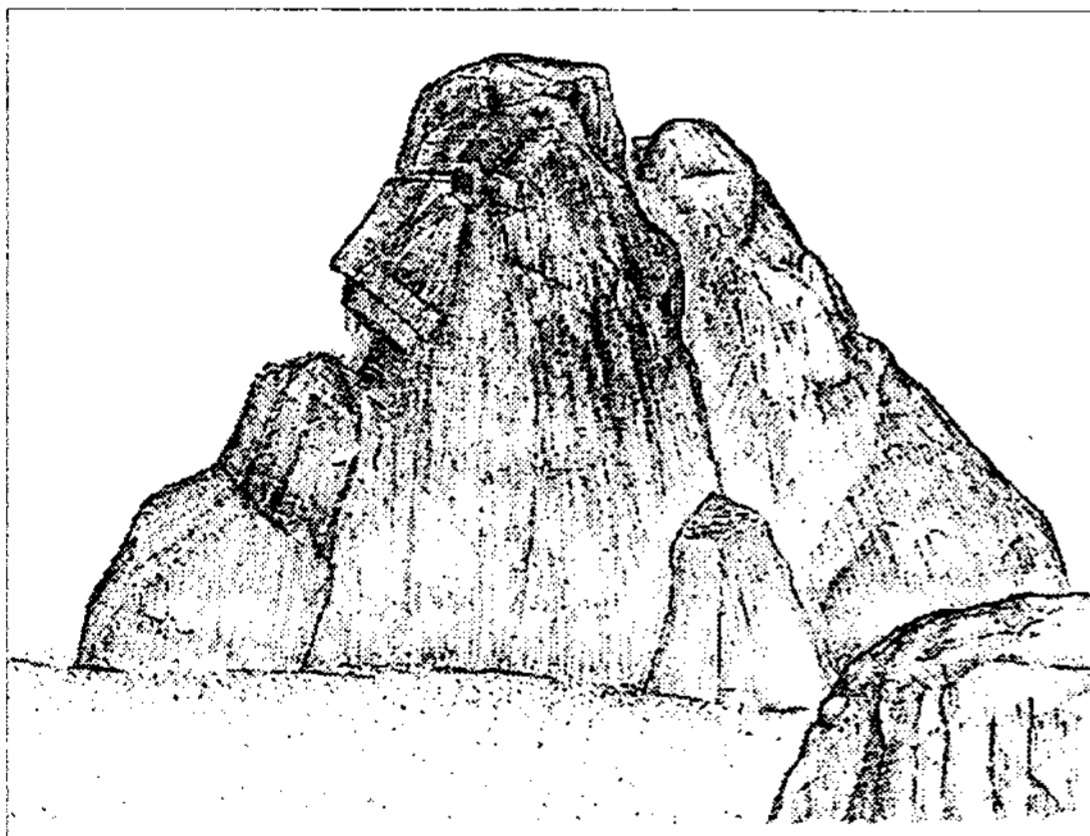


Figure 9. Stone construction of Xumi mountain at Erinji temple (惠林寺) at the time of Kamakura(鎌倉) in Japan

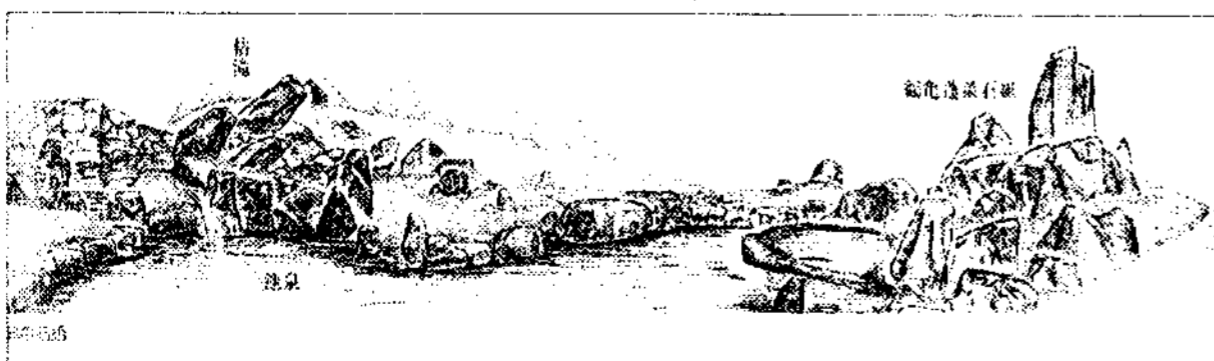


Figure 10. Stone construction at a Yeumjwa main temple(旧座主院) garden at the time of Momoyama(桃山) in Japan

ving many numbers of peaks and cliffs on an oddly shaped stone with green moss and one lump of an oddly shaped stone, hills and valleys, filled with heavy fog(smoke for a incense burner), and a pine tree, which is actually small, and pine and stone on an oddly shaped stone show off their bottomless spirit, rising from the shape of the oddly shaped stone. Sometimes, a chrysanthemum can be planted. Oddly shaped stones are to be put under the pond, on the bottom of pottery filled with water, and in a bowl. As it is in water, moisture will be formed, and it seems that fog will go up from the holes of an oddly shaped stone. It has everything to look like a mountain, even though it is small. It can be looked like a dragon, a tiger, a bird, a crawling animal, an old man or woman, the stump of a tree, with peaks and valleys, the mountain peaks layer upon layer, which are either pointed or odd and strange, some valleys with a hiding tiger, and sometimes it is supported by the stump of a tree for the foundation. Oddly shaped stones made of sharp and slim rocks are more fond of that thick and stumpy rocks.

Looking at the peaks of oddly shaped stone mountains, I prepare myself for far-reaching fantastic idea, and clam myself while watching the sharp edges. In addition, I am determined to polish virtue and humanity, when I look at their vigorous and highly risen shapes.

It is the same as a huge and real mountain in the eyes of a master, as there are nothing right or wrong, big and small, even though it is a small and fake mountain.

4. Function and Arrangement

Oddly shaped stones of a palace are mostly arranged in the gardens(苑) of palaces in both Korea and China, and also by the facades of main Royal palaces .

The shapes, pedestal stones and the arrangement of oddly shaped stones can be roughly seen on Donggwaldo, which is a picture of Changdeok palace and Changkyeong palace from Choseon dynasty. Oddly shaped stones are mostly arranged by the facade of a Royal palace, and in the backyard(後苑). However, most of the oddly shaped stones of the palace, which had been pictured on the Donggwaldo, have been lost, so that the number of the remains is minimum.

Oddly shaped stones of Japan are piled up like a mountain as a group(組), arranged either on islands at a lotus pond in a garden or around them, and are also arranged on the bottom of sand in a garden without any plant or water.

III. Conclusion

As Korea, China and Japan are included in the cultural area of the Northeast Asia, there are things in common by

the cultural negotiation(交渉) among them. This can be demonstrated in oddly shaped stones in the palaces and private houses of three countries, which symbolize nature and three heavenly mountains in Taoism.