

Eurasia Foundation International Lectures, Fall 2021 Semester
The Construction and Transformation of East Asiaology” Lecture Series (11)
Title: Reviewing Japanese Culture from Japanese Traditional Architecture

For the 11th week, we invite Professor Hsien-Chou Fang, Chair of the Department of Japanese Language and Literature from our university to deliver speech entitled “Reviewing Japanese Culture from Japanese Traditional Architecture.” At the beginning, Chair Fang gave an example that when students went to Japan for internships abroad, they did not understand why they would visit traditional Japanese shrines and other traditional buildings. However, after the teacher’s explanation, they could understand the arrangement of the department and learn Japanese culture from it. This lecture discusses Japanese culture from four dimensions: a brief history of Japanese architecture, traditional houses in Japanese Manga (Comics) and Animation, key elements of traditional buildings, and characteristics of traditional buildings. The following excerpts are as follows:

1. A brief history of Japanese architecture

- Prehistoric period (Architecture in Jōmon, Yayoi periods): Yoshinogari in Saga Prefecture.
- Asuka period (592 - 709): *Kon-dō* (金堂, sanctuary Hall, main hall) at *Hōryū-ji* (法隆寺, Temple of the Flourishing Dharma) in Nara Prefecture. The *Sai-in* (西院) *garan* (伽藍 [Sangharama]) is the oldest surviving wooden buildings in the world.
- Nara period (710 - 794): *The Shōsō-in* (正倉院) belonging to *Tōdai-ji* (東大寺) in Nara is the treasure house that keep the property of temple and government.
- Heian period (794 - 1185): *Hououdou* (鳳凰堂, Phoenix Hall) at *Byōdō-in* (平等院) in Kyoto was a villa purchased and constructed by *Fujiwara no Michinaga* (藤原道長) and made into a Buddhist temple by his son *Fujiwara no Yorimichi* (藤原頼通) who wields power and influence in Heian period. The back of the ten-thousand yen bill has the artwork of the *Houou Zou* (鳳凰像, Phoenix figure) which is placed in the *Byōdō-in* and Phoenix Hall is engraved in the Japanese 10 yen coin.
- Kamakura period (1185 - 1333): *Sanjūsangen-dō* (三十三間堂, thirty-three ken hall) in Kyoto. One “ken” is about 1.8 meter and the temple, *Sanjūsangen-dō*, is 59.4-meter long in Edo period.
- Muromachi period (1336 - 1573): *Gojūnotō* (五重塔, The Five-Storied Pagoda) in *Rurikoji* (瑠璃光寺, Rurikō Temple) in Yamaguchi City was built during this period. *Gojūnotō* in *Rurikoji*, *Daigo-ji* (醍醐寺, Daigo Temple) in Kyoto, *Hōryū-ji* are

called “Three Famous Towers of Japan.”

- Azuchi-Momoyama period (1568 - 1603): *Himeji-jō* (姫路城, Himeji Castle) in Hyōgo Prefecture is known as “*Shirasagi-jō* [しらさぎ城, White Heron Castle] because of its white exterior and cornice supposed resemblance to a white heron taking flight. Chair Fang gave an example that it was featured in the television series *Abarenbō Shōgun* (暴れん坊将軍, The Unfettered Shogun).
- Edo period (1603 - 1867): The interior design of *Katsura Rikyū* (桂離宮, Katsura Imperial Villa or Katsura Detached Palace) in Kyoto incorporates the *Sukiya* (数寄屋) architectural style. The Golden Hall in *Ninna-ji* (仁和寺, Ninna Temple) in Kyoto, also called “*Omuro Goshō* (御室御所, Omuro Imperial Palace),” has the tradition of having aristocratic or persons of imperial lineage serve as chief of the temple.
- Meiji, Taishō, and early Shōwa periods (1868 - 1945): *Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan* (奈良国立博物館, The Nara National Museum) adopts the Western style and is noted for its collection of Buddhist art. *Akasaka rikyū* (赤坂離宮, Akasaka Palace), or *Geihinkan* (迎賓館, the State Guest House), in Tokyo adopts the world-famous European style, integrating with Japanese traditional characteristics.
- Modern Architecture (1946 -): *Tōkyō tawā* (東京タワー, Tokyo Tower) is an Eiffel Tower-inspired lattice tower and its height is 333 meters. *Kōbe Pōto Tawā* (神戸ポートタワー, The Kobe Port Tower) is the only sightseeing tower using a pipe lattice with ruled surface. *Tōkyō Sukaitsurī* (東京スカイツリー, Tokyo Skytree) reached its full height of 634 meters and is the second tallest structure in the world. It is worth mentioning that the rapid memory method to remember the height of the Skytree “634” is the pronunciation of “MUSASHI”(武蔵).

2. Traditional house in Japanese Manga and Animation

In Chair Fang’s briefing, students were asked to guess which are the houses in animations such as Cherokee Maruko, Crayon Shin-chan, Dora A Dream, and Ms. Conch (Miss Conch) like “*Chibi Maruko-chan* [ちびまる子ちゃん, Little Maruko],” “*Kureyon Shin-chan* [クレヨンしんちゃん, Little Crayon-Shin],” “*Doraemon* [ドラえもん],” and “*Sazae-san* [サザエさん].” to arouse students’ interest.

3. Key elements in traditional building

- *Genkan* (玄関, entryway): The differences between *Doma* (土間, an earthen floor) and *Yuka* (床, wooden floor) is that *Doma* is the extension of outside space and is considered “not clean,” while *Yuka* in the interior part of a Japanese house, built higher than the earth, and is considered a “clean” space. *Genkan* is a transition space from “not clean” to “clean” and usually people take off their shoes in *Genkan*.
- *Tatami* (畳): Tatami mats can keep the room warm in chilly winter. A tatami is about 1.62 square meters and a tatami in Tokyo is smaller, around 1.53 square meters. Tatami mats are usually placed in T shape and cannot be placed in lattice shape, unless there is a funeral or the room is huge enough.
- *Engawa* (縁側): *Engawa* is a wooden floor space between garden and corridor, i.e. veranda. *Engawa* appears frequently in Japanese drama. Japanese people love to enjoy the cool air, have lunch or dinner, and have a drink with friends in *Engawa* in summertime.
- *Oshiire* (押入れ): *Oshiire* is a closet to put things like mattress and is a space that *Doraemon* sleep.
- *Onigawara* (鬼瓦, ogre tile): *Onigawara* are a type of roof ornamentation placed in four roof corners and they have the effects of eliminating evil spirits and warding off disaster.
- *Torii* (鳥居): A *Torii* is part of traditional Shinto shrine architecture and it is a type of *Kekkai*, symbolically marks the transition from the mundane to the sacred. Both ends of *Kasagi* (笠木) are slightly curved in the former and the former is most commonly found in Japan. The latter is linear and with simple style. The shrine worshipping *Amaterasu-Ōmikami* (天照大御神, 天照大神) usually adopt the latter.

4. Characteristics in traditional architecture

- (1) Good at absorbing foreign culture
- (2) Building materials are mainly made of wood
- (3) The structure of architecture is simple, composed of floor, pillar, and roof.
- (4) prefer less decoration, maintaining original color and not to paint different color
- (5) aloof aesthetics of shadow and of the contrast between light and shade.
- (6) Rich in Zen

(Web link: <https://eurasia.pccu.edu.tw/index.php>)

(Written by: Chin-Tang Huang, Associate Professor, the Department of Japanese Language and Literature)

(English Version Translated by Wenting (Florence) Yang, Assistant Professor, NCCU Program in Japan Studies, National Chengchi University)

