

**Iride Rosa and Andres Lepik:**

**Architecture.**

**The Berlin-Tokyo connection from late 19<sup>th</sup> Century to late 1920s**

When the Meiji government came to power in 1868, it was strongly committed to transforming the image of Japan into that of a modern nation. Architecture played a central role in that effort. It was a time of profound transformation for the architectural profession in Japan: Japanese architects, trained in the newly established College of Engineering, were beginning to take on significant consignments, although government authorities were always inclined to look for Western examples when commissioning important projects.

**German architects in Japan in 1870-1900:**

**Hermann Ende & Wilhelm Böckmann and Hermann Muthesius**

In 1870 the Ministry of Engineering created a building division and architects from all over the world were invited to design important public buildings for Tokyo. Within this renovation scheme priority was given to the planning of the layout of government buildings in the area west of Tokyo Bay which today constitutes the Hibiya Park. The pro-western foreign minister, Inoue Kaoru, invited the architectural firm Ende & Böckmann from Berlin to develop the parliamentary complex<sup>1</sup>.

Wilhelm Böckmann and Hermann Ende visited Tokyo between 1886 and 1887, and soon thereafter they condensed their ideas for the Japanese capital into a comprehensive and detailed redevelopment plan. Their proposal comprised not only an extensive urban transformation, but also detailed plans for individual buildings that would fit into the general scheme. An elevated site to the south-west of the Imperial Palace was reserved for the construction of the Diet Building, the House of Parliament. Despite the government's intent to re-invent and transform the image of Tokyo into that of a modern capital, there was nothing

---

<sup>1</sup> See Essay by Prof. Terunobu Fumimori " Architectural exchange between Japan and Germany through 19<sup>th</sup> century to 20<sup>th</sup> century",

modern about the neo-baroque classical scheme Ende and Böckmann first presented to the Japanese in 1887. The massive masonry structure, the symmetrical façade, the main entrance set in a central pavilion roofed by a dome, are all within the framework of coeval European style. In fact many of the architectural details as well as the overall character and proportions of the design can be traced back to the architects' own plans for the Berlin Reichstag in 1872 and 1882<sup>2</sup>. Within six months a second set of elevation drawings was sent from Berlin<sup>3</sup>, this time with a fantastic pagoda-like centrepiece: "an extremely orientalized version of Shimizu's First Mitsui Bank"<sup>4</sup> which was rejected by the Japanese because it was not modern enough. The various proposals for the House of Parliament<sup>5</sup>, as well as large parts of the plans by the Berlin firm were never fully realized; only the National Supreme Court and Ministry of Justice were completed in 1896 and 1895 respectively, and only the latter still stands as a major example of German influence and of the solidity of floating foundations that had been introduced in Tokyo by the Berlin firm. At the end of Ende and Böckmann's first visit to Tokyo after the government had commissioned their plans, they returned to Berlin with a dozen Japanese trainees to develop their plans and to be then send back to Tokyo to their collaborators<sup>6</sup>.

### ***Tokyo-Berlin and back again.***

### **The Bunriha Group and German Expressionism**

---

<sup>2</sup> In 1872 the firm was awarded the second prize in the initial Reichstag competition. Details about these initial drawings and a detailed analysis of how these initial Reichstag drawings relate to the design for Tokyo Parliament are to be found in, *op.cit.* Horiuchi, 1989, 240-44

<sup>3</sup> "Deutsche Bauzeitung", March 14th, 1891

<sup>4</sup> Stewart, B. David, *The Making of a Modern Japanese Architecture*, Tokyo-New York-London, 2002, p.39.

<sup>5</sup> Details of the various design stages for the Diet Buildings are analysed in, Reynolds, M. Jonathan, *Japan's Imperial Diet Building: debate over construction of national identity –Japan 1868-1945: Art, Architecture and National Identity*, in "The Art Journal", fall 1996.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Kozo Kawai who studied in Germany, participated to the supervision of the construction of the Ministry of Justice after his return to Tokyo.

<sup>7</sup> The Missionary Group was highly sponsored by von Sachsen who at the time wrote a letter to Spinner to recommend the young Muthesius for the work. For Muthesius in Japan, see, Yuko Ikeda, *Hermann Muthesius und Japan*, in the catalogue for the exhibition „Hermann Muthesius und der Deutsche Werkbund: Modern Design in Deutschland“, MoMAT, Tokyo, 2003, pp.385-392

<sup>8</sup> References to this project by Hermann Muthesius in Tokyo are to be found in coeval German publications as, "Architektonische Rundschau", Volume 13, Issue, Plate 60, 1897; "Centralblatt der Bauverwaltung", Berlin, 29.8.1891, p.337-339; and "Illustrierte Zeitung", Nr. 2818, 1.6.1897

<sup>9</sup> "Deutsche Bauzeitung", 1902, nr. 22, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, "Centralblatt der Bauverwaltung", pp.160-162., „Berliner Architekturwelt“, pp.34-53

After he graduated from Tokyo Imperial University in 1920, Ishimoto Kikuji travelled to Europe and to Germany. He was the first Japanese architect to ever work with Walter Gropius, with whom he stayed in contact for long after the two years that he spent at the Bauhaus. There he established a trend that would be followed by his fellow architects in the following years<sup>10</sup>. On his return to Tokyo, Ishimoto took with him ideas, styles and architectural technologies he had observed in Europe. But before then, in 1920, together with other five graduating students from the department of architecture at Tokyo Imperial University – Horiguchi Sutemi, Yamada Mamoru, Takizawa Mayumi, Morita Keiichi, Yada Shigeru -, Ishimoto Kikuji formed the first organization of modernist architects in Japan, the Bunriha Kenchikukai (Secessionist Architectural Society). The organization came to be perceived as a neo-Secessionist group that rose against the teaching of traditional, historical European building style. Its real inspiration was German Expressionism that in the years after World War I was the most powerful force in German architectural life and their idols were the Berlin architects Bruno Taut, Hans Poelzig and Erich Mendelsohn. The Bunriha first displayed its designs in a waiting room of the Imperial University in February 1920, and then, in the summer of that same year, the group organized an exhibition at the Shirokiya Department Store in Tokyo and produced a catalogue containing essays and designs by the members. Projects and works by Bunriha members in Tokyo show striking resemblance with coeval designs in Berlin by Taut, Poelzig or Mendelsohn. The Bunriha 's manifesto had its philosophical foundations in the stream of thoughts and ideas promoted in Germany by the “Glaeserne Kette”<sup>11</sup> and, seemingly, modelled its building projects after contemporary German taste and architectural forms.

---

<sup>10</sup> On Ishimoto Kikuji's life and work, see: Emanuele Carreri: *Ishimoto Kikuji e l'avventura del Giappone moderno*, in *ArQ 16*, (Architettura Quaderni) 1997, p. 20-49

<sup>11</sup> The “Glaeserne Kette“ was founded in Nov. 1919 by Bruno Taut as a platform for new architectural ideas. It consisted of 13 architects, artists and critics (e.g.: H. Finsterlin, W. Gropius, W.A. Hablik, H. Scharoun, the brothers H. + W. Luckhardt and M. + B. Taut). Their correspondence included utopian

In the redesign of the Shirokiya Department Store after the 1923 Earthquake, Ishimoto uses horizontal bands of almost continuous glazing and the “net effect”, clearly relying on the formal language of the work by Erich Mendelsohn for the Berliner Tageblatt 1921-23, or on the Deutscher Verkehrsbund Building in Berlin Mitte 1927-32 by Bruno Taut. Again, the romantic and powerful design for “A Mountain House” by Takizawa Mayumi, 1921, shows the same plastic energy as some of Mendelsohn’s drawings for the Einstein Tower in Potsdam. If we look at some Mamoru Yamada works like the Ministry of Post Telegraph Centre 1925 we cannot avoid to think of Poelzig’s Grosses Schauspielhaus in Berlin, 1918-19, as the model for this building<sup>12</sup>.

The establishment of the Bunriha greatly influenced the development of Modernism in Japan. During the eight years that the group was active, it organized a total of seven exhibitions (the last in 1928) exploring new developments in European Architecture and promoting these ideas within Japan’s architectural community. The Bunriha became a valuable model and was taken as example by other social institutions that had the aim to promote modernist architecture in Tokyo.

---

drawings which were partly published in the magazine: “Fruehlicht”. The cohesion of this group dissolved in December, 1920.

<sup>12</sup> Pehnt, Wolfgang, *Expressionist Architecture*, NY, 1973, p.17

<sup>13</sup> There were few publications on Traditional Japanese Architecture in German Architectural magazines, e.g: F.A. Baltzer: “Das japanische Haus, eine bautechnische Studie”, in: *Zeitschrift fuer Bauwesen* 1903, p. 230-275 or: “Wohnhaus in Japan” (Photo series) in: *Wasmuths Monatshefte fuer Baukunst* VI, 7/8, 1921/22, p. 249-260. Tetsuro Yoshida’s later publication: *Das japanische Wohnhaus*, Berlin, 1935 became very successful standard work.

<sup>14</sup> See Stewart, B. David, *op.cit.*, p.119

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Gropius designs were published in, “Kokusay Kenchiku”, 6 no 6, June 1930, pl. 16-20; a special article on Gropius was by Okada Takao, *Waruta Gropiusu shi oyobi Bauhausu no kinyo* in “Shinkenchiu”, 3, no 27, August 1927.

<sup>17</sup> Reynolds, M. Jonathan, *Maekawa Kunio and the emergence of Japanese Modernist Architecture*, Los Angeles – London, 2001, p.32

<sup>18</sup> Bruno Taut: *Architecture nouvelle au Japon*, in: “L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui “ 4, 1935, p. 46-83

<sup>19</sup> see: Bruno Taut, *Ich liebe die japanische Kultur*, Ed. Manfred Speidel, p.23

<sup>20</sup> For an overview of Bruno Taut’s work in Japan see the essay by Manfred Speidel in, *Bruno Taut, 1880-1938*, ed. by Winfried Nerdinger, 2001