

Japanese Traditional Architecture in the Face of Its Modernisation: Bruno Taut in Japan

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Bruno Taut: A Specialist in Japanese Culture

Bruno Taut (1880–1938) was not a Japanologist nor an art historian specialising on East Asia; he was a successful modern architect of housing developments in Berlin in the 1920s (Fig.1). Four of his residential developments were recently conferred the status of World Heritage Site by the UNESCO. In 1932, he had worked as an architect for large hotel and housing projects in Moscow.

When Taut emigrated to Japan in 1933, he had expected to experience the celebrated eminent culture of the country; he also hoped to work as an advisor to architects or institutions dealing with city planning and housing development.

As a well reputed modern German architect who was invited to give public lectures that received much publicity, Taut, after his arrival in Japan in May 1933, was asked to write about his first impressions of the country, no matter whether they were positive or negative. His book *Nippon mit europäischen Augen gesehen*, compiled in July 1933 and published in Spring 1934 soon became a big success (Fig.2). While he was excited about Japan's historic architecture, he was bewildered at the unbalanced lifestyle of modernised Japan and the misunderstood use of Western architecture. Taut could not proceed to the United States in July 1933 as he had hoped, and he also did not get much architectural work in Japan. So, he studied Japanese culture as a basis for modernisation, which he did under the



Fig.1 Bruno Taut, Wohnstadt Carl Legien, Berlin 1928-1930. Photo: Speidel.



Fig.2 Bruno Taut, *Nippon*, book cover in Japanese, 1934.



Fig.3 Bruno Taut. Chair 1935, reconstruction 1988.

guidance of his modernist architect-friends. In all, he finished four books, two published in Japanese, *Nippon Seen with European Eyes* (1934), *Japanese Arts Seen with European Eyes*, translated as *Nippon bunka shi kan, A Personal View on Japanese Culture* (1936), *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture* in German and English (1936), and *Houses and People of Japan* (1937) in English. Besides, Taut wrote many articles for magazines, mostly in English. He earned his living between 1934 and 1936 with designs of objects for daily life in the modernised home to be produced from traditional materials, partly as handicrafts, preferably in an industrialised process, in the Crafts Institute, Kōgei Shō, in Takasaki, Gumma Prefecture.

Taut later emigrated in November 1936 to Turkey; he again started architectural work with school buildings and taught as Professor at the Art Academy in Istanbul. He died there after two busy years on December 24, 1938.

Japanese architects, however, did not forget Taut and made a strenuous effort to continue his “cultural mission.” They observed the first anniversary of Taut’s death in December 1939 by erecting a small memorial stone with the inscription: “I love Japanese Culture.” A group of architects and Taut’s translator Hideo Shinoda started a unique project: between 1942 and 1944, in the middle of the War, they published four thematic books containing the writings of Taut on Japan, many of them translated for the first time. Even at the peak of the War, in 1944, they printed as the fifth book Taut’s peace-manifest and Utopian vision from 1918: the *Alpine Architecture*, in Japanese language. Immediately after the War, Taut’s collected writings were republished, even in parallel editions.

One may wonder how a foreign architect became such an authority on Japanese culture, and one may ask in which aspect he had been an authority since he was, as I said, neither a Japanologist nor an art historian. During the last fifty years there have been countless discussions about and evaluations of Taut’s apodictic views on Japan in Japan itself. Taut became, during and after the War, someone like a mythical figure and at the least an important part of Japanese culture.

Oriental and Japanese Images

It is important to note that Taut’s interest was not confined to Japanese culture alone. I think it was his disciple and assistant Tokugen Mihara (1911–2009) who pointed out in 1980¹ that though Taut’s works

1 Tokugen Mihara, “Bruno Taut: Herstellung von Kunsthandwerk in Takasaki,” in: Akademie der Künste, *Bruno Taut 1880–1938*, Berlin 1980, pp. 137–142.

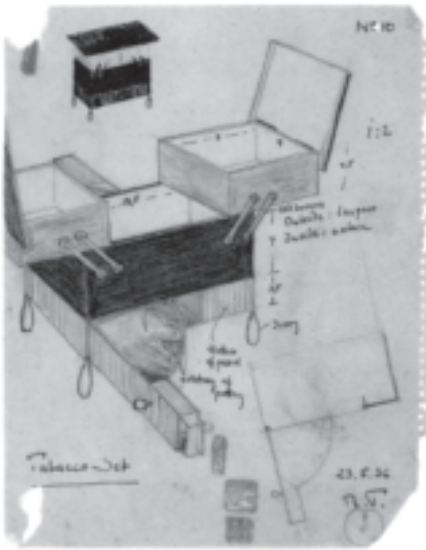


Fig.4 Bruno Taut, Tabacco Set, 1936.



Fig.5 Bruno Taut, Tabacco box, 1934.

as an object designer in Japan started from traditional Japanese daily objects and worked with traditional material and handicrafts, but they actually show forms not common in Japan. This is, of course, true for objects which were in use for the “modern” Western life. He designed chairs and tables in accordance with the aesthetics of the German “Werkbund” as functional and simple (Fig.3). “Functional” here means fitting to the body and employing ergonomic considerations, but it also helped to initiate mass production and stacking or folding of the objects. As regards “materials” it meant, for example, exposing the veining of wood as a kind of organic ornamentation.

Taut experimented with traditional forms and crafts derived from the Japanese tradition like *tansu*, chest of drawers, or its transformation into a Tabacco Set (Fig.4) or a portable cocktailbar and refined them up to their material limits. By bending bamboo or using the elasticity of lacquer in combination with tissue-layers, he tried to create even “new curves.” Some of these curves show a kind of organic function to adapt to the form of the hand or the fingers for holding.

Taut also created forms which may remind us of Muslim architecture: spiral-covered and dome-like volumes for cigarette boxes (Fig.5); or a standing clock as a combination of two spirals in a most complicated handiwork. This indicates that Taut’s imagination transcended various cultures with which he was involved during different periods in his life and the experience of which he activated in his mind at the same time.

Development as an Artist

Taut, like many other European artists around 1900, studied Japanese prints to get a fresh view on form and colour in nature. He also made studies in chalk and pencil “with the eyes of Japanese artists,” (Fig. 6) as he writes in 1933, before he arrived in Japan. He saw books with Japanese crests, and may be also some

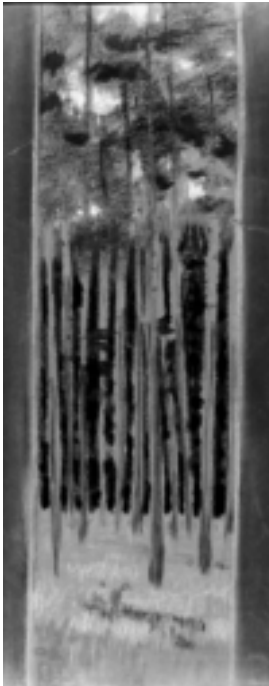


Fig. 6 Bruno Taut, *Pine Forest*, pastel 1903.



Fig. 7 Bruno Taut, Apartmenthouse Kottbuser Damm 90, Berlin-Neukölln, 1909–1910. Photo: Speidel.

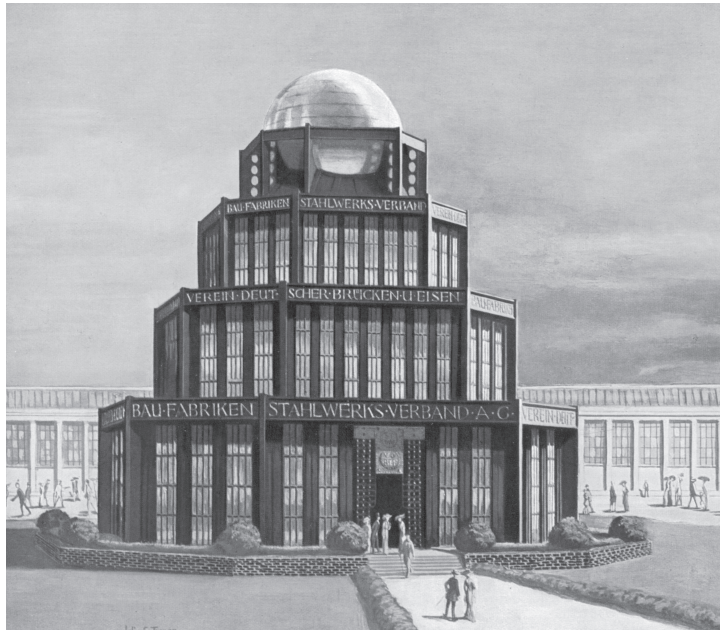


Fig. 8 Bruno Taut, “Monument of Iron,” exhibition pavillon for the steel industry, Leipzig 1913.

Japanese woodblock prints. But, of course, Japan was not the only source of his studies: we may find relations to Nordic art as well.² His architecture, however, is not influenced by either of it. He followed the German Reform Architecture (Fig.7), but did not lean towards Neo-Classicism as his contemporaries Walter Gropius or Mies van der Rohe did. On the contrary, after 1912, in ambitious exhibition pavillons Taut combined images of Oriental architecture with modern building materials and techniques. The octagonal “Monument

2 Manfred Speidel/ Sezon Museum of Art, *Bruno Taut 1880–1938, Nature and Fantasy*, Tokyo 1994, Berlin 1995.

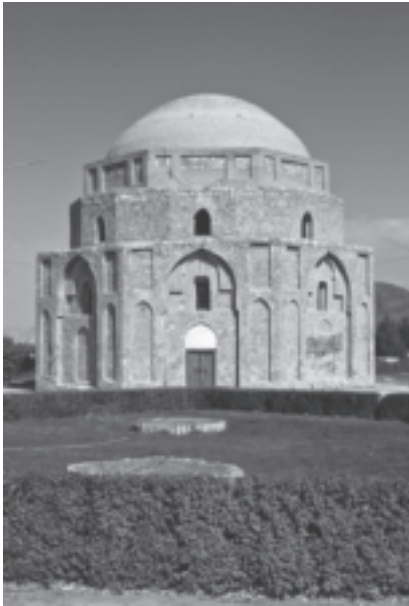


Fig. 9 Mausoleum, Jabali Sang in Kerman, Iran, 14. century, Photo: Speidel.



Fig. 10 Bruno Taut, Glasshouse, pavillon for the glass industry, Cologne 1914.



Fig. 11 Mausoleums of the Mamluk-Dynasty, Kairo, from: David Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, London 1848.

of Iron” for the steel industries in Leipzig, 1913, is something like a “Babylonian” four-stepped tower of steel and glass that comes very close to a Persian Mausoleum in Kerman of the 14th century (Fig. 8 and 9). Even the “Glasshouse” for the Werkbund Exhibition in Cologne of 1914, consisting of a base, a circle of 14 columns and a dominating 14-cornered dome with an avant-gardistic net-structure (Fig.10), resembles in profile and articulation the cupolas of Egyptian Mamluk Mausoleums, as Taut’s friend, the renowned



Fig. 12 Bruno Taut, House of Friendship, Constantinoples, competition entry, 1916.



Fig. 13 Silhoutte of Istanbul, 1964, Photo: Speidel.

writer Paul Scheerbart (1863–1915) had remarked (Fig.11). With the thin skeleton structure of reinforced concrete to support coloured glass walls, Taut created a glass architecture for which “Gothic” had been a “prelude,” as he claimed. But, for me, it looks like a transformation of “Oriental architecture” into modern techniques, even though Taut may not have been aware of it and had just designed it from its mathematical formulations.³

Constantinople

Taut’s interest in the Muslim culture of the “Near East,” as we Europeans call the region, had clearly come to the surface when he visited Istanbul in August 1916 to see the building-site for the design of a House of Friendship, for which a competition had been announced by the German-Turkish Society. That way, Taut could escape for two weeks the depressive

situation in Germany which was in the midst of the War. He was overwhelmed by the wonderful city and he immediately published his impressions in an essay titled “Travel Impressions from Constantinople.”⁴ He writes: “Constantinople is in every sense the gate to the Orient. The Orient is the true mother of Europe, and our dormant yearning goes always that way.” Excited about the glittering pictures of life and its colours and the exotic smell of Istanbul’s streets he cannot stop his ecstasy but is forced to “look, always look and not think about any thinking.” It is the same phrase which Taut used in 1933 when he visited Nikko but he then gave it a negative meaning.

Taut judges Turkish architecture in its cultural context also to define forms which could be used for his design and would fit to the environment of the old city. He tries to distinguish a “genuine Osmanic” architecture from mixtures with other cultures critisizing the intruding Western, especially German, historicism from around 1890 which lead, as he says, only to “degeneration and ugliness.” Some 30 years later,

3 Manfred Speidel (Hrsg.), *Bruno Taut, Ex Oriente Lux*. The Reality of an Idea, Berlin 2007, p.10 ff. The geometrical analysis in: *Nature and Fanatsy*, note 2, pp.134–136.

4 *Reiseeindrücke aus Konstantinopel*, in: *Ex Oriente*, note 3, pp. 73–78.



Fig. 14 Bruno Taut, *The City Crown*, 1917, published 1919, Fig. 45.

he gave the same judgment on the Japanese mixed modern environment.

Taut eventually designed the House of Friendship in October 1916 as a low and flat volume with a row of arcades and crowned by a 26 meter wide-span network-dome filled with glass blocks, which can be seen as a development from the Cologne Glasshouse combined with the cupola of an Ottoman Mosque. As a competition entry, it had no success (Fig.12).

India

The skyline of Istanbul (Fig.13) with its “cascades” of cupolas, the characteristic form which was given to the mosques in the 16th century, rising above the living quarters stimulated Taut to realise his concept of a “City Crown,” an architectural ensemble of the highest artistic ambitions to dominate an idealised new garden city and give her its spiritual focus. He presented his study as a book with his design and explanatory texts and the German title *Die Stadtkrone*, *The City Crown*,⁵ written in 1917, and published in 1919. (Fig.14) For us, it is interesting that he assembled 40 photos of towering churches, temples and pagodas from Europe, the Near Orient, India (Fig.15) and Indonesia but mixed them into an arbitrary sequence to demonstrate their equality and to prove that the “City Crown” was a worldwide phenomenon. It also shows his determination to look beyond the European culture. The book concludes with a praise of the Indian architecture as the highest achievement of mankind, even beyond the gothic cathedrals—suggesting a development from Gothic to India.⁶ East Asia, China, Korea or Japan with their flat skylines has no proper example in Taut’s book. From China he takes only a topographical plan of the mountain temple Miaio Tai Tze.⁷ Taut’s hymn on the Light from the East, the “Ex Oriente Lux,” which would finally illuminate Europe, starts and ends in India, and



Fig. 15 Madura, big Sapura, in: Bruno Taut, *Stadtkrone*, Fig.11.

5 Bruno Taut, *Die Stadtkrone*, Jena 1919, Reprint edit. by Manfred Speidel, Berlin 2002.

6 The essay is written by the art critic Adolf Behne: “Die Wiedergeburt der Baukunst,” “The Rebirth of Architecture,” in: Taut, *Stadtkrone*, note 5, pp.115–131.

7 *Stadtkrone*, note 5, p. 43.

he was of the view that when confronted with India, the Europeans must, bend down in humbleness.⁸ Taut's unreserved praise of Hindu-India as the zenith of an artistic and monumental world-architecture actually becomes silent after 1920 when he realised that "India" had come to be fashionable in Europe.⁹

The Turn towards Japan

In 1923, Taut felt the necessity to rethink the essentials of living spaces and its furniture for the

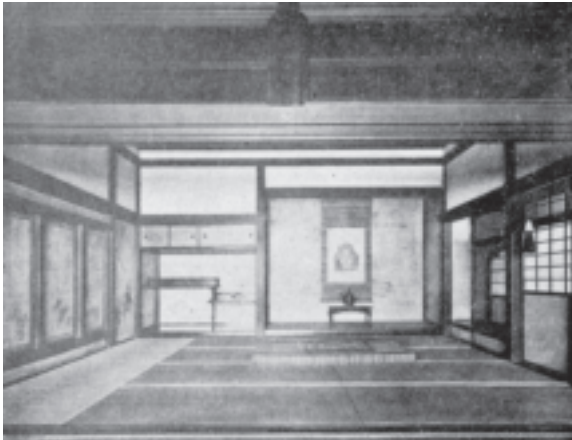


Fig. 16 Sanbōin, Okushinden, in: Bruno Taut, *Die neue Wohnung*, Leipzig 1924, p. 29.

average family house. In the book *Die neue Wohnung*, The New Dwelling,¹⁰ he has a chapter on history and gives examples of idealised spaces of the almost empty medieval European rooms and compares them with photos from an "Oriental" house in Baghdad and with two examples from a Japanese house. The simplicity of the completely empty spaces in Japan surprise even more, since the two photos show examples from aristocratic villas with no ornamentation and furniture at all¹¹ (Fig.16). Taut, who could know Japan only from photos,

explains lucidly about the tatami-floor and the sitting customs on the floor; he admires the *tokonoma*-niche as the only place for hanging paintings and placing flowers and the niche with decorative shelves for the display of crafts, and he praises the functional built-in cupboards as hollowed walls for storage. Important is his conclusion: the plain wood of the structure, the delicate and restrained colours of the paper-clad and the clay-walls and the soft light transmitted by the translucent paper-doors are in complete harmony with the colourful pillows on the floor and the colourful silk dresses of the Japanese. "In such a (modest) space human becomes completely himself." This is convincing. Taut may have seen coloured woodblock-prints. But he does not recommend to copy Japanese buildings. This is true also when he appeals for and proposes simplifying the overloaded interiors of German houses: he is strictly against any kind of Japonism, but he intends to apply the logic of Japanese culture to the German (or European) tradition by a kind of inversion. He concludes: "since we—in contrast to the Japanese—mainly use restrained colours for our dresses our

8 Bruno Taut, "Ex oriente lux," in: *Ex Oriente Lux*, note 3, pp. 101–104.

9 Bruno Taut, "Glaserzeugung und Glasbau," in: *Die Qualität*, 1, H. 1/2, April/Mai 1920, S. 11.

10 Written in the last quarter of 1923, and published in 1924. Reprint: M. Speidel (Hrsg.), *Bruno Taut, Die neue Wohnung*, Berlin 2001.

11 *Die neue Wohnung*, note 10, p. 29, Sanbōin, Oku Shinden, late 16. century. The photo is taken from *Japanese Temples and Their Arts*, Tokyo 1910, ill.132.

bodies will appear more lively, more corporeal, when our walls have pure colours.”¹² This means, Taut refers to Japanese culture just to support his main concern to create plain, but strong coloured surfaces for our architectural wall structures to replace ornaments or decorations.

In early, 1923 Taut also refers to Japanese philosophy. In lectures he gave in February 1923,¹³ he quotes from Kakuzo Okakura, *The Book of Tea*. He had felt the necessity to justify his heterogeneous designs for Magdeburg (when he worked there as a city planner during 1921–1924), which display no unified or simple, say “classicist” form, and he does it with the following sentences from Okakura: “The dynamic nature of the (Taoist) philosophy laid more stress upon the process through which perfection was sought than upon perfection itself... Uniformity of design was considered as fatal to the freshness of imagination. True beauty could be discovered only by one who mentally completed the incomplete.”¹⁴ Taut’s emphasis in the lecture on “living in the present,” or we have to “be ourselves,” or even the title of his speech: “On the spirit of the present in architecture” is inspired by Okakura’s text.

Taut’s idea of the small which cannot be made good if the vision of the whole is not present in the mind, or the equal importance of the mundane with the spiritual, written in the early 20s¹⁵ are thoughts to be found in Okakura’s book as well. We may even connect Taut’s later concept of “relativity,” which he defines after the second visit to the Katsura Villa in 1934, with Okakura’s emphasis on it in Taoist philosophy.

Culture

Culture, to Taut, means a balanced totality of life, customs and space, including philosophical concepts. On a spiritual level cultures can meet and fertilise each other. But the actual confrontation with the people and their environment changes and differentiates the perception of their culture. Taut was not able to travel to India, so its images seem to have become blurred after 1920 compared to Moscow and the USSR where he lived and worked through 1932 and left with great disappointment in February 1933. Grecian culture and the Acropolis of Athens which had never been mentioned by Taut before, became prominent on his cruise through the Mediterranean sea on his escape from Germany to Japan in the spring of 1933. Throughout the three and a half years, from 1933 to 1936, Japan had been the object of a most intensive study, deepening his understanding when Taut realised on his own the importance of climate for each culture and its architecture. His life in Turkey from 1936 till 1938 was completely occupied by architectural design, building of schools and teaching students. In a way, it became the application of his theoretical studies in Japan. Moreover, all the cultures Taut experienced directly were in a similar critical state of modernisation. The

12 *Die neue Wohnung*, note 10, pp. 29–31.

13 Bruno Taut, “Vom gegenwärtigen Geist der Architektur,” in: *Hellweg*, 3(1923), pp. 478–489, published in *Ex Oriente Lux*, note 3, pp. 160–166.

14 Kakuzō Okakura, *The Book of Tea*, 1906, had been published in German first in 1919 as *Das Buch vom Tee*, in the popular Insel Bücherei Nr.174. The quote is found on page 50. “Das wahrhaft Schöne ließ sich nur von dem entdecken, der denkend das Unvollendete vollendete.” The english quote is from the edition edited by Hiroshi Muraoka, Tokyo 1967, p. 62.

15 For example: Bruno Taut, “Architektur neuer Gemeinschaft,” in *Ex Oriente*, note 3, pp. 129–136.

quality of native ways of production and building had already been on the retreat or at least had come into a growing competition with the Western industrialised techniques which were necessary for development.

Modernism and Internationalism

Even before Taut became an architect moving from country to country, he formulated his view on



Fig. 17 Ueno Isaburō, Tōyōtei Restaurant, Kyoto, around 1929.

the results of “Modern Architecture” in the Western world, in the countries of Europe, in the Soviet Union and in the United States. He realised that the evaluation of other cultures would require the recognition of the fundamentals and—for their modernisation—the creation of transformational concepts.

The question was, what was modern architecture to be?

In the book *Modern Architecture*,

Die neue Baukunst,¹⁶ written and

published in German and English in 1929, Taut argues that only the complete fulfillment of the purpose of a building, a radical functionalism, would guaranty unity and harmony in architecture. “Architecture is an art whose contents is its usefulness, and also transverse, the building gives the proper use its order.” He writes the formula: “The task of architecture is the creation of the beautiful (fine) use.” In German, it sounds better: “Die Aufgabe der Architektur ist die Schaffung des schönen Gebrauchs.”¹⁷ A modern Japanese architecture—seen from this point of view—is judged by Taut in this book as having not yet started. “The modern movement in Japan has so far led rather to general good-will than to concrete results.” It has to be added that Taut could later find examples of “beautiful use,” more than everywhere else, in Japan, in almost everything, but especially in the art of the tea ceremony.

It was not until 1930 that a modern Japanese building actually is shown in a German magazine: Bruno Taut added to an article on the “Architectural Situation in Russia” an extra page with two photos of the restaurant Tōyōtei built by Ueno Isaburō in Kyoto¹⁸ (Fig.17). Taut had found these photos in the magazine *Arkitekturo Internacia* of the International Architectural Association of Japan which he received as one of its foreign members since its foundation in 1927. He had been invited in 1930 to attend the group’s conference in Kyoto. Having seen its publications, he excused himself of having had no proper information when he

16 Bruno Taut, *Modern Architecture*, London 1929. Bruno Taut, *Die Neue Baukunst in Europa und Amerika*, Stuttgart 1929.

17 Note 16, *Modern Architecture*, p. 9, *Neue Baukunst*, p. 7.

18 Bruno Taut, “Rußlands architektonische Situation,” in: *Moderne Bauformen* 29 (1930) H.2, Februar, pp. 57–66, addition p. 67 comment on the Japanese situation.

wrote the book “Modern Architecture” in England. He took the chance to correct his earlier dissenting remarks, and finds now, “that the new architecture is (well) able to be brought into harmony with the character of the Japanese people and race. The building connects a modern attitude with the delicacy of old Japanese tradition.” His argument goes for an indigenous modern architecture not in a shallow “International Style” with cubic white forms everywhere all the same, which would result in a boring world. In his 1929 book, the German edition, he wrote:

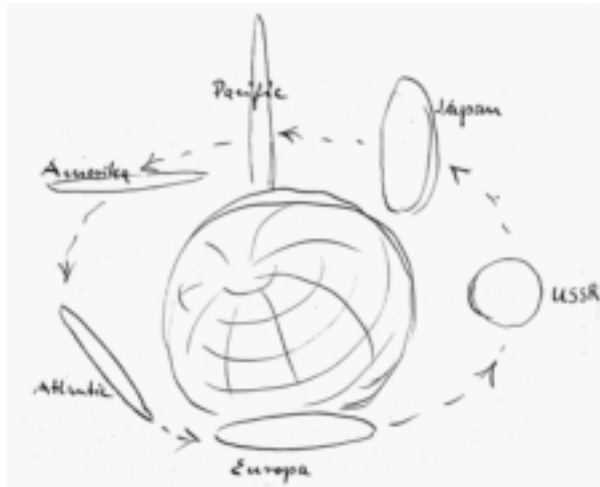


Fig.18 Bruno Taut, *Zeppelin Flying around the World*, sketch in *Mimari Bilgisi*, 1938, Fig. 21.

It is not surprising when together with the technical equipments, machines, steamships and industries also the respective Western architecture had been transmitted to these countries in development and “Europeanised” local architects had built “Kitsch”-Hotels as everywhere else... (But) internationality in our sense means to re-discover the basic conditions to building. Not at all should one type of formal appearance (like the cubic shape) be poured all over the world like a dilute solution. Indications are regrettably already to be found, for example, in Japan. Therefore it is necessary to think about it... The new architecture is inhabited by another spirit. Its determination by purposes means that the North-Russian house will not become more similar to a Javanese one; on the contrary. But what is similar and what connects both of them is contained in the sound and natural process of building. What remains is the constructing Javanese, Indian, Chinese, Japanese etc. The constraints to apply a European style are omitted. Therefore: autonomy of architecture.¹⁹

In the later book *Architekturlehre*, to underline his idea of functions adapting their form to different cultures and conditions, Taut draws an image of a Zeppelin Airplane which flies around the world receives a metamorphosis from oblong to circle and changing its direction from horizontal to vertical (Fig.18).

Japan

“The spirit of the people speaks from their buildings.”²⁰ Even though Taut did not expect anything in

19 *Die neue Baukunst*, note 16, German addition “Schluss. Internationalität,” p. 67.

20 “Wir wollen nicht, daß die Erde langweiliger wird. Die Erde soll reicher werden. Denn in den Bauten, aus den Bauten

this sense to find in modern Japan he claimed to be optimistic when he announced his coming in a letter written on the Siberian Railway, which was published in the May issue of the *Arkitekturo Internacia*, which was actually its last number: The (Japanese) tradition of simplicity, the importance of the “empty” place, etc. conform to tendencies in modern architecture. “Therefore modern architecture needs not to come in contradiction to the old tradition of Japan. The care of the old Japanese house can continue side by side with the modern one. There is no need to fear a loss of national identity. On the contrary the natural connection of the old with the new gives great hope for the unfolding of a new Japanese art.”²¹

It may not surprise that the building which had been chosen by Taut’s hosts to show him on his second day in Japan as a present for his 53rd birthday, the Imperial villa Katsura, was immediately seen by him as something very modern. Taut describes the Katsura villa in his diary and in his book *Nippon Seen with European Eyes*²² with characteristics he had already defined before as characteristics of modern architecture in the book of 1929.

Katsura

One of the first remarks on Katsura in *Nippon* is a comparison with the Acropolis, which he saw



Fig. 19 Katsura Rikyū, Entrance Court, from: Kunimoto Kawakami, *Kyoto—Sentō Gosho, Nijō, Katsura, Shūgakuin Rikyū*, portfolio of about 20 volumes, starting 1928.

a month earlier, in that “forms are removed from any individualistic and arbitrary expression true to generations of refinement” or in the diary on Katsura: “Building lacking individuality, everything looks the same.”²³ It can be understood from Taut’s own efforts on social housing to display a collective attitude and avoid personal favourite ideas in structural matters or in taste to the expense of its usefulness. He continues in 1929, “All elements of a building, the individual part like the whole should derive their form from the sense pertaining to each. All of it is meaningless when of no use or when the result is not in proportion to the costs...”²⁴

At Katsura the entrance would not be called an “architecture” by art history books because here the gutter and the drainage-pipe from bamboo are practical necessity in the same way as they are

spricht ihr Geist.” *Die neue Baukunst*, note 16, p. 67

21 “Zu meiner bevorstehenden Reise nach Japan,” in: Manfred Speidel (edit.), *Bruno Taut, Ich liebe die japanische Kultur*, Berlin 2003, S. 45.

22 Manfred Speidel (edit.), *Bruno Taut, NIPPON mit europäischen Augen gesehen*, 1. German edition, Berlin 2009.

23 Reisenotizen (Japanese diary 2. and 3. May 1933) in : *Ex Oriente Lux*, note 3, pp. 221–223.

24 *Modern Architecture*, note 16, p. 135.

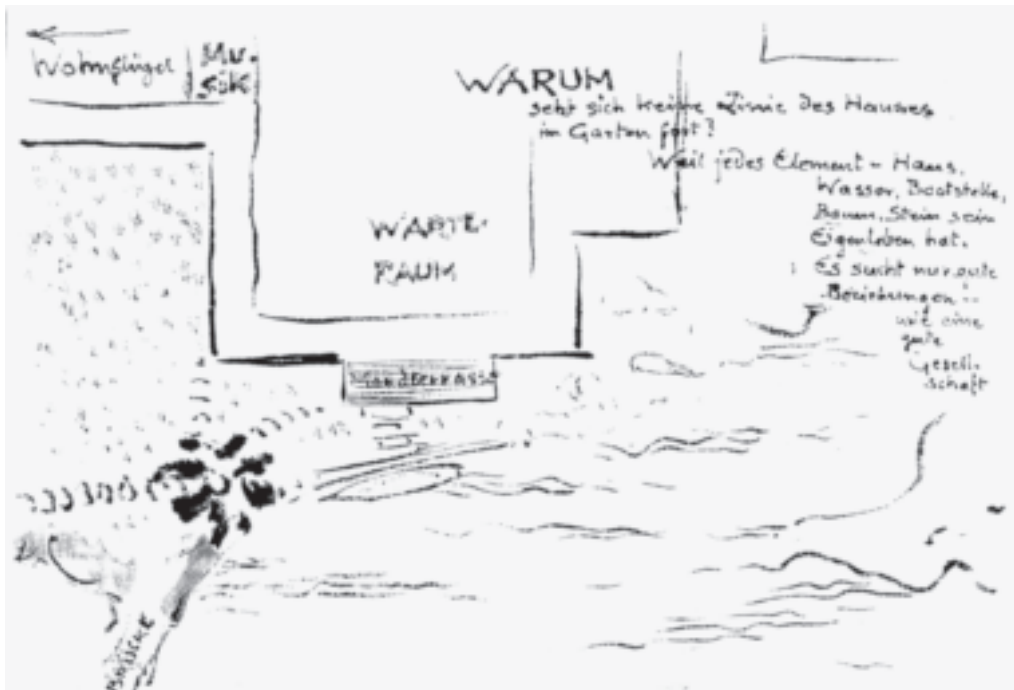


Fig. 20 Bruno Taut, *Katsura Album*, 1934, Iwanami Shoten, Tokyo.

architectural form. The modern architect will determine with surprise, that this building is absolutely modern in so far that it fulfills its requirements on the shortest and most simple way. Standard measures are strictly applied, and there is nothing which arises the impression of individual fortuitousness²⁵ (Fig. 19).

When Taut sums up the first chapter of *Nippon* saying that parts of the gardens as well as the buildings of Katsura are neutral, “so that we can imagine that with such a naturalness of forms also the life, the behavior of the people and the relations between them must have been a matter of course and natural as well.”²⁶ In 1929, in an analogy to the “modern” open and social minded society Taut states: “With modern architecture, the elements of building have also achieved an authentic freedom... Freedom for the individual elements means that all of them cooperate in a perfectly equal way, so effacing any hierarchy of higher and lower, since the indispensability of the individual components is immediately obvious. There is not any constraint forced by an architectural style-costume or by obligations to an axis or a symmetry. “The ordering of these things is no longer based on a preconceived canon (of traditional forms);.. it is indeed in parallel relationship to the ordering of our own existence,”²⁷ an existence based on equality.

25 *Nippon*, note 22, p. 21.

26 *Nippon*, note 22, p. 28.

27 *Modern Architecture*, note 16, p.135, 140. Retranslated from German.



Fig. 21 Katsura Rikyū, New Shoin, from: Kawakami, see Fig.19, around 1928.



Fig. 22 Katsura Rikyū, Old Shoin, from: Kawakami, around 1928.



Fig. 23 Katsura Rikyū, Shōkintei, from: Kawakami, around 1928.

Taut expressed these ideas in his album devoted to Katsura in May 1934. On sheet 12, next to the plan of the Old Shoin with the Moon-Viewing platform and the garden with its stone pathways that intersect diagonally: “Why is there no line of the house extended to the garden? Because each element—house, water, boat-landing, tree, stone, has a life of its own. It only searches for good relations, like a good society.”²⁸ (Fig.20) For Taut the criss-cross composition reflects the attitude of an enlightened society. The paths guide directly to their destinations, independent from the geometry of the building. While this is “functional” it appears totally informal as well.

Taut interprets Katsura not only in terms of his functionalist theory of 1929 but also in line with his utopian concept of a complete human environment. This can be said to be completed only when the buildings for ordinary everyday use, the dwellings, the working and recreation places, and those for social activities, etc. are complemented with spiritual and artistic buildings which are free of any practical purpose as Taut defined it in the *City Crown* of 1917 and in the essays in 1920.²⁹ At the second visit to Katsura in May 1934 he analyses the degree of artistic expression of the garden in the various parts of the complex in the context of the task they were supposed to serve. The formal quality of buildings is not the source of Katsura’s beauty, as

28 Taut draws this conclusion after his second visit in May 1934. “Gedanken nach dem Besuch in Katsura.” in: Taut, *Natur und Fantasie*, note 2, p. 314.

29 “Architektur neuer Gemeinschaft” in: *Ex Oriente Lux*, note 3, pp. 129–136.

Taut emphasizes, but the gradually unfolding relations between buildings and gardens when you experience and recognize them; and more important, the relation between the buildings in respect to their position in the social life of its owners.

Taut sees three main parts: the private living at two of the three staggered *shoin* buildings, the reception of guests at the Old Shoin, and the spiritual seclusion at the Shokintei (Fig. 21, 22, 23).

The private dwelling-spaces in the Second and the Third Shoin are built simple and practical. The living rooms face a garden without any design but just a plain lawn, a sports field, and with the trees like in a German “farmer’s” garden. This “no-garden” supports a quiet personal life.

The building for reception of guests, the Old Shoin, seen by Taut as the part for the social and official life, displays a symmetrical, slightly curving roof, which has a representative and “stately” character. But underneath the roof all symmetry disappears. In the graceful colonnade the asymmetrical succession of the interiors is reflected on the outside. Inside, it is very simple avoiding any kind of decoration, but from there it gives the main view of the elaborate and well designed lake garden with islands.

And there is a third part on the opposite side of the compound, leading from the Old Shoin to the teahouse of the Shōkintei through a sophisticated and artistic landscape-garden. The path comes from an idyllic scenery of a valley (with a waiting pavillon, which Taut ignores), passes a lovely murmuring brook and turns into a rocky landscape. Taut interpretes this as the turning point (“Wendepunkt”), which requires from the visitor a “serious consideration”³⁰ so as if asking: Do you really want to take the hard way to approach the narrow tearoom as the place for philosophical contemplation (on works of art)?

After the “ascetic” tearoom, the progress to the blue-white checkered walls of the main rooms of Shōkintei with a view on the fine landscape garden (an allusion to the famous “Amanohashidate” scenery), and after that the walk through the pleasant nature of flowering trees which continues to the soft hill is friendly and the visitor feels relaxed and a certain happiness, as if he had experienced an enlightenment.

Katsura a Cosmos?

This interpretation of the Katsura buildings and its gardens as a sequence of interrelated parts like an unbroken chain may appear to be a Westerner looking for deeper meanings in Japanese culture. Taut never tired of revealing the ways in which Katsura succeeded to satisfy a plurality of purposes, to be exact, three purposes that go well beyond the 1929 requirement for a functionality of basic necessities. “Every part of the complex, from whichever side you view it, is remarkably elastic in fulfilling the purpose that they, like the whole, are meant to serve, whether of ordinary everyday utility or official purposes or even in the expression of an elevated philosophical spirituality. And the wonderful thing is that all three of these purposes are so closely united that one cannot perceive the confines between one and the other.”³¹

Taut finds that the three functions, in their differences, are clearly articulated so that an attentive

30 Katsura Album, in *Natur und Fantasie*, note 2, p. 312.

31 Bruno Taut, *Houses and People of Japan*, Tokyo 1937, p. 291.

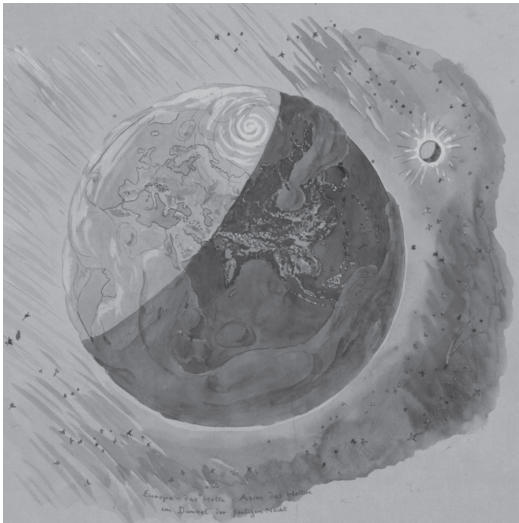


Fig. 24 Bruno Taut, *Alpine Architecture*, 1919, plate 25. Earth, Asiatic Side. “Europe—the bright one. Asia the brighter one in the dark of the colourful night.”

eye can recognise them and find out about the sense they have in the whole complex. “It is the eye that thinks ... in that it sees.” This “functional beauty” makes “the eye a sort of transformer of thought.”³²

Since Taut keeps a ranking of the three parts at the Katsura complex from the ordinary daily utility passed the communal functions of representation up to high thinking and to the arts he defines it as a complete cosmos, its beauty being more than form, being a kind of “style built out of relationships: it is built relatively, so to speak.”³³

Thus far, Katsura not only refers to the *City Crown* of 1917 but further to Taut’s utopia of the *Alpine Architecture* of 1918–1919. During the wartime, Taut proposed to create incredibly large

and extensive architectural works of art without any utilitarian function distributed on mountains and islands all over the world (Fig. 24). It would be necessary to employ all economic and cultural resources, first from European countries, then involving all countries in the world to realise the immense structures made of crystal and glass. This would be the only way to stop the production of war machinery and to prevent further wars on the globe. What in 1918 were fulminant works of art as peacemakers became in 1933 for Taut the cultural achievement of the Japanese teahouse and its culmination in the combination with the Shokintei in the context of the Katsura villa, as a place of solely spiritual and artistic activities. This explains why Taut describes the series of analytical sketches he draws in 1934, *The Katsura Album*, as his “Second Alpine Architecture.” Like the first one, it was also meant to be a “peace manifesto.” In a note in his diary for May 10, 1934, after he had given the album to the Kyoto collector of paintings of Uragami Gyokudō and Takamura Chikuden, who Taut admired most, we read: “It is a sad world this, where concerning oneself with spiritual things is seen as almost a luxury! What would Japan be reduced to such a mentality? Only cannons etc.” (Which means actually: War!)

One may understand that Taut’s admiration of Katsura is not limited to a “modern”-like appearance of simplicity in its buildings which could be admired by modernists as well, but his interpretation beyond the fine craftwork and the brilliant garden may be too difficult to be understood by ordinary visitors; and it may be suspect to the historians who cannot find adequate written sources for such an interpretation. So we

32 “Das architektonische Weltwunder Japans,” in: Manfred Speidel (edit.), *Bruno Taut, Ich liebe die japanische Kultur*, Berlin 2003, p. 96.

33 *Das architektonische Weltwunder Japans*, note 32, p. 99.

may have to admit that Bruno Taut's Katsura is not necessarily the "Japanese Katsura."

Taut's finding that the three functional complexes are separated as well as connected into a whole by stonepaths and greenery may be seen as just a common way in Japanese gardening to arrange the in-betweens of the collection of buildings, when new pavillons were added to the existing ones. We also have to consider



Fig. 25 Bruno Taut, Faculty for Literature, University of Ankara, 1937–1940. Photo: Speidel.

that wider empty places for outside activities had to be reserved on the ground where more than one building and a garden, probably the Old Shoin, already existed before the others were added. Taut could not know this, the history of Katsura had not yet been clarified. He could obviously not accept a heterogeneity of the composition, especially since he believed that Katsura had only one designer, Kobori Enshū. So for his interpretation he excluded the prominent Gepparo- and the Shokatei-Tea pavillons. He could not yet define their proper relationship to the other buildings.

Nevertheless the main contrast in architecture and composition: the South-facing living-part of the *shoin* group, and the North-facing pavillon of the Shōkintei, can be given a contrasting meaning. The name of Shokin-tei refers to a (ritual) nightwatch which would indicate the pavillon to have been at least once a year a place for celebration; this would give it a fairly religious meaning compared to the living quarters.³⁴

One may see Taut's interpretation as exaggerated, but he has given to the Katsura complex a superior importance, not to speak about it to being a model of a better society and its environment, not only for Japan but for all cultures. Taut may be understood as saying: Each culture has to find its own "Katsura," its cosmos in its own place where the ordinary and simple is combined with the spiritual, not mixed but separately arranged and acknowledged. Taut was not able to fulfill this dream in his own work. As a step between the "low" and the "high" on a "stepladder" of formal expressions he well added characteristics which he thought to be important for a higher status of a public building. This was a symmetric central part and, for example, a special form of gable with a motto in letters as he built at the University Building in Ankara. At the ground floor under the gable the entrance, the foyer and the auditorium are arranged asymmetrically according to the functions—as at Katsura's Old Shoin, the rooms and the moon-terrace (Fig. 25).

34 Akira Naito, Takeshi Nishikawa, *Katsura, A Princely Retreat*, Tokyo/New York, 1977, p. 155. Naito argues that the tearoom might have been added and "squeezed in" later.

Relativity of World Architecture

During his second exile in Turkey 1936–38, Taut compiled his view on architecture in a book for lectures, the “Architekturlehre.”³⁵ In 1935–1936 he made a complete research on the history and the cultural conditions of the Japanese house, including climate, techniques and beliefs. He called it “The Japanese house and its home life,” “Das japanische Haus und sein Leben,” translated into English as “Houses and People of Japan,” published in 1937 when he already had been in Turkey. This book was not any more a polemic but was intended to be a methodological basis for an architect who wanted to build in contemporary Japan. Taut used it also as a base for a long essay *Architekturüberlegungen*, Considerations on Architecture, which he wrote in December 1935 and January 1936³⁶ which he extended with many examples for the *Architekturlehre*. Taut now took a distant view on Japan and opened the horizon again for global aspects. He included in his theory all eminent works of world architecture, Grecian as well as Japanese and Chinese, but he appointed to each of it one special “task” which he thought they fulfilled in world culture under the aspects of an Architectural theory: aspects of Technique, of Structure and of Function.

To be short: classical Grecian and Japanese architecture are seen as masterpieces in techniques in the sense of material, of refinement and precision of details, and the Japanese house is mentioned for its solutions to manage the climate. Gothic and Turkish architecture have gained importance in structural aspects. Masterpieces of huge stone structures, vaulting and cupolas had been created. Aspects of function could best be studied at the Japanese house represented by the Katsura villa which provides the solution for a whole set of functions necessary for a human environment: practical as well as spiritual functions. Also the arrangement of long axis becomes an aspect of function when we consider Chinese architecture.³⁷

With the idea to determine the contribution of a country to world architecture, Taut assigned to each culture an importance relative to any other. He obviously replaced nationalistic interpretations of culture—which actually he himself stimulated by his definition of a “real” or “pure” Japanese architecture at Katsura or the Ise Shrines—by a far-reaching study and building programme.

A Specialist in Japanese Culture?

The effects produced by Taut’s writings on Japan which we mentioned at the beginning had been studied in every detail already 20 years ago by Shōichi Inoue in his excellent book, *The Made Myth of Katsura*.³⁸ It is regrettable that there is no English translation of this work so far. I also feel that the translations of Taut’s writings into Japanese have to be revised.

35 Published in Turkish as *Mimari Bilgisi*, Istanbul 1938. Recently in German: Manfred Speidel (Edit.) *Bruno Taut, Architekturlehre*, in: arch+ 194, Berlin 2009.

36 Published in German as “Beiheft” of arch+ 194, Berlin 2009.

37 In this world perspective Indian architecture became not more than a particular case of luxuriant decoration. *Architekturlehre*, note 35. p.40. The analysis of Katsura helped Taut to develop his idea of relativity (“architecture of relations”) as well as that of “elasticity” of functions and of his final concept of architecture as the art of “proportion.”

38 Shōichi Inoue, *Tsukurareta katsura rikyū shinwa*, Tokyo, 1987.



Fig. 26 Bruno Taut, Own House in Ortaköy, Istanbul, 1938. Photo: Speidel.

I will give just one example. Inoue builds his story on Taut's remarks in the diary entry from November 4, 1935 when he considers to write a book on the Katsura villa. In Shinoda's translation it reads: "I may fairly say with pride (self-confidence, *jifu*) to be the discoverer of Katsura Rikyū."³⁹ Taut himself writes instead: "Hier bin ich quasi sein Entdecker." "Here I am, so to speak, (as it were), its discoverer." This is quite a different attitude even though Taut displays surely a self-confidence in his remark to his family in Germany to which the diary is addressed.

We come back to the observation of Tokugen Mihara that Taut seemed to have kept images of Western and Oriental culture on dispose in his heart. Despite that Tokugen Mihara was convinced that Taut's spiritual homeland and his deep love was actually not Japan, the "Far East," but Turkey, the "Near East," from which he was emotionally moved. Japan came later into his mind. But it was still there and molded into a unique synthesis when we look at his last work. The house he built for himself in 1938 at Ortaköy in Istanbul was seen as Turkish by the Japanese and as Japanese by the Turkish. The octagonal plan refers to Taut's house designs of the early 1920s as well (Fig. 26). Mihara concluded: "It is located on the European side of the Bosphorus. It seems to look yearning over to Asia—from Europe ..."⁴⁰

39 *Nihon, Tauto no nikki*, Vol. 3, Tokyo, 1975, p. 297.

40 Mihara, *Kunstgewerbe*, note 1, p. 142.