The End of the World as They Knew It: Architectural History And Modern Japan

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> "So how does all of this have anything to do with the world ending?" An innocent question.
>
> "Accurately speaking, it isn't this world. It's the world in your mind that's going to end."
>
> "You've lost me," I said.
>
> Haruki Murakami,
>
> *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*

Contemporary architectural visions of Japan stray between antipodes of stasis and ephemerality. At one pole are depictions of the post-millennial city without history, for instance the dystopias of anime films such as Ôtomo Katsuhiro's Akira or the transient images that flash across Tokyo's giant video screens. Murakami Haruki, Japan's most renowned contemporary writer, creates realms separate from history and conventional time, such as the world within the mind of the protagonist in Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World.

At the other pole are stereotypes of traditional Japanese buildings and gardens, which are often seen as products of an ancient and timeless culture. In either vision, time and history in Japan appear to differ from American and Western European norms. Both tableaus suggest a lack of the teleological narrative that has formed the basis of the typical architectural history survey in the United States. To examine the question of the "end of architectural history" in Japan is thus to step outside the Western tradition to see how one influential architectural culture has imagined time and history in the modern age.

Between 1850 and 1950, Japan experienced two endings to architectural history. These endings were seen both as ends to a historical period and as ends to a particular mode of architectural history. The first shift occurred in the middle of the nineteenth century with the aggressive adaptation of Western concepts of architecture and history. The second began at the end of WWII with the destruction of cities and the discrediting of imperial ideology and continues to shape contemporary visions of history. Sandwiched between these two watersheds was the development of architectural history as a field, as well as the maturation of the modern field of architecture in Japan.

In Japan, the field of architectural history developed in tandem with concepts of modern architecture on one hand and historical preservation on the other. Through the mid-nineteenth century, there was no field of architectural history in the European sense; only during the Meiji period (1868-1912), when Japan attempted large-scale modernization and Westernization, did European modes of architectural history take root. However, in Japan architectural history stemmed from a unique set of motives and precedents. To examine the development of architectural history during the Meiji period first requires a glance at Japanese perceptions of historical architecture during the mid-nineteenth century.

THE END OF HISTORY CIRCA 1868

The Meiji Restoration of 1868 marked the political transition from the early modern period (ca. 1600-1868) to modern Japan. In the following years, the Meiji state emphasized the development of modern technical, social, and political institutions. Although the state had little explicit interest in historical architecture, its early policies show carryovers of earlier perspectives on the role of historical architecture. Through the 1860s, there was little interest in buildings as physical objects

to be preserved. For instance, the first preservation regulations in Japan, the 1871 Koki kyûbutsu hozonhô (Ancient objects and articles preservation law), targeted thirty-one categories of objects at Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples but did not include buildings themselves. Three years later, the government stopped funding Buddhist temples and began to allocate to Shinto shrines monies for construction, maintenance and other expenses. However, as the historian Nishimura Yukio has noted, the basic aim of these policies was to guarantee the health of the shrines as institutions rather than to preserve buildings per se.[1] In other words, buildings continued to be seen as settings for institutions and objects rather than as historical objects themselves.

This perspective was rooted in the historical relationships among painting, architecture and sculpture. In contrast to post-Renaissance Europe, in Japan buildings were seen as qualitatively different from objects such as paintings, sculptures, ceramics and other objects produced by skilled craftsmen and artists. With a few exceptions, buildings were generally designed and constructed by master builders who had little connection with painters, potters, and other artists. Thus although Japan boasted a long history of connoisseurship in the arts, architecture itself was not part of the same discourses of collection, interpretation and evaluation. Moreover, since monumental buildings in Japan were constructed from wood, no building of great age retained all of its original material—the periodic replacement of tiles, timbers and other damaged elements ensured that buildings were continually modified. For this reason, buildings tended to be seen as objects of the present as well as creations of the past.

After 1868, though, these perspectives on historical architecture would change as the government pursued modern Western engineering and architecture. For example, in the fourth of five articles in the 1868 Charter Oath, the Meiji emperor pledged, "evil practices of the past shall be abandoned, and actions shall be based on international usage." Although the state and emperor took relatively little interest in the buildings of the past, their sponsorship of modern technology led to new paradigms of architecture based indeed on modern Europe rather than on historical Japan. For the next two decades, traditional Japanese buildings would take only a minor place in the world of official institutional architecture. Moreover, the indigenous understandings of the buildings of the past also would come to an end as Western-influenced theories of architecture became dominant. In these ways the Meiji Restoration of 1868 marked the beginning of the end for traditional understandings of historical buildings, and thus the end of one kind of architectural history.

MODERN ARCHITECTURE AND HISTORY

In 1877, the Japanese government hired Josiah Conder, a young English architect, to teach architecture at the Imperial College of Engineering (ICE). This university, the first modern technical college in Japan, was founded in 1873 to educate Japanese engineers, scientists and architects. Although the ICE emphasized pragmatic subjects, Conder taught architecture through architectural history. Like other British architects of the day, he believed that historical precedents served as the basis for modern design. To teach architecture, then, meant to inculcate the history of architecture into the Japanese students. In other words, architectural history entered Japan as part of the desire to modernize. Because architectural history was tied to European architecture, and because European architecture was seen as the modern model to emulate, the future of Japanese architecture was tied to the European past. The buildings of the Western past became an integral component of the architecture of the Japanese future.

Because of his belief in history as the basis of architecture, Conder hoped that the history of Japan also would be incorporated into modern architecture in Japan. In describing the architecture course at ICE, he wrote, "great notice will be taken of the principles and beauties of the Architecture of the Country, with a view to encourage the retention of the best characteristics of the National Architecture in future building, so far as is consistent with stability and security of construction, and with all modern requirements."[2] However, both the methodology and specific buildings of the architectural history familiar to Conder were derived from the nineteenth-century European context and thus had little to do with the buildings of Japan. For instance, James Fergusson's *A History of Architecture* and Alfred Rosengarten's *A Handbook of Architectural Styles*, the two textbooks used by the Japanese

students, included no buildings from Japan. Moreover, although Fergusson included examples from China, these buildings were placed outside the major narrative of his architectural history.

Nonetheless, many of the students attempted to address the question of historical Japanese buildings. These students, the first of whom graduated in 1879, were the first Japanese trained in Western modes of architecture and became the most influential architects in late-nineteenth century Japan. Several students attempted to outline the development of Japanese buildings in their graduation theses. For instance, Kuru Masamichi, an 1881 graduate, titled his thesis "History and Theory of Japanese Architecture," but noted that the lack of systematic works on the subject made research difficult. Even as they attempted to uncover the roots of Japanese architecture, Kuru and his colleagues drew their methodology of architectural history from Conder, Fergusson and Rosengarten. From these figures the Japanese students adopted an evolutionary model of architectural form and decoration that posited climate and customs as architectural determinants.

In this way, the beginnings of architectural history in Japan were tied to both the Western tradition and to historical Japanese buildings. However, because the standard model of architectural evolution assumed a linear chronological development, Japanese buildings could not fit into the Western model: Japanese architecture had no place in the progression that began with Egypt and continued through Greece, Rome and Western Europe. Japan thus lay outside the fundamental narrative of architectural history, and the prevalence of this Western model was one reason for the difficulties in establishing architectural history in Japan. Another reason was simply the lack of related scholarly fields. In Europe, architectural history had developed along with art history and archaeology, but in the technology-oriented Japan of the 1870s, these latter disciplines as yet had no place.

TOWARDS A NEW ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

In the 1880s, two sets of developments furthered the maturation of architectural history in Japan. First, in 1882 the Meiji government began to sponsor surveys of historical art objects. The two most renowned figures were Okakura Kakuzô, later famous outside Japan as an exponent of the Japanese tea ceremony, and the American Ernest Fenollosa. In 1888, the Imperial Household Ministry (Kunaishô) established the Rinji zenkoku hômotsu torishirabekyoku (Extraordinary department for the national investigation of treasures). This action was the culmination of efforts by Okakura and others to create a comprehensive national inventory, and over the next decade this agency catalogued over 215,000 items. Architecture, though, played only a minor role in this newfound interest in the Japanese past. For instance, when Fenollosa unveiled the famous Guze Kannon statue in the east precinct of Hôryûji in Nara, he had little interest in the Yumedono, or "dream hall," that housed it. Fenollosa, who had become the non-Japanese spokesman for traditional Japanese art, viewed paintings, sculptures and other objects within a framework of connoisseurship, a perspective ill-suited to architecture. (In fact, the Yumedono is inarguably one of the most important early Buddhist artifacts in Japan. Constructed in 739, it is one of the oldest wooden buildings in the world and part of the most complete early Buddhist complex in Japan.)

The other major development in the nascent field of architectural history was the introduction of traditional Japanese architecture into the education of architects. At the Imperial University (Teikoku Daigaku), the master builder Kigo Kiyoyoshi began teaching courses in Japanese architecture in 1889 (by this time Tatsuno Kingo had replaced his mentor Josiah Conder as professor of architecture).[3] Although Kigo was not a historian, he was trained as part of a long lineage of elite builders who designed and constructed buildings in conventional Japanese modes. Through Kigo, students at ICE who previously had been exposed only to Western modes of architecture learned alternative ways of planning and building.

Kigo also conducted surveys of historical architecture for the government.[4] For Kigo, though, the distinction between historical and contemporary buildings was artificial; his knowledge of contemporary design and construction derived from traditional Japanese structures. For earlier architecture students, such as Tatsuno Kingo and Kuru Masamichi, who were trained in contemporary Western architecture, traditional Japanese build-

ings had appeared as relics of the past. For Kigo, though, these buildings suggested a different kind of history, one that remained alive through the continuity of construction and design techniques. Kigo's classes at the university and his work for the Meiji government made him the crucial link between the realm of traditional building practices and the official world of Westernized architecture. It was in this gap between the two that architectural history in Japan matured.

By 1890, then, government interest in historical art and official support of traditional Japanese architecture began to create a context in which historical Japanese buildings could be seen as worthy analogues of works from the Western tradition. In the following decades, the crucial figure in the establishment of architectural history as a field was Itô Chûta.

ITÔ CHÛTA AND THE CREATION OF A JAPANESE ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

Among Kigo's students at the university was Itô Chûta, who graduated in 1892 and became the most vocal and perhaps the most influential architect of his generation. Unlike earlier architects such as Tatsuno Kingo, Itô questioned the hegemony of Western architecture. In 1894 he complained that Europeans and Americans "disregard the architecture of Japan" and that they were under the misconception that "in Japan there was no art (*geijutsu*) that should be called architecture (*kenchiku*)." Itô emphasized both that Japan was an island that had "preserved the fundamental character of the national polity" and that its architecture was linked to China, India, and Greece.[5] In other words, he attempted to establish both Japan's uniqueness and Japan's position within a larger historical framework. In order to gain legitimacy for Japanese architecture, Itô had to incorporate Japan into the standard Western view of architectural history. As one of the cartoons from his student-era notebooks suggests, Itô was searching for a dialogue between Western and Japanese architecture (figure 1).

For Itô, Hôryûji, the Buddhist complex in Nara comprising the oldest extant wooden buildings in the world, became the site that joined Japan and the West. Itô's famous 1893 essay "Hôryûji kenchikuron" (A theory of the architecture of Hôryûji)

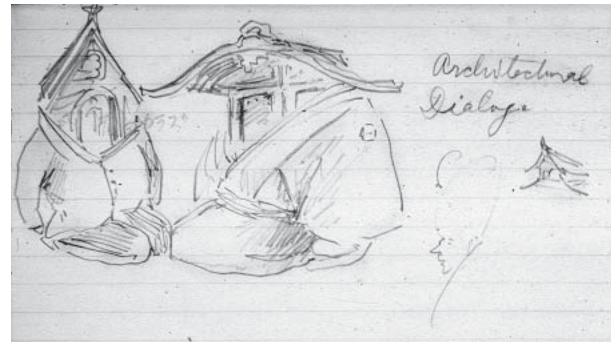

Figure 1: Itô Chûta, "Architectural Dialogue," ca. 1892.

was the first extended treatment of a historical Japanese architectural site. Earlier students had attempted brief histories of Japanese architecture, but Itô was the first to author a rigorous analysis of a single site. His ambitious essay examined the buildings themselves and then placed them in an extended chronological and geographical matrix. He argued that Hôryuji terminated a line of architecture that extended back to the empire of Alexander the Great. He wrote, "this style clearly keeps the appearance of the Chinese style, faintly preserves the old traditions of India, and furthermore retains vestiges of the Greek style."[6] He claimed that the architecture of ancient Greece spread east through Alexander's empire and then influenced architecture in India; those buildings in turn influenced Chinese architecture, which Itô saw as one of the origins of Japanese architecture. Itô adduced the entasis of the columns as evidence of the vestiges of Hôryûji's far-removed Greek origins.

In other words, Itô added an alternate branch to the traditional linear narrative of Western architectural history. He argued that the story forked westward from Greece to Rome, but also eastward from Greece to Asia. By adopting the framework of Western architectural history and using his knowledge of traditional Japanese buildings, Itô was able to place Japan in a position analogous to that of the cultures of modern Europe—namely, heir to one of the two great currents in the historical development of architecture. This positioning of Japan at the end of a long chronological development can also be seen as part of the larger redefinition of Japanese civilization. As a number of historians have noted, Japanese concepts of civilization through the mid-nineteenth

century took China as the center of civilization.[7] Once the overwhelming military and technological superiority of Western nations became evident, though, Japanese figures came to view the degree of civilization not in regard to China, but in relation to chronological development. Nations such as England and the United States were seen to have achieved the most modern state of civilization, the level to which Japan aspired. Itô's work provided a variation on this theme: rather than claim that Japanese architecture had attained an identical state to that of the West, he argued essentially that Japan's achievements were separate but equal, and that Japan's modern civilization would necessarily differ from the West's.

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY AND ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

As noted above, the original motive for architectural history in modern Japan derived from the European nineteenth-century belief that historical architecture provided the roots of contemporary design. During the 1880s architects had already begun to develop eclectic buildings that incorporated both Japanese and Western sources; this *shajiyô*, or "shrine and temple style," was perhaps the first uniquely Japanese style in modern Japan. As Itô and others pursued a viable native architectural history for Japan, designers began attempting deeper syntheses. Itô himself took this path, designing such works as Dendôin, a building for the Nishi Honganji temple in Kyoto. (figure 2) Here Itô's free use of historical elements is visible in the Mughal-inspired window frames, quasi-Japanese brackets, vaguely Islamic dome, and Victorian English brick-and-stone polychromy.

Itô's work in this idiom culminated in Tsukiji Honganji, a Buddhist temple in Tokyo completed in 1934. Since Buddhism had been one carrier in the transmission of architecture from India to China to Japan, this project served as an embodiment of the phylogeny of Asian architecture.[8] It was also a statement of Japanese nationalism during an age of military expansion.

In fact, by the 1930s historical Japanese architecture had begun to take on new meanings through its relationships with nationalist ideology on one hand and modernist architecture on the other. For instance, the 1930 guidelines for the competition

Figure 2: Dendôin (1912) designed by Itô Chûta.

for Tokyo Imperial Museum stipulated that entries must be in an Eastern style (*tôyôshiki*) based on Japanese taste (*nihon shumi*). This requirement was related both to the nature of the commission–the purpose of the museum was to exhibit the art collection of the Imperial Household–and to growing nationalist sentiments in Japan. Watanabe Jin's winning entry used roofs and decorative details derived from historical wooden temples to provide the necessary Japanese flavor to what was in fact a steel and concrete structure. (figure 3) Many other entries took the same strategy, one that had been used in buildings such as Nagoya City Hall.

In contrast, architects of a modernist bent argued that buildings that combined the forms of ancient timber constructions with modern ferro-concrete structure in fact violated the principles of historical Japanese design. As Jonathan Reynolds has observed, the modernist architect Maekawa Kunio

Figure 3: Tokyo Imperial Museum (1937) designed by Watanabe Jin.

argued that his own abstract, modernist design better fit the principles of historical Japanese architecture. He claimed that in pre-modern Japan as in ancient Greece or medieval France, building design had grown from technology and materials. Indeed, Maekawa made few distinctions between the principles of historical Japanese buildings and historical Western ones.[9] Trained in part in the atelier of Le Corbusier, Maekawa sought not to divide history into two currents, as Itô had done, but to find universal historical principles.

At the close of the 1930s, then, architects could argue for alternate readings of Japanese history. Watanabe, at least in his museum design, suggested that Japan's architectural history was distinct and unique; Maekawa, versed in European modernism, argued for a certain unity of historical architecture.[10]

A SECOND END TO ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

At any rate, it was not architectural debate that led to the demise of these models of architectural history; rather, it was Japan's failure in WWII and the subsequent discrediting of much of the nationalist and imperialist culture of the 1930s. In addition, all of Japan's major industrial cities were heavily bombed late in WWII; incendiary bombs obliterated the centers of Tokyo and Osaka, the two largest cities, and atomic bombs devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki. With its cities in ruins and its ideology obsolete, Japan faced the American occupation as a nation whose buildings were destroyed and whose recent history was no longer valid. Moreover, in the aftermath of the war there was little economic or intellectual surplus available for the immediate reconstruction of historical architecture. This era can be seen as a second end to architectural history in Japan. It also serves as one of the roots of current images of Japanese cities as places without pasts.

Since the 1950s, when Japan first emerged as a prominent producer of avant-garde architecture, Japanese architects from Tange Kenzô to Isozaki Arata to Ban Shigeru have addressed architectural history in countless ways, but rarely as a coherent linear narrative. For instance, in his 1960 Plan for Tokyo, Tange imagined a new city based not on historical building types and planning but on growth and movement. He argued for "a new urban spatial order which will reflect the open organization and the spontaneous mobility of contemporary society." Modern transportation systems, he claimed, "represent a superhuman scale, which in no way harmonizes with the architecture of the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century."[11] Tange then proposed a new city of 10 million organized around large-scale, linear transportation systems. This new Tokyo would have served as an alternative city, built not on land but on Tokyo Bay, and housing no sign of historical buildings.

Utopian plans by Tange and other architects provided one source for the dystopian images created in the late twentieth century. In the recent past, even as Japanese architects continue to be recognized for individual buildings, many of the most compelling images of cities and buildings have been created by writers, directors, and other figures outside the field of architecture. These figures often draw on the same events that changed architects' attitudes towards historical cities and buildings, especially the devastation of WWII, the rapid the 1960s economic boom, and the "bubble economy" of the 1980s. For instance, in *Akira*, Ôtomo Katsuhiro imagines a future in which Tokyo has experienced not only WWII, but also WWIII, a war that starts with a massive explosion reminiscent of the WWII atomic bombs. Ôtomo's Neo-Tokyo, like the new Tokyo of Tange's 1960 plan, exists not within historical Tokyo but on artificial land in Tokyo Bay. Neo-Tokyo thus occupies an alternate space as well as an alternate time.

In contrast, the characters in novels by Murakami Haruki often move back and forth between the everyday world of Tokyo and alternate environ-

ments in which space and time are structured in unconventional ways. The protagonist in Murakami's *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* realizes that the second world he inhabits is not, in fact, an exterior universe, but one that exists within his own mind. Within one world (the realm of daily existence) there is another universe that possesses a different history and time. That interior world, he finds out, will come to an end.

Any particular paradigm of architectural history also can be seen as a kind of interior world, albeit one created by historians, architects, and various other figures. In the nineteenth century, and then again in the middle of the twentieth century, the world of architectural history in Japan reached an end. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, there is no dominant paradigm that relates the historical architecture of the past to the architecture of the future; visions of ephemerality appear to have superseded images of permanence.

In fact, though, demographic and economic shifts in Japan (for instance the declining population) suggest that the wholesale reconstruction of the Japanese built environment engendered by the destruction of WWII and the economic booms of the 1960s and 1980s will not be repeated. In other words, the age of rapid turnover of buildings and disruptive urban change that helped spawn late-twentieth century architectural visions may give way to a period of architectural renovation and reuse. If this is the case, than historical architecture—now mainly of the second half of the twentieth century, may become the foundation for a new framework that relates historical buildings to the contemporary city.

ENDNOTES

1. Nishimura Yukio, "Kenzôbutsu no hozon ni itaru Meiji zenki no bunkazai hogo gyôsei no tenkai," *Nihon kenchiku gakkai keikakukei ronbun hôkokushû* 340 (June 1984): 105.

2. *Calendar* (Tokei [Tokyo]: Imperial College of Engineering, 1877): 54.

3. For an examination of Kigo's classes at Imperial University, see Inaba Nobuko, "Kigo Kiyoyoshi no Teikoku Daigaku (Tokyo Teikoku Daigaku) ni okeru Nihon kenchikugaku jugyô ni tsuite," *Nihon kenchiku gakkai keikakukei ronbun hôkokushû* 375 (April 1987): 111-120.

4. See Inaba Nobuko, "Kigo Kiyoyoshi ga Meiji nenkan ni shûshû•sakusei shita Nihon kenchikugaku kanren shiryô," *Nihon kenchiku gakkai keikakukei ronbun hôkokushû* 413 (July, 1990): 151-158.

5. Itô Chûta, "Nihon kenchikujutsu kenkyû no hitsuyô oyobi sono kenkyû no hôshin ni tsuite," *Kenchiku zasshi* 92 (August, 1894): 228.

6. Itô Chûta, "Hôryûji kenchikuron," *Kenchiku zasshi* 7 (November 1893). Quoted in Ôta, *Kenchikushi*, 14.

7. See for instance Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Re-Inventing Japan: Time Space Nation* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998): 24-30; and also David Howell, *Geographies of Identity in Nineteenth-Century Japan* (Berkeley: University of California, 2005): 156-58.

8. For an analysis of the relationship between the Jôdo shinshû sect and Itô's building, see Cherie Wendelken, "Pan-Asianism and the Pure Japanese Thing: Japanese Identity and Architecture in the Late 1930s," *Positions* 8 no. 3 (2000): 822-25.

9. For Maekawa's position, see Jonathan Reynolds, *Maekawa Kunio and the Emergence of Japanese Modernist Architecture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001): 92-101.

10. In fact, neither of these architects was as doctrinaire as their competition entries might imply. Hara designed buildings in modernist styles, and during WWII Maekawa produced a competition entry for the Japan-Thailand Cultural Center that drew heavily on historical Japanese residential architecture.

11. Tange Kenzô, "A Plan for Tokyo, 1960: Toward a Structural Reorganization," in Joan Ockman, *Architecture Culture 1943-1968* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993): 330; Ibid., 334.