To what extent did architecture contribute to Japan’s transition in the Meiji Restoration?

Grace Izinyon
To what extent did Architecture contribute to Japan’s transition in the Meiji Restoration?

Introduction

The Meiji Period took place during 1868 to 1912; it was the beginning of modernization for Japan and was followed by the Taisho period (1912 - 1926), Showa period (1926 - 1989) and the Heisei period (1989 – present). The Tokugawa Period, commonly known as the Edo Period, was the era before the Meiji Period; it began in 1600 and ended in 1868. During the Tokugawa reign the Tokugawa shogun, who was a military dictator, Tokugawa Yoshinobu ruled Japan. Japan was a closed off country to limit Westernizing influences from effecting the Japanese society. Contact with the outside world was extremely limited, all foreigners were forbidden to enter Japan and Japanese citizens who left the country could never return. The penalty for disobeying these laws was death. However, there was a little trade that allowed a few Dutch traders to trade in Dejima, a little island in the middle of Nagasaki Bay. Despite their limited trade, the Japanese economy grew during the Tokugawa period maintaining close relationships with only their neighbouring countries, China and Korea. The social hierarchy during the Tokugawa reign was separated into four classes; samurai, peasants/farmers, artisans and craftsmen and the lowest members was the merchants. Since the economy was established on agriculture, rice was the unit of measure for wealth. Due to the warrior's

---


position, their salary was paid in rice, which meant their net worth was high and “fluctuated as wildly as the annual harvest yields”. The merchants had the lowest social standing in Japan because it was believed their income was from the labour of others.

The spark for the beginning of the Meiji Restoration was influenced by the aftermath of the First Opium War between China and the British Empire in 1842. China’s humiliating defeat forced the country to sign the first “Unequal Treaty” in East Asia. Unequal treaties are treaties that impose harsh terms and conditions for the weaker country by the stronger nation; it varies from claiming territory to enforcing trade rights between countries. The treaty between the British Empire and China was called the Treaty of Nanjing, which forced China to open five of their treaty ports to foreign traders, accept foreign Christian missionaries into China and allow extraterritoriality rights to British missionaries, traders and citizens. This meant that the crimes committed by British citizens in China would be trialed by British officials instead of facing Chinese courts. Shortly following this in 1854, Commodore Matthew Perry, an American Captain, sailed four warships to Japan from America to form an agreement with the Tokugawa shogun. This “agreement”, which was written from US president Millard Fillmore, was more in the form of an Unequal Treaty. This treaty demanded for protections of US sailors who were shipwrecked onto Japan, help in restocking or repairing US ships and opening additional treaty ports in Japan. In return, Japan acquired nothing. As well as peasant uprisings due to years of famine, tension was created within Japan, especially within anti-Tokugawa clans,

---


which consisted of the Choshu clan and the Satsuma clan\textsuperscript{12}. The response to the agreement was split; half of the Japanese lords voted to not accept the agreement, whilst the rest vote to accept the agreement, in fear of worse treaty conditions and terms to come in the future.

In the end, the shogun agreed to the treaty and due to his decision, in 1868, the Choshu and Satsuma clans led a rebellion and overpowered the shogun and his forces. The rebellion’s main goal was to restore power back to the emperor Meiji rather than having a military dictator rule the country as the shogun failed to oppose the Western demands\textsuperscript{13,14}. In Japan, every era is titled by the name of the emperor\textsuperscript{15}. Since the emperor was called Meiji Tenno\textsuperscript{16}, the rebellion marked the beginning of the Meiji Era.

The goal of the Meiji Restoration was to “Enrich the country and strengthen the army”\textsuperscript{17}. In order to escape Western colonization, the Meiji government realized Japan needed to achieve military and economic modernization\textsuperscript{18}. One of the first laws that were enforced was to abolish the old social hierarchy within Japan. This meant that samurais, craftsman, peasants and merchants were all within the same level of social ranking. Following this was a universal education scheme within the country as well as the launch of the Iwakura

\begin{footnotes}
\end{footnotes}
Mission in 1871 19 20. The Iwakura Mission was between 1871 to 1873, over a hundred Japanese politicians, administrators and students travelled to several important cities in Europe and USA, in order to collect information about anything ranging from ways of living to government systems and economy. The collected information would be used to help the development of Japan 21. In addition to the Iwakura Mission, in the mid-1870's, Japan invited a range of Western experts, which included architects, engineers, military strategists and more, into the country to assist in Japan's development 22.

**Architecture in the Meiji Period**

The Meiji Restoration was the division between modern and traditional architecture in Japan. Western styles advanced Japan’s architecture as numerous traditional buildings were changed to modern style and this term was called “motra” (modern-traditional). There are three types of motra buildings. Type one motra had a traditional structure and appearance and this was mainly used in daily life architecture, such as in shrines and inns. Type 2 motra had a traditional structure but a modern appearance; an example of this type would be in modern houses with synthetic sidings. The last type (Type 3 motra) had a modern structure but a traditional appearance and this type was mainly used in restaurants to attract customers by having a modern exterior but a traditional atmosphere inside 23. The two main architectural influences during the restoration were English and German. For instance in

---


larger scale public buildings, stones and reinforced brick were used instead of the traditional wood\textsuperscript{24}.

Architecture was Japan’s symbol of history, culture and innovation. Though, it was one of the aspects of the Japanese culture that was affected by Japan’s transition in changing economically, culturally, politically and socially during the Meiji period. It was affected because it was difficult for the Japanese to find a right balance between Western architecture and still represent their national identity with traditional aspects of Japanese architecture\textsuperscript{25}.

In this report, I plan to look at three public buildings that were planned and/or constructed during the Meiji Era. Within each building, I plan to investigate the goal of the building, plan, structure and the social responses. Following this, I will evaluate how the building contributed to Japan’s mission in becoming a modern nation, whether it helped political, economical, social and cultural development.

**The Imperial Diet Building**

The Imperial Diet Building was a government building built for the Imperial Diet and it was constructed after the Meiji Era in 1920 but the plans began in the 1880s\textsuperscript{26}. The Imperial Diet was the new government that was formed during the Meiji Era, as there were deep concerns about the Japan government around the world\textsuperscript{27}. Once formed, the Diet always gathers in small rooms, such as lecture halls or temples, and sat in a circle to have discussions. This made it difficult for the members to argue effectively. Fukuzawa Yukichi, a head member of the Diet, concluded that the Imperial


\textsuperscript{25} Christine Manzano Visita, “Japanese Cultural Transition: Meiji Architecture and The effect of cross-cultural exchange with the West”, Digital Commons, \url{http://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=forum} [accessed 10 August 2016]

\textsuperscript{26} Steven Sundberg, “Imperial Diet Building, Kasumigaseki”, Old Tokyo, \url{http://www.oldtokyo.com/imperial-diet-building-kasumigaseki/} [accessed 5 November 2016]

\textsuperscript{27} Jonathan M. Reynolds, “Japan’s Imperial Diet Building”, \textit{Debate over Construction of a National Identity}, pp. 38-47
Diet needed an official chamber dedicated solely to public debate. Japan also wanted the Diet Building to serve as a symbol for national identity within Japan and internationally.

The Building was planned to rest in front of Shinbashi station, which is in the Hibiya and Kasumigaseki area in Tokyo. This environment was essential because if anyone had to enter Tokyo, they would have to use Shinbashi Station. The Diet building would be centre among other well-constructed buildings for any visitor, especially foreigners and emissaries. The Government thought by having the Diet building situated as one of the first structures foreigners see once entering Tokyo, it would boost progress in negotiations of Unequal treaties’ terms and conditions.

English architect, Josiah Conder, designed the first plan for the Diet Building. Though, it was rejected as the oligarchs who were a small group of people that had control of Japan. They wanted the building to be very Western style rather than having a Japanese exterior that the designs incorporated. Their main argument was that “a composite architectural style must never be used in designing our government’s buildings”.

German architects, Hermann Ende and Wilhelm Bockmann, designed the 2nd and 3rd plans. The first of the two plans was similar to the architects’ designs for the German Reichstag. The architectural details originated from contemporary European architecture. This consisted of the dome, columns, mansard roofs (roof that has four sloping sides that become steeper halfway down) and the pediment windows. This plan was rejected, as the structure did not tie in with the Japanese wanted. The 3rd plan was more of a hybrid of Japanese and contemporary European architecture. For instance, the mansard roofs were changed to “hipped-and-gabled tiled roofs”, which is inspired from traditional Japanese architecture. However, this plan was also rejected due to the cost of importing the foreign materials.

---


29 Jonathan M. Reynolds, “Japan’s Imperial Diet Building”, Debate over Construction of a National Identity pp. 38-47


31 Jonathan M. Reynolds, “Japan’s Imperial Diet Building”, Debate over Construction of a National Identity, pp. 38-47
Though, the Imperial Diet were working on a deadline, so a temporary structure was created, which was designed by Adolph Stefmueller and Yoshii Shigenori. The first temporary building was completed in 1888. It was a two story wooden structure in a European style. However, the original design for the building had Japanese embellishment, such as an irimoya roof. The building lasted for one month as it was destroyed in a fire in January 1891.

A 2nd provisional building was completed six months after in 1891, which lasted for 35 years. The style, material and construction were very similar to the 1st building. However, the new building consisted of elements that would make the structure more fire resistant than the previous one. Firewalls, spare seats and improved acoustics of the chambers were also added.

---


During the years of the existence of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} building, the government created a panel to discuss a more permanent structure for the Imperial Diet. The opinions of the panel was split in half, some were for a purely western style building, while others wanted the permanent building to be more traditional\textsuperscript{34}. A competition was held in 1918, which was ruled by Tatsuno Kingo. There was no limitation to the design and first prize was ten thousand yen, which would be 5.4 million yen today. 118 proposals were submitted and 20 were passed for the 2\textsuperscript{nd} round. In the end, Watanabe Fukuzo won first prize and the panel incorporated his plan into the actual blueprint of the final structure\textsuperscript{35}. Watanabe’s plan had a central entry pavilion and two flaking wings, which was the same basic arrangement as Bockmann and Ende’s plans. The roof was flat with subtle ornamentation. Above the centre of the structure was a dome tower and the main entrance was plastered with a pediment portico (a triangular upper part of a wall at the end of a ridged roof supported by columns)\textsuperscript{36}. The current and final Diet building was completed in 1936 after the Meiji period but most of the planning and construction was during the era. It was the tallest building in Japan during this time, with a height of 206m high and

\textsuperscript{34} Jonathan M. Reynolds, “Japan’s Imperial Diet Building”, \textit{Debate over Construction of a National Identity}, pp. 38-47

\textsuperscript{35} Nigel S Roberts, “Japan Imperial Diet Building”, \url{http://www.nigel-roberts.info/japan-diet-building.htm}, [accessed 10 November 2016]

\textsuperscript{36} Jonathan M. Reynolds, “Japan’s Imperial Diet Building”, \textit{Debate over Construction of a National Identity}, pp. 38-47
89m deep and consisted of 393 rooms. It is in a modified Renaissance style with a reinforced concrete and steel frame and faced with a grey granite exterior. The floor plans are from Watanabe Fukuzo’s winning plan. The “stepped pyramidal” roof and stouter tower was influenced from Takeuchi Shinshichi, who came 3rd place. His plan was chosen because instead of European and East Asian plans that were designed by other architects, Takeuchi’s plan was more of a modern hybrid. The materials used were brought from different parts of the country. The granite and marble were from Hiroshima, the lumbers from Keyaki and Hinoki and the modern cravings and moldings represent ancient Japanese folklore and mythologies.

Figure 3: Current and Final Diet Building

From the beginning, the government wanted the Diet building to “embody the spirit of national unity”. However, during the process, a number of issues


38 Jonathan M. Reynolds, “Japan’s Imperial Diet Building”, Debate over Construction of a National Identity, pp. 38-47


40 Jonathan M. Reynolds, “Japan’s Imperial Diet Building”, Debate over Construction of a National Identity, pp. 38-47
arose from the Japanese public. One of the main issues was the nationality of the architect. Since the Iwakura Mission was successful, many Japanese architects were trained to handle important architectural projects like this. However, the government wanted western advisors and foreign architects. Even though the final structure was mainly Watanabe Fukuzo’s design, many were not keen with the idea of having foreigners having an input to a building that was intended to represent Japanese national identity. As well as the nationality of the architect, the lack of “Japaneseness” of the actual building was an issue. The only Japanese element was the decorative motifs and the material used. Though, this element was insufficient compared to the Renaissance style structure\textsuperscript{41}.

Another main issue was the price of the construction from all the temporary buildings to the final product. During the years of construction, Japan was nearly bankrupt as the cost of 25 million yen was very expensive\textsuperscript{42,43}. Despite these issues, when the building was completed was completed, it received attention because of its unfamiliar style in Japan and its grand size\textsuperscript{44}.

The Diet Building had two main goals before the construction process began in the early 1880’s. The first goal was to provide an official meeting area for the Imperial Diet to debate and discuss. The second goal was to be a symbol of national identity. Overall, the building was able to achieve its first goal but failed the latter. Despite the Government’s efforts to improve and promote the designed image of the Diet building, the general views of the building did not change. The Imperial Diet was not a well-favoured and respected body in the eyes of the Japanese public\textsuperscript{45}. This played a big role in the image of the building, as it was always associated with their poor reputation. This hindered people from viewing the structure as more than a political building with

\begin{itemize}
  \item Jonathan M. Reynolds, “Japan’s Imperial Diet Building”, \textit{Debate over Construction of a National Identity}, pp. 38-47
  \item Timothy Langley, “A Brief History of the Japan National Diet Building”, Langley Esquire, \url{http://www.langleyesquire.com/2015/01/08/japan-national-diet-building-history/} [accessed 1\textsuperscript{st} August 2015]
  \item Jonathan M. Reynolds, “Japan’s Imperial Diet Building”, \textit{Debate over Construction of a National Identity}, pp. 38-47
\end{itemize}
“bitter political struggles”. Rather than a national symbol, some viewed it as
disappointment and a waste of the years of construction. From the minute
the Government involved foreign advisors and architects to contribute to the
project, it failed its goal as a national symbol.

As for contributing to Japan’s transition in the Meiji Era, it would be assumed
that the Diet Building was of little help. However, a famous politician once
said, “the physical contours of a chamber can have a decisive influence on the
decisions made in politics”. Before the first Diet Building was constructed,
decisions made within the Imperial Diet would always spiral out of control and
very disorganized. This was due to the chambers they held meetings in. They
were too cramped and had no specific seating arrangements. However, the
final building enforced a sense of authority within the chambers and was able
to reduce disorder when the members were debating. In conclusion, the Diet Building may have not directly contributed to Japan’s transition. However, the existence of the building would have played a hidden
role in the decision-making and organization of the Imperial Diet.

The Rokumeikan

The Rokumeikan also known as the “Deer Cry Pavilion” or the “Hall of the
Baying Stag” was an accommodation building for foreign guests in Japan.
The idea of the existence of the Rokumeikan was generated from Kaoru
Inoue, the Foreign Minister of Japan. Kaoru’s goal for the Rokumeikan was not
only to provide accommodation for foreign guests. He wanted to use this
building to convince Western powers that the Japanese culture was as equal
as the West, because the Western world viewed the Japanese culture as
“barbaric”. He also wanted to renegotiate the Unequal treaty terms that
were enforced by Matthew Perry at the end of the Tokugawa Era in 1854.

---

46 Jonathan M. Reynolds, “Japan’s Imperial Diet Building”, Debate over Construction of a National Identity, pp. 38-47


49 Mami Harano, "Anatomy of Mishima's Most Successful Play Rokumeikan", Dissertations and Theses, pp. 1-68
Before Kaoru’s idea of the Rokumeikan, the Enryokan existed. This accommodation wasn’t as high profiled as the Rokumeikan because it was used as a training school for foreign naval cadets. There were attempts to modernize the old building but it was very out of date to be accommodating Kaoru’s future guests.

Kaoru Inoue assigned British architect Josiah Conder to design the building. Conder wanted to incorporate Japanese architectural elements as part of the design. As he believed that the new Japanese architecture should be based on national history. To make the building more fire resilient to Japan’s occasional fires, Conder planned to use bricks or stones for the exterior structure but at the same time, avoid having a European aesthetic. However, Kaoru rejected most of Conder’s oriental-style focused plans because he wanted the structure to be fully Western styled. This was because Kaoru wanted to create comfortable atmosphere for the foreigners. An atmosphere that would make his guests feel as though they are not out of place but rather back in their country.

Construction began in 1881 and was completed in 1883 in Hibiya, Tokyo. It was a white, two story building created in a French Renaissance style. The final structure had arches over the entrance of a central pavilion. On both floors, there were open porches, which were lined by columns and arches. The


style of the roof was mansard and the ground floor contained the dining rooms, a library, a billiard hall and smoking rooms. Corinthian columns supported the wooden craved main staircase. The second floor consisted of a ballroom, bedroom suites and salons. Throughout the whole structure, there were features of metal filigree, which are delicately created ornamental work. As well as palmleaf motifs, which are recurring images or designs that forms a pattern. These gave some aspects of the Rokumeikan a Moorish feel (architectural elements from the Maghreb regions). Throughout the whole building, the garden was the only aspect in a Japanese style. An earthquake affected the structure in 1897, causing Conder to expand the pavilion by adding an extra floor, more electrical lights and updating the furniture of the guest rooms.

Once the Rokumeikan was completed in 1887, it was very famous for its balls and parties. It was not only the prime location to house foreign guest but


numerous events were held in the pavilion. The events included serving as a concert hall, restaurant, private club and even Emperor Meiji’s birthday was held at the Rokumeikan. High members of society were always attendants at the events, members varying from government ministers and officials to business tycoons. Guests were expected to dress in a Western manner, though women could wear formal kimonos as well. Domestic guests who attended were warned, through newspapers, to avoid doing anything that would look bad in front of the foreign guests. They were expected to know Western etiquette and ballroom dancing, so classes were held in the Rokumeikan. However, the building’s popularity was short lived and caused mixed reactions. It became a controversial topic among the Japanese and foreigners. Though the Japanese citizens realized that the need of Westernization within Japan was important. They thought the existence of the building was a symbol that glorified the West. Some even viewed the pavilion as a disgrace and questioned its true propose. Even Westerners found the structure to be a disappointment and cheap replica of a European hall and the events boring and tedious. Pierre Loti, a French novelist and naval officer described the ball as a monkey show. French artist, Charles Bigot even published cartoons that illustrated Japanese men and women viewing themselves in a mirror but the view in the mirror were monkeys. This backs up the idea of Pierre Loti’s claim of the ball being a monkey show. The etiquette of the ball challenged the Japanese culture. The intimacy and closeness of the men and women conflicted with the traditional Japanese morals. There were a number of gossip and reports about the inappropriate behaviour of the high-ranking government officials that occurred during these balls. Some even believed that the rising taxes in Japan were due to the government’s pursuit of indulgence. Theses rumors added to the Rokukmeikan’s poor


64 Mami Harano, "Anatomy of Mishima's Most Successful Play Rokumeikan", Dissertations and Theses, pp. 1-68
reputation. The building was demolished years later in 1941 because it had grown out of date and there were new desires to build on that land.

The fundamental goal of the Rokumeikan was to improve foreign relations and improve the terms and conditions of the Unequal Treaties. Overall, the building failed these goals. The Treaties were abolished in 1899, during the existence of the building; not because of the hall. It was Japan's victory over China in the Shino-Japanese war in 1894 to 1895, which convinced the Western Powers that they could no longer enforce the Treaty on Japan. The failure of this goal led to Kaoru Inoue to refocus his sites on the Imperial Hotel, which served the exact same purpose as the Rokumeikan but on a grander scale.

As for contributing to Japan's transition during the Meiji Era, the Rokumeikan had zero contribution. In fact, the hall would have soiled Japan's social reputation. The existence of the building made Japan look as though it idolized the Western powers too much. To the extent that Japanese leaders changed their traditional culture just to impress the foreigners. I think in order to help Japan's transition, the Rokumeikan could have been used as a platform to promote Japan's culture to the West and exhibit how the Japanese live. Rather than creating a false imagine. This would have been more efficient in improving foreign relations.

The Ryounkaku & The Ginza District

---


67 Mami Harano, "Anatomy of Mishima's Most Successful Play Rokumeikan", *Dissertations and Theses*, pp. 1-68


The Ryounkaku, also known as “The Palace Rising Over the Clouds” or “The Twelve Storeys Tower”, was Tokyo’s first skyscraper. It was the main landmark in the Asakusa district, an area in the north east of Tokyo.

The tower was intended to appeal to “working men” and attract their families to Asakusa. So by containing Japan’s first elevator, the Ryounkaku was planned to inevitably become an attraction. The construction process of the Ryounkaku was very straightforward. The project began in the late 1880s and took around 10 years to complete.

It was designed by Scottish engineer called William Burton and was completed in 1890. Some described the tower as an “odd structure”. It was made from brick and had an octagonal structure. As the tallest building in Japan, the tower was 50 meters tall with 12 floors. Every floor had a theatre, bar and restaurant. From the second to eighth floor contained stores that sold products from all over the world. The top floor was an observation platform that gave people the opportunity to view Tokyo through telescopes. Every floor of the tower was well lit and visitors could travel up the tower using the elevator, which was imported from America. However, this...

---


71 Nieves Moreno, “Mapping Tokyo’s cinemas: Asakusa’s urban development in Meiji Japan”, pp. 1-12


was shut down months after the opening, due to safety reasons\textsuperscript{76}. In 1894, the tower was weakened by a strong tremor, which caused the structure to lean. It was then reinforced with steel girders\textsuperscript{77}. However, it was no match for the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, which destroyed its upper floors\textsuperscript{78}. The tower was never rebuilt, as its damage was meaningless compared to the damage the earthquake caused to the rest of the city\textsuperscript{79}.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{ryounkaku.png}
\caption{The Ryounkaku designed by William Burton\textsuperscript{80}}
\end{figure}


\textsuperscript{77} Steve Sundberg, “Ryounkaku (Twelve-Storeys Tower), Asakusa”, \url{http://www.oldtokyo.com/ryounkaku-twelve-storeys-tower-asakusa/} [accessed 5 November 2016]


\textsuperscript{79} Shimaguni , “A Tall Tower and a Big Earthquake”, \url{https://shimaguni.net/2011/04/30/a-tall-tower-and-a-big-earthquake/} [accessed 31 October 2016]

\textsuperscript{80} Japan Property Central, “Asakusa’s Ryounkaku Tower to be revived”, \url{http://japanpropertycentral.com/2013/07/asakusas-ryounkaku-tower-to-be-revived/}, [accessed 15 December 2016]
The citizens of Japan and foreigners adored the Ryounkaku. It was described to be a symbol of “Civilized Tokyo”. As many exhibitions and events were held there. These varied from little events such as geisha art displays and art exhibitions to grand political events. The Ryounkaku inspired numerous poets and artists’ works. Kaneko Mitsuhiro, a famous artist and poet, created a poem called Asakusa Junikai (Asakusa Twelve Stories). In the poem, Kaneko talked about how the tower gave him the courage to “see himself as he is”. He narrated how the loss of the Ryounkaku felt as though there was a missing half.

The goal of the Ryounkaku was to attract people to the Asakusa district. Overall, the tower was able to achieve this goal. Since the tower regularly held social, political and cultural events while containing the restaurants and bars, countless visitors came to the Asakusa district to attend these events. One of the shows held in the tower attracted more than 450,000 visitors within 100 days. The Ryounkaku became the symbol of the Asakusa district, as the citizens loved it.

As for contributing to Japan’s transition in the Meiji Era, the Ryounkaku would have improved Japan’s social image, as it was a popular tourist attraction. Though, its contribution was not significant. However, if the elevator was open all through its existence, the tower would have been more popular.

The Asakusa may have prospered due to the Ryounkaku, it was one of the districts in Tokyo that was affected the most after the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923. As Asakusa tried to rebuild, the Ginza district, which was only 14 minutes away from Asakusa, skyrocketed to popularity as the new entertainment hotspot.

Years before the earthquake, Ginza looked like every other town in Tokyo, until it was destroyed in a fire in 1872. The Meiji government had already

---


82 Nieves Moreno, “Mapping Tokyo’s cinemas: Asakusa’s urban development in Meiji Japan”, pp. 1-12


planned to turn Tokyo into a fire-resistant city. Due to this fire, Ginza was selected as the first district to be changed\(^85\). The Government planned to have the new Ginza in a Western style for similar reasons to the creation of the Rokumeikan in order to display an image of development to the Western powers\(^86\). The government wanted to make Ginza the “model of modernization” as it was the connecting area between Shinbashi station and Nihonbashi. These were two important areas for economic growth in Japan\(^87\). As Nihonbashi was the centre of economic and the Shinbashi was the first and only train station in Tokyo, so many visitors would arrive and leave Tokyo from there\(^88\).

The construction for the new Ginza district was not straightforward. The government had two main plans for the project. They wanted to widen the streets and build brick houses\(^89\). However, due to its unpopularity with the public, the plan was scaled down\(^90\).

English architect Thomas Waters completed the Ginza brick town in 1875\(^91\). The street was doubled in width to 27 metres, with a separation of a vehicle zone and pedestrian brick sidewalk. Gas lamps were stationed along the streets as well as cherry blossom, pine and maple trees. A Georgian architectural style was used for the brick houses. Each house had circular columns that had a veranda below, which is a roofed platform along the outside of a house, level with the ground floor. This supported an overhanging balcony that was on the second floor. The houses used 1-


\(^{86}\) Goddard, Timothy Unverzagt, “Teito Tokyo: Empire, Modernity, and the Metropolitan Imagination”, UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations, pp. 6-10


Chrome system\textsuperscript{92}. Chromes are the subsections within a district. For instance, with the address 1-4-8 Ginza Chūō Tokyo, Tokyo is the city, Chūō would be the ward within Tokyo and Ginza would be the district within Chūō. Ginza is then divided into sections called Chrome. The first digit (number 1) would be the Chrome. The following number is the subsection within the Chrome (number 4) and the last number would be the house number\textsuperscript{93}. Ginza contained a wide range of western style shops, varying from bakeries, clock dealers, restaurants, and western clothing and furniture shops. The structures of the stores were completely different compared to how it was before. Rather than vendors sitting down on tatami mats to sell their items, the new shops had broad windows so the products could be displayed at the storefronts.

\textbf{Figure 6: Ginza Bricktown} \textsuperscript{94}

The brick houses were poor quality and didn’t harmonise with the Japanese weather, as the bricks easily became damp. This caused the houses to ruin in short periods of time. However, the government sold these houses to citizens at high prices. Due to the high prices and corroded houses, the brick homes


remained vacant from the very start. Citizens wanted to look at the buildings but no one wanted to live in the stuffy homes. However, Ginza became a place where citizens gatherer to not only shop but to simply walk through the district. Due to newspapers and magazines, the latest trends from the Ginza shops were easily broadcasted throughout Tokyo. However, foreigners disliked the new Ginza many that came to Japan hoped to see the traditional Edo Japan. Isabella Bird, an English explorer visited Ginza in 1878 and 1880 and suggested that Ginza looked more than Chicago or Melbourne than an Oriental city. Pierre Loti wondered the same and called described it as “tall brick houses of an American ugliness.”

The two main goals of the Ginza bricktown were to create a fireproof city and order to display an image of development. As there are no documented events of any fires during the existence of the new Ginza, it can be assumed that this goal was achieved. As for the second plan, the brick houses may have not projected an image of development but the new store formats did. Though Ginza bricktown was destroyed by the Great Earthquake in 1923, the post earthquake Ginza still carried on using the same 1-Chrome and store systems as the bricktown. The Ginza district may have not played a big role in Japan's transition during the Meiji Era but it can be assumed that Ginza bricktown acted as the foundation of the modern day Ginza district that surpassed the Asakusa district. The Ginza bricktown may have not been as successful as the Ryounkaku in terms of improving Japan's social image. However, it was popular with the Japanese citizens.

Conclusion

The Meiji Period ended in 1912 after the death of Emperor Meiji. This restoration was a historic transformation for Japan. The country's main


99 Goddard, Timothy Unverzagt, “Teito Tokyo: Empire, Modernity, and the Metropolitan Imagination”, UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations, pp. 6-10
objective was to “enrich the country and strengthen the army”. This restoration did not only strengthen the nation’s defense system but economic and political power. It was evident that Japan had achieved their goal in improving the military when the nation was victorious in two wars, the Sino-Japanese war against China and the Russo-Japan war against Russia. Along with the annexation of Korea, Japan proved to the world that they were a powerful nation that was able to defend themselves from any external powers. Japan progressed a lot in terms of economical growth; by 1913 more than 1/3 of the world’s silk came from Japan. The nation flourished in every aspect possible, ranging from technology and education to arts and culture.

I think the role architecture played in helping Japan’s transition can be seen as both quite minor but at the same time somewhat essential. For other aspects during this period, Japan would tend to take a Western concept and make it fit into the Japanese regime. As for architecture, Japan had more difficulty because it wasn’t as straightforward to change as other aspects of the nation. For instance, the military vision has always been fundamentally the same since the existence of Japan, but has been gradually improving. It has a fundamental vision of protecting the country and providing a powerful defense system for the nation. The change was relatively troublesome and confusing for architecture because the visions weren’t the same. During the Meiji, many wanted architecture to act as the storefront of Japan, to represent their national identity but at the same time project an image of the new developed Japan. It would have been difficult for architecture to represent Japan as it seems as though Japan didn’t even want to be themselves. Since they were constantly using Western ideas as the foundation for theirs. English architect, Josiah Conder said that modern architecture in Japan should be based and developed from national history. Since this was a period of change and moving forward, it seems as though Japan didn’t want to turn back and use ideas from the past to move forward.

In conclusion, during the Meiji period architecture was more of a following factor than a guiding influence to change as Japan was still in that transition of trying to establish where they stand in the World. However, this period of struggle would have been essential to today’s modern architecture. I think it acted as a period of trial and error for architecture for Japan. As the nation was able to see what materials, styles and ways of building works best for Japan’s climate and culture and use this as foundation for structures built in the Taisho, Showa and Heisei periods.
Bibliography


Reynolds, M. Jonathan, “Japan’s Imperial Diet Building”, Debate over Construction of a National Identity

Interview with Reynolds, M. Jonathan
Shimizu Yuichiro / Naraoka Sochi, “Shaping the Diet”, *Competing Architectural Designs for Japan's Diet Building*


Harano, Mami, "Anatomy of Mishima's Most Successful Play Rokumeikan", *Dissertations and Theses*

New World Encyclopedia, “Rokumeikan”, http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Rokumeikan


Nieves Moreno, “Mapping Tokyo’s cinemas: Asakusa’s urban development in Meiji Japan”


Shimaguni, “A Tall Tower and a Big Earthquake”, [https://shimaguni.net/2011/04/30/a-tall-tower-and-a-big-earthquake/](https://shimaguni.net/2011/04/30/a-tall-tower-and-a-big-earthquake/)


Goddard, Timothy Unverzagt, “Teito Tokyo: Empire, Modernity, and the Metropolitan Imagination”, UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations


Star Marky, “Why Ginza is called Ginza?”, https://japanthis.com/2013/05/03/why-is-ginza-called-ginza/

Cybriwsky, Roman, “Historical Dictionary of Tokyo”, (Scarecrow Press, 2011)

Fraser, Benjamin and Spalding, D. Steven, “Trains, Culture, and Mobility: Riding the Rails”, (Lexington Books, 2011)


