
Wisteria in Japonism

SAWADA Kazuto

During the period when Japonisme was flourishing, Japanese arts and crafts produced for the Western market frequently used wisteria as a motif. In this paper, I have identified the factors that contributed to this trend.

There are two types of wisteria used in horticulture: Sinafuji (*Wisteria sinensis*), which is native to China, and Nodafuji (*Wisteria floribunda*), which is native to Japan. The Sinafuji was introduced to the West earlier than the Nodafuji, and was more widely spread. The nodafuji, first introduced to the West by Philipp Franz von Siebold, attracted attention for a time at the end of the 19th century when it showed its original characteristics thanks to the appearance of fully grown trees over time. However, a reversal of the highs and lows of diffusion between Sinafuji and Nodafuji has not occurred to this day.

Nevertheless, wisteria became a flower that evoked images of Japan, not China, due to the fact that it was not only one of the most indispensable flowers in the “kingdom of flowers” Japan, but was even considered by Westerners as a representative of beautiful Japanese flowers. More importantly, the precincts of Kameido Tenjin, known for its wisteria, became so popular that Westerners sought the ideal Japanese garden there. It became almost the norm for Japanese gardens in the West, so much so that they were considered incomplete without wisteria.

I believe that this recognition of the inseparability of the Japanese garden and the wisteria contributed to the formation of the image of the wisteria as a symbolic flower of Japan, and thus created a strong link between Japonisme and the wisteria.

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