Time in Japanese Architecture
A reflection through the practice of reconstruction

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When compared with Western monumental architecture, Japanese historical architecture shows several atypical particularities, if we consider it as architecture in the Western sense. Among these Japanese atypicalities, exist the problematics of “time” and “form”, to which the practice of reconstruction or reconstitution found frequently in the history of Japanese architecture are necessarily connected. Relating with other notions such as those of “monument”, “history”, “model”, “scale”, “origin”, etc. which many existing Japanese buildings evoke, the question of time and architecture is considered as a central issue, not only to reveal the particularities of the Japanese meaning of architecture, but also to find a common basis which might permit us to understand both Japanese and Western monumental architecture under the same regard. In the present article, several examples of Japanese monuments will be presented showing atypical aspects when in confrontation with a Western notion of monument. Also, an attempt to show the possibilities of reading a monument as a text containing temporal elements will be done based upon the mediaeval Senbon Shakadô main cultic hall. Whereas the spatial composition found in the Senbon Shakadô can be regarded as recuperated time i.e. history, the literature on history of Japanese architecture can be considered as monument in the sense that it seeks the origin of architectural forms in Japan. This author’s point of view might open the possibility for a new interpretation of the well-known ritual, Shikinen-sengû.

Keywords: monument, history, reconstitution, space, style

Introduction

The notion of reconstruction in Japan seems to be essential to the understanding and appreciation of Japanese architecture; this is true for the contemporary architecture as well as for the traditional architecture or historical monuments. It would be also possible to point out that what we define as architecture in Japan seems to be different from that in Europe, especially when regarding the relation between architecture and time, and also to notion of a time in flow.

The term “architecture” or “kenchiku” is introduced in Japan after the Meiji Restoration in the 19th century. After the opening of Japan to the world in 1858, the confrontation of “Japanese architecture” with Western architecture created a need for a Japanese word equivalent to the term “architecture”, since then, the term “kenchiku” has been employed as one of the translations of the word “architecture”. It seems, however, that even now, there still exist perpetual differences and discrepancies between the notion to which “kenchiku” is connected (which we translate as “architecture” in the West) and the notion to which Western architecture is connected. The Japanese traditional notion of “kenchiku” seems to reveal these discrepancies from the notion of “architecture” in the Western sense, when we
consider Japanese traditional architecture in terms of time, value as monument, memory, history, etc. Chûta ITÔ is regarded as one of the first architects who perceived the differences between “architecture” and “kenchiku”, a subject that has since then encouraged many other related studies. Yet, it seems that these epistemological and cultural discrepancies have not been resolved and a sort of parallelism between these two words still exists.

It is the author’s opinion that this situation does not seem unfavorable to the comprehension of architecture. Today, we are to consider both “architecture” or “kenchiku”, in their respective Western or Japanese sense, it would be necessary to reunite these two “architectures” under the same regard, and to closely examine their definitions, notions and concepts that are included in these two terms.

In order to frame the subject of this article, we could attempt making a caricature: in the West, architecture is considered as something eternal, whose foundation represents a departing point of history, and where the monument ideally registers in eternal duration. Conversely, in Japan, architecture is considered rather as temporal and the important thing is permanent re-foundation or reconstruction rather than foundation. In Japan, a building is “never” the original building. It is in this frame that the practice of reconstruction is important for understanding Japanese architecture. What this caricature expresses is merely a caricature but one which illustrates what the present article seeks to comprehend: the bridges between Western and Japanese architecture, rather than their oppositions.

**Heian-jingû shrine**

The Heian-jingû Shinto shrine (Fig. 1) would be a good example to illustrate main problematics which the present article is to discuss. For the normal Japanese visitors and tourists, this shrine is undeniably a Japanese monument, and it is this attitude assuming the notion of monument that is essential to the notion of Western architecture. Nevertheless, Heian-jingû can be also interpreted as an atypical monument in terms of the definition of “monument” in the Western sense.

![Figure 1. Heian-jingû Shinto shrine, Taigoku-den, 1895, Kyoto (photo: author)](image)

Although this shrine delivers an image of what is generally considered as ancient Japanese architecture, its foundation is merely dating from 1895, by occasion of the “twelfth centennial” anniversary of the capital’s transfer to Kyoto. So originally, these buildings were used as pavilions housing the “Domestic Industrial Exposition”. Nevertheless, this monument, merely 109 years old is for most of the Japanese or foreign visitors identified as a monument which has existed for a long time. In this shrine, the veneration of a god also suggests ancestorinity. The veneration of a god – here, the emperor Kanmu, who is responsible for transfer of the capital to Kyoto in 794 - could be said to confer the character of monument onto this relatively new shrine. However the buildings hardly have any elements which can grant them the definition of monument in the Western sense.
From this example, we can deduce the problematic of the indifference to period or time in Japanese architecture. In this monument from the 19th century, we see a period much more ancient than the reality.

In fact, the buildings of this shrine are the reconstitution of the 8th century Kyoto imperial palace’s pavilions. The architecture of Heian-jingū is not, therefore, Shinto shrine architecture, but palace architecture. Here, a dwelling typology is converted to a religious usage. The stylistic exactitude in the reconstitution of the ancient palace’s architectural form has been ensured by two architects, Chûta ITÔ and Kiyotaka KIGO. This reconstitution of the 8th century was adopted for the foundation of a monument in the 19th century. From these facts, another problematic emerges: the absence of criteria of a typology of the monument in Japanese architecture. Coupled with this is the problematic of model. The adoption of a 8th century model shows also a sensibility to time and period (to nostalgia) in a monument.

Another interesting point to remark is that this reconstitution of the ancient imperial palace was executed in the scale of 5/8 of the original palace. Today, the majority of visitors is unaware of this scale reduction. Here, we would like to emphasize the detachment from scale in Japanese architecture, which leads us to, for example, the issue of delimitation or definition between architecture and art object.

These “bizarre” remarks which can be observed in the architecture of Heian-jingū question the Western definition of this shrine, not only as a monument but also as architecture. The comparison of Heian-jingū with Western gothic cathedrals, or with Western palaces, town houses which are more or less inspired by Roman architecture, would make us more conscious of the strange character of Japanese architecture as “monument” in the Western sense. The notion of architecture in the West is essentially related to the concepts such as materiality, memory, place and the space, concepts profoundly different in the case of Heian-jingū.

As a contrast, we examine briefly the Notre-Dame cathedral of Paris. Contrary to the Heian-jingū, this cathedral has conserved its original function, which corroborates the idea of continuity in the time through religious practices. Also, the architectural style of the cathedral testifies, in a whole, one sole stylistic period. As for additions or modifications, they are always architectural parts that we can qualify as posterior annexes, and they also testify their own period styles and respective period of construction. The plan, form and even the style of Notre-Dame of Paris have all inherited the precedent architectural traditions, but what they presents as architecture is one accomplished and independent style with its own wholeness, in which would be quite difficult for the ordinary visitors to read reminiscences of the formative process of stylistic evolution through time. In short, in this cathedral, there is no indifference to the chronological order of periods i.e. to time, nor to the accomplished typologies and the functions, and there is no detachment in relation to the architectural scale. Here, the cathedral affirms itself as accomplished “architecture” by clearly distinguishing itself from what we could define as its models. And in any case, it is anything but an art object.

In comparison with the Paris cathedral, what the reconstitution of Heian-jingū transmits us is our memory of an ancient place, that of imperial palace, that is to say, that of another time. This reconstruction of the imperial palace in a reduced version prolongs the past time into the present time and probably until the future. The period evoked
by this reconstruction derives from the most ancient written sources on which the architects were based. Heian-jingû is perhaps “history” within architecture.

**Reconstruction, reconstitution, and scale in traditional architecture in Japan**

Before commencing a detailed observation based upon a concrete architectural example, it would be better to make a short excursion in the history of traditional Japanese architecture, excursion where we would rediscover Japanese architecture and become conscious of the peculiarities that could be related to what we have seen in Heian-jingû. The guiding lines are the remarks which we could deduce from the Heian-jingû and the Paris cathedral, such as reconstruction, reconstitution, scale, model, time, etc.

- Hokke Sôji-in, Konponchûdô, Jyôgyôdô and Hokkedô in Enryaku-ji

The present two main buildings of Hokke Sôji-in in Enryaku-ji temple (Fig. 2), a pagoda and a main cultic hall, are reconstructions. However, in this case, these buildings are used as pavilions of Buddhist temple. The pagoda and the square pavilion in this temple Hokke Sôji-in belonging to Enryaku-ji temple were constructed in 1937. The pagoda was reconstructed according to the historical sources, and it transmits an image of that pagoda at the 10th century. The pavilion built aside has now the function of main cultic hall and was constructed after a model of another existing Buddhist temple, the pavilion of Amithaba of Hôkai-ji, dating from the 11th to 12th century and situated in Kyoto.

The Konponchûdô in Enryaku-ji is another reconstruction, again in Enryaku-ji. This one was executed in 1642 in order to rediscover the sprit of the foundation period. It was constructed after the original style of the 10th century. For this reason, this reconstruction is often chosen as a representative of the image of that edifice of the 10th century. This architecture is probably a monument, but is it a monument of the 10th century belonging to the ancient period, or is it a monument of the 17th century belonging to the pre-modern period? Here again, we encounter an idea of indifference to the time and to the chronological order.

The Jyôgyôdô and Hokkedô in Enryaku-ji is also another reconstruction situated in Enryaku-ji. In this case, it is a reconstruction executed in 1595, in the beginning of the pre-modern period. Here, a pavilion with a square plan founded in the 10th century is reconstructed and constituted in the 16th century. In the general literature on the history of Japanese architecture, this pavilion is often cited as a characteristic example of that cultic hall with a square plan, appeared in the 10th century for the first time.
East Pagoda and West Pagoda of Yakushi-ji,
Small pagoda of Kairyûô-ji and five-stories Pagoda of Mûrou-ji

The east pagoda of the Yakushi-ji, a Buddhist temple situated in Nara, constructed in 730, is the only building surviving since the time of the foundation of the Yakushi-ji in the period of Heijô-kyô. Originally, this temple had two “identical” pagodas, but one of the two was destructed in a fire. A reconstruction of this three-stories pagoda “identical” to its precedent, therefore identical to its twin, was accomplished in 1981 (Fig. 3). This example seems to testify a mental habit of seeking the rediscovery of the ancient form after its disappearance. However, we should not forget that the pagoda dating from the 8th century is also a reconstitution at the occasion of transfer of the temple from the imperial city of Asuka to Heijô-kyô. In general literatures of the history of Japanese architecture, the east three-stories pagoda is cited for the reason that this pagoda conserves many elements which transmit the original image of this architecture constructed in the 7th century at Asuka. The reminiscences of an older building is accentuated here rather than the importance of one of the survival buildings from the 8th century.

There exist pagodas belonging to a specific type called “small five-stories pagoda”. The height of the small five-stories pagoda from the Kairyûô-ji temple (Fig. 4), dating from the 8th century, is 4.10 meters. In spite of the reduced total height, this small pagoda is a “real” pagoda and not a reduced scale model. Not a few authors often use this pagoda in history of architecture in order to describe the architecture of the period of Hakuho, early times of the Nara period. If this pagoda is considered as veritable architecture, this is mainly because of its high quality of detail, identical to that of pagoda in real scale, thus it has been also venerated for a long time in the same way as a “real” pagoda. Through this example, we can understand that, in the Japanese monument, size, dimension, and scale do not always decide architectural values.
To confirm the observation above, the five-stories pagoda of the Murou-ji (Fig. 5) in Nara would offer a good example. This pagoda, dating from the end of the 8th century, measures 16.10 meters in the height and 2.45 meters on each side of the first story. This size is much larger than that of the small five-stories pagoda of the Kairyû-ji, but for a veritable pagoda, this dimension remains very small. The height between each story does not permit a person to enter standing. Here again, what does scale of architecture mean? And does it signify architecture?

· Miniature shrines\textsuperscript{11} and Konjikidô of Chûson-ji

Normally, in the main cultic hall of Buddhist temples, miniature shrines are placed in the part reserved for inner sanctuaries containing the statue of Buddha. Most of miniature shrines are equipped with complete roofs in spite of their small dimensions close to that of an art object (Fig. 6). This type of architectural form with complete roof reminds us of the real architectural exterior. But can we call these miniature shrines “architecture”, which is to say, this hypothetical architecture contain a history in a space? Here, a new problematic arises, that of the architecture in architecture.

Another comparable example in relation to “architecture in architecture”, but of another scale,
would be the “cover-pavilion” of golden pavilion (Konjiki-dō) situated in Hiraizumi and dating from 1124. In the mediaeval Muromachi period, a cover-pavilion was fabricated for the purpose of protection of the edifice. Because of the relatively modest dimension of the golden pavilion, this cover-pavilion has produced a double architecture i.e. architecture in architecture in a normal architectural scale together with the pavilion which had already existed from the ancient period. The present cover-pavilion which covers the Konjikidō now is a modern construction in reinforced concrete, while the mediaeval cover-pavilion was transferred and preserved. In this way, we can say that Konjikidō and its cover-pavilion evoke not only the problematic of architecture in architecture, but also that of scale and place in architecture.

· Hie-taisha shrine

In the enclosure of the Hie-taisha Shinto shrine (fig. 7) at the foot of Mt. Hiei, we can observe very interesting scene, that of a multitude of pavilions. Here, we evidently find the question of scale in Japanese architecture. However, we also find the question of transfer in Japanese architecture. We could observe that those pavilions are posed on stone socles and that their base is a wood frame. Originally, the low beams must have been prolonged in order to allow the transportation of these pavilions from one place to another. The remnants of this technique are visible in all these different sized pavilions. In addition to the question of scale, another new question emerges: is architecture without place possible?

Figure 6. Miniature shrine of the kakurin-ji temple, 1397, Hyūgo (photo: Architectural Institute of Japan (ed.), Illustrated references for the history of Japanese architecture, revised edition, Shōkokusha, Tokyo, 1980, p. 51)

Figure 7. East main shrine of the Hie-taisha Shinto shrine, 1595, Shiga (photo: Jean-Sébastien CLUZEL)

Until here, through the several exemples of the Japanese monuments, we have pointed out several peculiarities that traditional Japanese architecture implicates. It seems that all the peculiarities in all the exhibited exemples disrupt the notion of architecture in the Western sense; or in the least they reveal the attributes contrary to those immanent from Western architecture. From this fact, it would be natural that our discussion on the
particularities of Japanese architecture would be examined around the question of reconstruction, problematic that allows the synthesis of the question of time and form, specifically in Japanese architecture.

**Senbon-shakadô**

In regard to the question of time and form, in order to understand what Japanese architecture transmits to us, and in what way it does so, an attempt to show the possibilities of reading a monument as a text would be of some use here. For this, the Senbon-shakadô (Fig. 8), dating from the beginning of the mediaeval period and situated in the centre of the city of Kyoto, draws particularly our attention. The Senbon-shakadô is the main cultic hall of the Daihöon-ji temple, showing a typical form for the mediaeval “Japanese style”\(^12\). Dating from 1227, this is one of the most ancient buildings in the city of Kyoto. The pavilion, consisting of two distinct spaces - inner sanctuary\(^13\) and space of prayer\(^14\) - also present a typical plan of the mediaeval main cultic hall of esoteric school.

The main cultic hall of the Senbon-shakadô is built on the gambrel roof plan\(^15\) in refined proportion. The whole exterior is covered by a big roof with generous curves which can be symbolically interpreted as a container of time. The dimension of the roof follows a rectangular plan with a main façade of 5 pillar-spans and a lateral façade of 6 pillar-spans. The plan (Fig. 9), the longitudinal section (Fig. 10) and a drawing presenting the analytical system of the spatial composition of this hall allow us to clearly understand the spatial character of this edifice.

![Figure 8. Main cultic hall of the Daihöon-ji temple - Senbon-shakadô, 1227, Kyoto (photo: author)](image)

![Figure 9. Senbon-shakadô, plan (Architectural Institute of Japan (ed.), Illustrated references for the history of Japanese architecture, revised edition, Shôkokusha, Tokyo, 1980, p. 47)](image)
One of the most prestigious and current manuals of history of Japanese architecture treats the Senbon-shakadô as one of the good examples which convey to us the concrete image of the sophisticated character of the careful regard to proportion particularly found in the mediaeval architecture constructed at Kyoto in the “Japanese style”\(^\text{16}\). But in most cases, the descriptions in the history of Japanese architecture dedicated to the explanation of this edifice uniformly follow the spatial structure and developments as shown in the drawing presenting the analytical system of the spatial composition. This uniformity found in different analysis on the spatial characteristics of this building, seems to reflect a sort of will existing in Japanese architecture to discover the generating process of architecture with time, and this seems to be what we claim unconsciously for an architectural achievement. As a typical example of the discussion on this edifice, we encounter the following references:

< The plan (of the Senbon-shakadô) tells us the formative process of this building. Aroud the one-pillar-span-sided central square which is found in the inner sanctuary as a central core, the three-pillar-span-sided inner sanctuary is formed. Then, in front of this inner sanctuary space, a second eave\(^\text{17}\) comes to be added. The space thus created is surrounded once more by eaves on four sides. The result is the actual plan of 5 pillar-spans for the main façade and 6 pillar-spans for the lateral façade of this building.>\(^\text{18}\)

or

< The actual plan of the space reserved for the inner sanctuary is square, according to a three-pillar-span-sided plan. In order to obtain such a space for the inner sanctuary, firstly, there was a one-pillar-span-sided centre square with eaves. Then, in front of this space for the inner sanctuary, a second eave was added: 3 pillar-spans for the main façade, 1 pillar-span for the lateral façade. Finally, a third eave of 1 pillar-span was built to surround the four sides of the building, which gives the plan that we see today, a rectangular shape with main façade of 5 pillar-spans and the lateral façade of 6 pillar-spans.>\(^\text{19}\)

Written by historians specialized in the mediaeval Buddhist architecture, the phrases above cited coincide perfectly with the analytical system of the spatial composition of this cultic hall. At the same time, these phrases explaining the construction of the Senbon-shakadô leave us the impression of a process of construction in several stages i.e. a successive process of reconstruction. These theoretical processes of reconstruction following common construction processes commence from a central space with a square plan confined by four pillars. This central space appears again in another form, that of an original space suspended in obscurity at the centre of the building, as if its limits, the four pillars, represented the real commencement of the history of this edifice. In the centre of this space produced by the four stout columns, there is one miniature shrine containing
the statue of Buddha of this temple, also in obscurity. This miniature shrine, equipped with a roof, raises again the questions of scale in Japanese architecture and of architecture in architecture that we have previously examined.

In fact, the construction of this hall was effectuated as a whole (as the historical and archeological studies have shown\textsuperscript{20}). Here, no part has been added \textit{a posteriori}. Therefore, the spatial composition of this hall shows the imaginary stages of its constructive process, but also all the stages of the spatial evolution that main cultic halls of the esoteric school in the mediaeval period followed, before reaching the accomplishment of the present Senbon-shakadô. Historical studies have shown the validity of this formal evolution to the Senbon-shakadô. Certain cultic halls show the transitory forms and transmit the incomplete stages of the spatial compositions prior to the matured form of the present Senbon-shakadô.

In this sense, the Senbon-shakadô draws nearer to a stage or state of achievement reflecting all the evolution of spatial form in the main cultic halls of the esoteric school at mediaeval period. This evolution was developped along with time and has formed a history. Therefore, we can say that the Senbon-shakadô encloses the history in its spatial composition and that here, time has survived in the organization of spaces. However, time is petrified under a grand roof covering the history and has lost its chronological character.

The examination of the Senbon-shakadô confirms the evidence present in the examples we have examined before in our historical excursion: the question of indifference to time, placing the evidence of a period through imaginary reconstructions, the question of scale in the form of the miniature shrine, that of architecture in architecture, and the existence of architecture as history narrated by the way of space.

\textbullet\ Chôju-ji

There exists another example that allows us to understand spatial composition conserving the history of evolution in the same architectural typology: the main cultic hall of Chôju-ji, constructed in the beginning of the mediaeval period in the prefecture of Shiga, next to Kyoto.

The plan of this hall (Fig. 11) shows a square plan which is divided into two spaces: one space reserved for an inner sanctuary and another space for prayer in front. The two distinct ceilings of these spaces show two individual architectures in one pavilion (Fig. 12). The ridge of the ceiling in the centre of the space for prayer illustrates an independent hipped roof\textsuperscript{21} in 5 by 2 pillar-spans. As for the space of the inner sanctuary, the ceiling of the gable roof\textsuperscript{22} delimits a space of 5 by 2 pillar-spans. However, these spaces are covered with one big roof, which gives them a united character in which the history is enclosed. The history of Japanese architecture often represents these two interior spaces as the original state of this building, that is to say two independent buildings which are finally amalgamated. But in fact, concerning the case of the Chôju-ji, historical and archeological studies have not yet verified whether this pavilion was constructed as a whole or not\textsuperscript{23}.
Figure 11. Chôju-ji temple, plan (Architectural Institute of Japan (ed.), Illustrated references for the history of Japanese architecture, revised edition, Shôkokusha, Tokyo, 1980, p. 46)

Figure 12. Chôju-ji temple, section (Architectural Institute of Japan (ed.), Illustrated references for the history of Japanese architecture, revised edition, Shôkokusha, Tokyo, 1980, p. 46)

Here, we could also see that architecture as finished object is history: It narrates or retraces, but it recuperates the evolution process of the mediaeval esoteric school architectural plan. Also, here, history is architecture: in detaching itself from object as the stage of formal accomplishment, in seeking its original form, the historical literature is in the search for “a stage in time”, it becomes a “conscious memorial”, it proposes models of architecture from a history (the building). In the cases of the Senbon-shakadô and the Chôju-ji, the form of the present buildings implicates long historical periods which recuperate history: where history utilizes existing architecture in order to find an original model, where “history” becomes architecture when it explains its model.

The recuperated time found in architectural space is not the architectural particularity only for Buddhist temple. In Japan, there exist enormous architectural examples which are able to be interpreted as spatial containers of history, as in the pavilion of the Senbon-shakadô or the Chôju-ji. In order to close this chapter, two more buildings would merit our attention, this time, Shinto shrines.

• Two Shinto shrines : Yasaka-jinja and Kitano-tenmangû

The main pavilion of the Yasaka-jinja Shinto shrine, in Kyoto, dates from 1653. However, in general and current histories of Japanese architecture, such as in Introduction to the history of Japanese architecture by Hirotarô ÔTA, this example is used in order to describe a much more ancient architectural form than that of the existing pavilion, moreover, the scholars of history of Japanese architecture discuss this present pavilion in the historical context of Heian period from middle of the 10th century to the end of the 11th century. This is due to its relatively complex and elaborated plan and spatial composition which can be read as a spatial recuperation of history connecting the spatial evolution of Shinto shrines with the influence of Buddhist temple architecture.

Always through a method of eave addition, the spatial structure of the Yasaka-jinja shrine’s main pavilion contains several spaces with independent proper ceilings (Fig. 13). This plan which we see today has been completed in the reconstruction dating from 1653, but it is this architectural formula that incessant reconstructions has been conveying to us. For this reason many historians of Japanese architecture insert the photographs and
plans of this main pavilion in the chapter assigned to the ancient period in their books. Here, again, an existing architecture contains and petrifies the memory of the origin of this architectural form, while the literature of architectural history tends to regard an existing building as a more ancient one. What enables us to do so is the practice of reconstruction found in Japanese architectural history.

Figure 13. Main pavilion of the Yasaka-jinja Shinto shrine, section (Architectural Institute of Japan (ed.), Illustrated references for the history of Japanese architecture, revised edition, Shôkokusha, Tokyo, 1980, p. 29)

Similarly to the case of the Yasaka-jinja, the main ensemble of the present buildings of Kitano-tenmangû Shinto shrine in Kyoto are constructions dating from 1607, the beginning of the pre-modern period. However, in the literature of history of Japanese architecture, these main ensemble of buildings are considered to be representative of an architectural formation that occurred in the Heian period i.e. in ancient period. Normally we believe in a crystallized image of this typology’s origin in this 17th century shrine. The original image of two buildings connected by an intermediate in-between space of this shrine is assured by our unceasing practice of reconstruction which, we believe, has not at all modify the original form. Here, with its character of process transmission the formal evolution through history, the architecture of the Kitano-tenmangû is "history". It is evident that it is representative of

the architecture of the 12th century, but it is also correct to say that it is, by historical descriptions, an architecture representative of at least five centuries of formal evolution.

Introduction to the history of Japanese architecture by Hirotarô ÔTA

After our examination principally based on the monuments, it might be necessary to consider the following question: why does history of Japanese architecture become architecture?

The explanations of the Yasaka-jinja and the Kitano tenmangû, which we have just examined above, can be found in a book titled Introduction to the history of Japanese architecture written by Hirotarô ÔTA. We can say that this book, published in 1947 for the first time, is the first true general history of Japanese architecture. Until the time of its publication, manual-books of historical architecture - consisting of simple enumerations of old monuments together with more or less archeological descriptions - were the only literatures which we could call “history of Japanese architecture”. It is this Introduction of ÔTA that enabled us to obtain a global perspective of the history of Japanese architecture for the first time.

To the Japanese readers, this Introduction would give an impression of a certain fluidity in the author’s structural elaboration, in the subjects he discusses, and in its narrative discourse. This fluidity is one of the phenomena which reflect the peculiar nature of Japanese architecture. In short, this Introduction to the history of Japanese architecture preserves the same structure and same nature as Japanese architecture, of which some aspects have been revealed in our examinations of architectural examples.
In Japan, history of architecture might detach itself from history of Western architecture in the sense that it does not seek to be chronological as some phrases of the Introduction by ÔTA illustrate. In the literature of the history of Japanese architecture, particularly after the publication of the Introduction of ÔTA, no historical building cited in history exemplifies the evidence of the period of its construction. As we can see in the Introduction by ÔTA, one of the main questions concerning the history of Japanese architecture is the rediscovery of the original model, that is to say, to typify a state of ancient achievement based on a building of a more recent period. This literary character might also easily emerges from the architectural examples that we have examined before. The case of the two Shinto shrines, Yasaka-jinja and Kitano-tenmangû, is also utilized in such a way in the Introduction by ÔTA.

Such an attitude found in the Introduction could be regarded as indifference to chronology. Beside the case of the Yasaka-jinja and the Kitano-tenmangû, this attitude i.e. this indifference can be found in many places of the Introduction. For example, ÔTA presents us the great gate called Sanmon at Tôfuku-ji temple, dating from 1405, in order to consider whether the buildings of the first Japanese Zen temples already presented the Zen style. Normally, we consider that this architectural style calle Zen style was formulated during the mediaeval period, and that the Tôfuku-ji temple, founded in 1239, counts as one of the first Japanese Zen temple. A chief intention of the Introduction’s author lies in the pursuit of the beigning of the Zen style, which must be placed during the Kamakura period (from 1185 to 1333). Therefore, in the Introduction, the Sanmon at the Tôfuku-ji is discussed in the chapter where the architecture of the Kamakura period should be discussed. However, the existing gate of Sanmon at Tôfuku-ji is an architecture of the Muromachi period, the very end of the mediaeval age. In fact, the present Sanmon is a reconstruction dating from 1425. The author of the Introduction to the history of Japanese architecture describes an architecture of reconstruction which replaced the anticipating original building in order to illustrate another architecture which can give us the original image of the time of foundation. Here, the Sanmon gate is deprived of the natural flow of time i.e. chronology. In his Introduction, ÔTA depicts the non-chronological character that is enclosed in the architectural form and space. He is in the research for the original style which enables this Sanmon gate to open to us. We believe that it is this historical character of Japanese architecture that allows the author to find an origin, a lost origin which is to be rediscovered.

If the building is “history” – representative of an evolution in time – it should reflect a sort of mental habit or collective unconscious will or wish to show the continuity of time in a material realization. If the written discipline, “history”, tends to become architecture as a monument, historians seek the origin, the model in its primitive form. The questions of history of Japanese architecture are rediscovered in a disappeared architecture, which although never true, wishes to bear witness to the survival of forgotten models, the achieved ancient models.

Conclusion

Almost all the subjects discussed above in this article were related with time and model in architecture. Therefore, to conclude our reflection on the particularities of Japanese architecture, it would be legitimate here to mention briefly the shikinen-sengû(shikinen-zoutai), one of the most famous and the most charasteristic monumental practice of Japan, which is defined as a periodic
ritual of reconstruction, executed on an established interval of years. One of the most representative cases of the present shikinen-sengū can be seen in the case of the main pavilions of the Ise-jingū Shinto shrine, whose last ritual has been executed in 1993.

It is rather astonishing to know that the present main pavilion of the Ise-jingū, a contemporary edifice dating from 1993, 1973, 1953 …, is regularly cited in the general literature on the history of architecture as the most representative building from the most ancient period, with its picture showing in the front pages of many books on the history of Japanese architecture. Here, “history” is “architecture” in the sense of monument. It is “history” that defines the 1993 reconstitution as a monument, as an evidence of the most ancient memory. As for history, it is not concerned about chronology at all. It is “architecture” that becomes “history”. Whereas the ritual of reconstruction testifies the spontaneous action of keeping and transmitting a form like history, it does not satisfy itself as a monument. It wishes to be immemorial; it wishes to be the flow of time. Thus, in Japan, architecture (monument) can not conceive itself without temporality, it is the recuperator of the time, while history does not follow the unfolding of time. History is in the seek of model, of monument, maybe of incident.

Compared with the Western ideas and definitions of “monument” or “memorial” which are formed on the principle of regarding architecture as a “monument”, “memorial” and “history” wish to be “immemorial”, to narrate time. Japanese consciousness would work in a reversed process in Japan, “architecture” was envisaged as “immemorial”, while “history” has been searching for the “monument” i.e. the “memorial”. However, in each of these two cultures, Western and Japanese, time could serve as a common denominator, granting equilibrium between Western and Japanese time through the idea of a “architecture as history”.

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2 Concerning the question of the Japanese awakening to Western architecture and the Japanese idea of “kenchiku (architecture)” prior to the Meiji period, see NISHIDA, Masatsugu: « La pensée architecturale » au Japon vers 1885, in Yann Nussaume: Milieu et internationalisation. Un siècle de discours architecturaux au Japon, Bruxelles, Ousia, 2004, under printing.

3 For the chronological data in the present article, the author mainly refers to: ŌTA, Hirotarō (ed.): Illustrated chronological table of Japanese architecture, Shōkokusha, Tokyo, 2002. For the date of the construction of the Heian-jingū, idem. p. 39, 190.

4 idem. p. 39.


6 FUJII, Keisuke and TAMAI, Tetsuo: A history of architecture, Chūkōronsha, Tokyo, 1995, p. 70. This book treats this temple as an example of 9th century architecture, architecture of the fondation years of the Enryaku-ji temple.

7 Hirotarō ŌTA(ed.): op. cit., p. 40. In this book, the picture of this temple’s present building appears in a chapter concerning the Heian period in the 9th century.

8 For example, Architectural Institute of Japan (ed.): Illustrated references for the history of Japanese

9 present Nara, ancient imperial capital (710 – 784).


11 zushi, or more particularly, kûden.

12 Wa-yô

13 nai-jin

14 ge-jin

15 Irimoya-zukuri


17 hisashi. The term ‘eave’ in the history of Japanese architecture signifies “spaces enlarged”. It is a system that allows an enlargement of the main roof. Nevertheless, the term eave does not necessarily indicate the elements belonging to roof, but rather indicates gained or added spaces.


19 FUJI and TAMAI: op. cit, pp. 127-127.


21 Yosemune-zukuri

22 Kirizuma-zukuri


29 Zenshyû-yô

30 The most convincing example is, indeed, ÔTA, Hirotarô: op. cit., Introduction to the history of Japanese architecture. The first picture we encounter in this book is that of the Ise-jingû shrine’s main pavilion. Also in ÔTA(ed.): op. cit., Illustrated chronological table of Japanese architecture, the main pavilion of the Ise-jingû appears in a chapter concerning 9th century architecture.

31 In respect to the non-chronological character of the Shikinen-sengû as well as to general historical informations on the Shikinen-sengû, see INAGAKI, Eizô: An architectural consideration on the Shikinen-sengû, in Particularies of Japanese architecture, Chûkôron Bijutsu Shuppan, Tokyo, 1976, pp.189 – 212.