

The Architectural Colonisation of Japan through Media Design Practices

Abstract

This essay is dedicated to the change in architectural design with the opening of Japan in 1868 under the Meiji government. For this purpose, the medial practices of the pre-modern master carpenter on the one hand and the Western architect on the other are juxtaposed. Since the 16th century, the Japanese master carpenter (*daiku*) has worked with a flat planning board (*ita-zu* or *ezu-ita*), in which the arrangement of the load-bearing supporting pillars is sketched by means of a simple, two-dimensional grid plan. Decisive design issues were only clarified on the construction site; design and construction process were inseparable. Religious tasks in the form of Shinto ceremonies, which accompanied the various stages of the building process, continued to be an integral part of the *daiku's* work.

With the establishment of the Imperial Engineering School (later: Imperial University of Tokyo) in 1871 and the establishment of the study of architecture from 1877 under Josiah Conder, detailed construction plans such as ground plans and elevations to scale became established, as did axonometrics and detailed construction drawings. These became obligatory in competition procedures for the awarding of building projects.

In this sense, European design practices can be understood as a quasi-colonial instrument that—even more profoundly than the European style forms that were also taught—shaped Japan's cultural self-image. Traditional Japanese timber construction only became part of the curriculum in 1889 through Kiyoyoshi Kigo. With Kigo, a phase of architectural hybridisation begins, which is reflected, for example, in the medial practices of the reconstruction of the Heian Shrine in Kyoto.

Keywords

Japan, Representational Media, Colonialism, Hybridization