Nanzen-ji Temple, Kyoto - Detail of bell tower

Chapter 1
Between Ise and Katsura: The Forgotten Traditions of Japanese Architecture

"The shrines of Ise are Japan's greatest and most completely original creation in terms of world architecture."
Bruno Taut (Houses & People of Japan), 1937

"Time and again I have been requested to name one extant masterwork on Japanese historical architecture. The choice is difficult, but I inevitably point to the Nandai-mon of Tadai-ji, not to Ise or Katsura."
Arata Isozaki (Japan-ness in Architecture, 2006)

THE VIEW FROM ISE

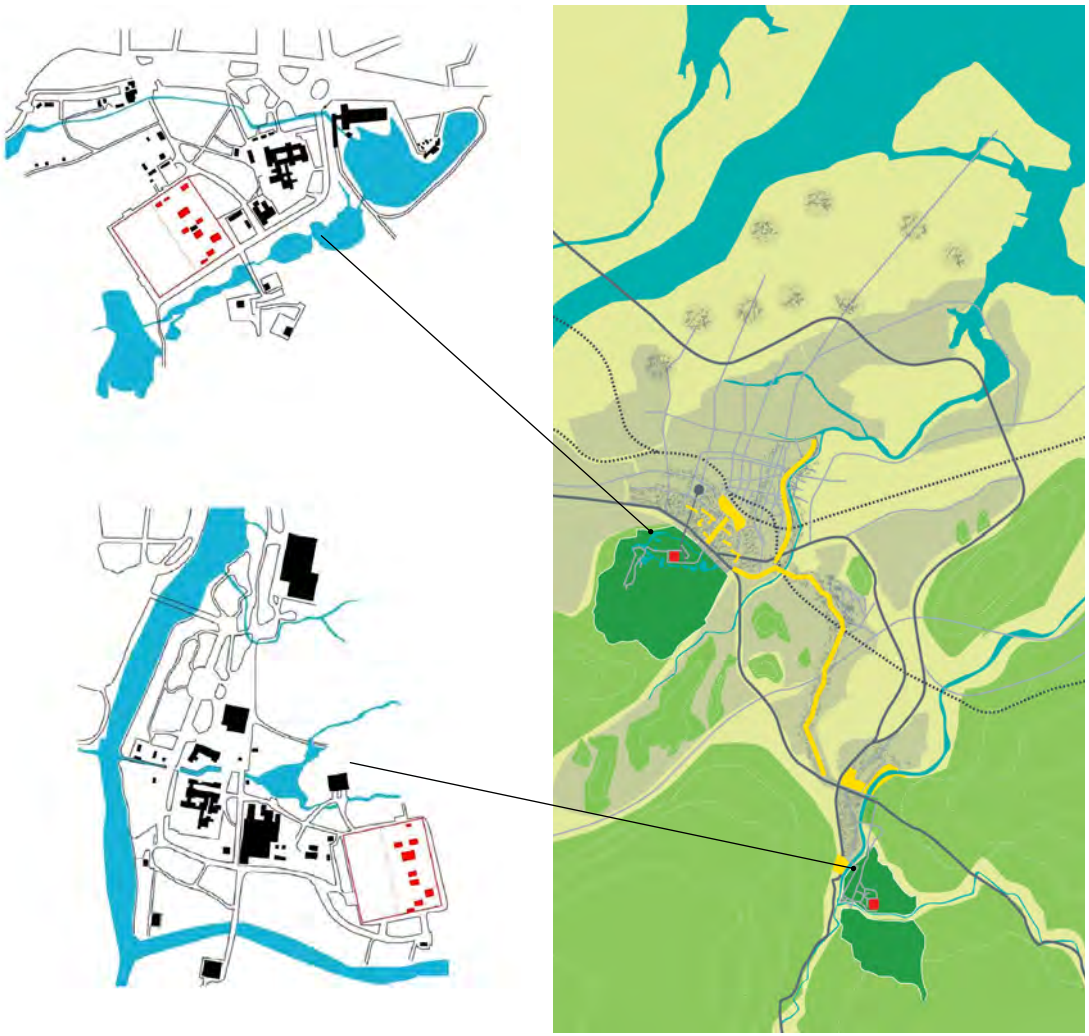
It seems like a cliché to begin a discussion on Japanese architecture with the Ise Jingu, but it is unavoidable. The Ise Jingu is the clearest springing point for what this story is all about, not only since it is one of Japan's earliest recorded architectural masterworks, but also one of its most unique places today. This ancient shinto shrine keeps alive a precious cultural thread going back more than 1300 years: Its *shikinen sengu*, the dismantling of the old wooden structures and rebuilding of new ones every twenty years, separates it from any place, sacred or secular, anywhere in the world. There are no precise dates of its origin; records suggest that the first sengu took place in the fourth year of Empress Jito (approximately 686-697 CE), and some speculate that the shrine goes back as early as 4 BCE. Whatever the case, among Japan's 80,000-odd shrines, this mythic place has been and continues to be the most venerated on the entire archipelago.[1] *(Fig. 1.1)*

For a wider audience, however, Ise is a misunderstood place, suggesting by extension, how several aspects of Japanese architecture continue to be misrepresented. For most, the Ise Shrine refers to a modest cluster of impeccably designed thatched wooden buildings within a pine forest clearing – this is how they have been presented to the wider world. In reality, however, the term Ise Shrine refers to two autonomous precincts, the Geku (outer shrine) and the Naiku (inner shrine) located around 5 kilometers apart. Each precinct is centered on a main shrine, with other ancillary objects from storehouses to bridges, totaling more than 60 structures, all of which are rebuilt every two decades. The precincts are connected by a pilgrimage path, with 125 other related shrines located not only within the territory but also outside the boundaries of Ise City *(Fig 1.2)*. The complete experience of the Ise shrine and the ceremonies of the sengu thus happen at four scales: 1) that of the regional geography, commemorating the surrounding natural element–mountain, forest, river and agricultural fields; 2) that of the sacred territory bounded by the hundred-odd tutelary shrines; 3) that of the individual sacred precincts and the path connecting them; and 4) that of the main buildings, in which the deity is housed.

Anthropologically speaking, Ise thus reveals some of Japan's earliest philosophical underpinnings, tracing back to the mythic origins of the land itself as

Figure 1.1 Opposite page: Ise Naiku during reconstruction in 1953. The shrine to the left is the newly reconstructed one.

Figure 1.2 The complete Ise Shrine: The main shrines are indicated in red. Ise Geku is in the page center. Ise Naiku is at the page bottom. The preserved Ise forests is shown in dark green. The surrounding larger forest are in light green. The habitat is in grey. The pilgrimage path is in orange. The insets show the clusters of the various shrine buildings with the main compounds in red.



mentioned in its oldest chronicles, the Kojiki and Nihongi. Here, there is mention of *modokim*, a ritual practice of invoking the presence of *kami* (Gods), guided by the rhythms of day and night, sun and moon, the four seasons of the year, and the process of harvest. The twenty year cycle of Ise's sengu commemorates this rhythm while its rituals physically celebrate as part of Shinto belief, various aspects of the natural geography.[2] *(Fig 1.3)*

Another reason for beginning at Ise is because its current condition is in many ways emblematic of some of most perplexing dilemmas facing the Japanese architectural world today. While the physical conditions of the shrine precincts are meticulously preserved, the town surrounding the pilgrimage path has been ravaged by random sprawl and insensitive infill. Meanwhile, as we shall discuss later in this book, the sengu itself faces many economic and environmental dilemmas such as timber paucity, raising complex questions on its future. This dialectic between heritage and contemporary realities is a pan-Japanese thematic that is particularly accentuated when seen from Japan's most revered center.

Furthermore, Ise Jingu, perhaps more than any other Japanese architectural landmark has also enjoyed significant attention from a foreign gaze, and this has among other things had an indelible effect on the contemporary perception of Japanese architecture at large. While the shrine has always been the prime sacred epicenter throughout Japanese history, not many know that before that 1930s, the architecture of Ise's sublime buildings was read as part of a larger genre of Shinto shrine architecture. The 1927 Nihon Kenchikushi-yo (Summary of Japanese Architectural History), for instance, includes but a short description of Ise, even though it is noted as the "original style" of shrine architecture in Japan.[3] The architectural status-quo Ise enjoys today, both within and beyond Japan, should be attributed, ironically, not to a native but a foreigner, the German architect Bruno Taut.

In 1933, fleeing the hostile political environment of Nazi-dominated Germany, Taut arrived in Japan for the first time, and was taken by some of his former Japanese students to the Ise Shrine and the Katsura Villa. He did not know much about traditional Japanese architecture, and had never seen anything like these two buildings before. The architectural austerity and rusticity of Ise and Katsura made a deep impression on him, so much so, that he proclaimed them as the ultimate

Figure 1.3 Ise Naiku; tutelary shrine

archetypes of Japanese architecture, and went as far as comparing the significance of the Ise shrine to the Parthenon of Greece. This proclamation had far reaching impacts both within and beyond Japan. In the 1930s Westernizing Japan, it synchronized perfectly with the emerging architectural generation seeking to break away from historicist attitudes. For the Western architectural world, this minimalism was a breath of fresh air offering a sort of validation to their own evolving minimalist attitudes in Modern architecture. Ise, the ancient Shinto shrine in Mie, and Katsura, the seventeenth century rustic royal villa in Kyoto became the affirmed symbols of authentic Japanese architecture, and for most, the idea of traditional Japanese architecture still begins and ends with austere, rustic buildings and monochromatic tatami rooms, even as one ignores an entire spectrum of architectural accomplishments that span in between. It is against this backdrop that this inaugural chapter strips away the minimalist veneer that has shrouded the richness of traditional Japanese architecture for decades and offers a chronological overview of its pre-industrial accomplishments.

EARLY PERIOD (660 BCE – 540 CE)

In early Japan, with the idea of the emperor as a descendent of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu Omikami, her shrine at Ise occupied the apex of a state-supported hierarchy of Shinto places of worship. But in opposition to this imperial legacy, there was another important shrine, the Izumo Taisha that was seen as a counter-symbol of religious as opposed to political authority. "….of all (Japan) the most holy ground is the land of Izumo," wrote Lafcadio Hearn in his 1895 book "Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan,"[4] after he learned about it from the Kojiki chronicle.[5] Like Ise, there is no knowledge of the origins of Izumo Taisha, but it is known that in the latter half of the seventh century, Emperor Temmu (631-686) commissioned the Kojiki to be the official history of Japan, and it was completed in 712 CE. Izumo, like Ise is mentioned in this chronicle, as part of Japan's earliest recorded history.

At Izumo, like Ise, the main building is a simple wooden structure raised on pillars, entered by a ladder, with rafters projecting in the form of a crotch above a thatch roof, and timbers bound together with wisteria withes just like those of

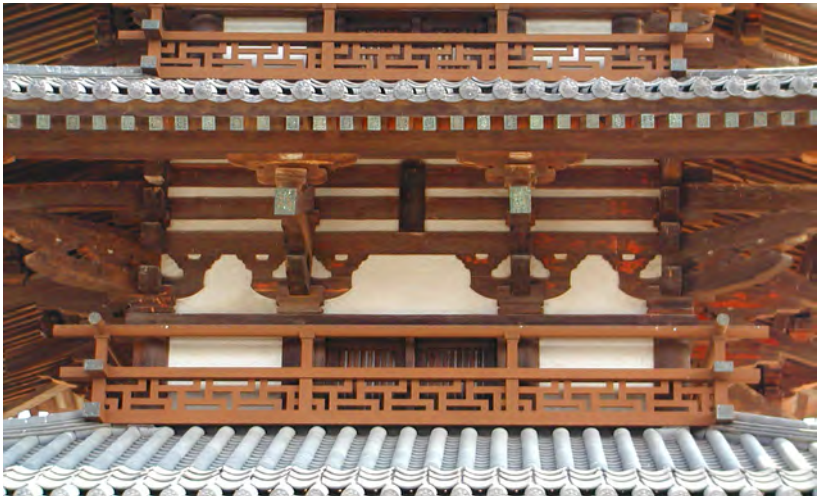
Figure 1.4 Izumo Shrine painting circa, 1876. This picture was appended to a request for permission to repair the Grand Shrine at Izumo, on behalf of the Minister of Home Affairs, to the Grand Minister of State, on 17 February the 8th year of Meiji. Note that the shrine is not on its original raised base. The inset shows a model of the original raised shrine.

the palace. This pattern appears to have established itself in ancient Japan, even withstanding the succeeding influences of Chinese and Indian dominated brick and stone construction that entered with Buddhism in 538 CE. Restraining the use of color and ornament and maintaining the straight line in contrast to the luscious curves favored in China, both shrines retain this primordial form of timber architecture and represent Japan's earliest wooden archetypes. More significantly, according to the Kojiki, Izumo-taisha was considered the largest wooden structure in Japan when it was originally constructed. Legends say it stood nearly 100 meters tall.[6] This can be attributed to early Shinto cosmology, wherein the gods (kami) were believed to be above the human world and dwelling in the most extraordinary and majestic parts of nature. The height of Izumo-taisha could have been an attempt to create a place for the kami symbolically above humans. Nishi and Hozumi have observed how the plan of Izumo's main shrine "resembles that of the Daijoe Shoden, built for the accession of each new emperor" and how the main shrine therefore, preserves a layout characteristic of ancient domestic architecture.[7]

Like other Shinto shrines, Izumo too was cyclically rebuilt–more than twenty five times–but its sheer size raised recurrent construction difficulties, and in response, numerous structural and stylistic changes were introduced with each rebuilding. Over time, even though the floor plan remained virtually unchanged, the shrine's overall outer form changed from the original. Today, its layout consists of eight support pillars arranged to divide the interior into four sections with the entrance off-centered – a significant contrast with the typical symmetry of other Shinto shrines. It is possible that the main structure was built like a less formal domestic space as opposed to a shrine, suggesting a more informal relationship between devotees and their gods. *(Fig. 1.4)*

The Japanese architect Atsushi Ueda has rightfully noted that "the history of Japanese architecture is the struggle with the pillar."[8] In this statement Ueda sets forth the basic differences between Japanese timber architecture and its Western contemporaries: in the West, one used the outer and interior walls to bear the load of the building; in Japan, the pillar (post and beam construction) remained the fundamental structural and symbolic element. Conceptually, this early shrine archetype revolved around the idea of a central timber pillar. It symbolized the mythic axis

Figure 1.5 Pagoda at Horyu-ji Temple, Nara



connecting Heaven to Earth and manifested Japan's ancient rituals of tree worship. In ancient Shinto tradition the tree was a *yorishiro*, the means by which Gods descended to the earth.[9] Old trees struck by lightning were revered as evidence of this supernatural event, and this idea of the yoroshiro eventually morphed into the original form of the Shinto shrine. Thus the *shin no mihashira* (esteemed pillar of the heart) under the center of the floor of Ise's main building is significant because it is regarded as a yorishiro in which the Gods reside. It is possible that the existence of timber pillars lining up in a single row in the center of a traditional Japanese building may have evolved through this yorishiro concept as well.

ASUKA PERIOD (540 – 640 CE)

Buddhism entered Japan in 538 CE. But not until the sixth year of the reign of Emperor Bidatsu (578 CE) would the arrival of monks and temple artisans from Kudara (the western part of Korea) and simultaneous support for Japanese Buddhism by the central government bring significant prowess in temple construction. Asukadera was the first temple complex constructed in Japan beginning in 588 CE and completed in 596 CE. It had a *pagoda* (tiered tower enshrining the Buddha's relics) located in the center of an enclosed cloister with golden halls surrounding it on three sides. Like most buildings of this era, nothing remains of this original structure save a few stones and tiles. The *kondo* (main hall), the pagoda, the middle gate and the cloisters of the great monastery of Horyu-ji and the pagoda of Hokki-ji are the only exceptions to this case.

Thus Horyuji (built in 607 CE on a different plan, burnt, then rebuilt on the present plan from 670) best showcases the wooden architecture of the Asuka era. It was influenced by the North and South dynasties of China and eventually transmitted through Korea. This combined college, infirmary and temple, was like its contemporaries an enclosed precinct entered through a Nandaimon (Southern Great Gate), with the great hall and pagoda, then the library and bell tower, and behind them the lecture hall with the monks' residences to the east and west *(Fig 1.5)*

Figure 1.6 Above: Evolution of the garan prototype. The pagoda locations are shown in red.

Figure 1.7 Opposite page: Todai-ji Daibutsuden, Nara

HAKUHO PERIOD (640 – 720 CE)

The Hakuho (literally "white phoenix") period saw a significant importation and adaptation of Chinese Tang dynasty ideas, having realized their compatibility to the climate and timber construction techniques of Japan. With increasing relations with the Asian continent necessitating a fixed center of government, the late seventh century saw the building of the splendid new Fujiwara Capital in 694 CE on a plain surrounded by the fabled Unebi, Kagu and Miminashi Hills.

One of the new prototypes of this era was the Tang influenced *shichido garan* or "Temple of Seven Halls." Designed as an enclosed quadrangle like its predecessor Horyu-ji, this model by contrast had two pagodas facing each other, often placed within the enclosure at a little distance from the center line of the buildings through the south gate–as in the case of Yakushiji. The original Yakushi-ji complex was built in Fujiwara-kyō, Japan's capital in the Asuka period, commissioned by Emperor Temmu in 680 CE to pray for recovery from illness for his consort, who succeeded him as Empress Jitō, and completed the project around 698 CE. It has been long believed that the temple was moved to its present location in 718 CE, following the move of the capital to Heijō-kyō known today as Nara. However, excavations of the Fujiwara-kyō Yakushi-ji site in the 1990s suggest that there may have been two Yakushi-jis at one time. Fires destroyed most buildings of the complex in 973 CE, and the main hall in 1528. The main hall was rebuilt in the seventies, and the entire temple has now been restored.

As the fourth of the major temple complexes, the first three being Asuka-dera, Shitennō-ji, and Hōryū-ji, Yakushi-ji's layout illustrates the evolutionary incarnations of the *garan* prototype plan. In the first, the pagoda because of the relics it contained was the centerpiece of the garan , surrounded by three small kondo. In the second, a single kondo stood at the center with the pagoda in front of it. In the third, they were next to each other as seen at Hōryū-ji. And at Yakushi-ji there is a single, large kondo at the center with two pagodas on the sides. The same evolution can be observed in Buddhist temples in China. In other words, pagodas gradually lost their importance and were replaced by the kondo. Because of the magic powers believed to lie within the images the Kondo housed, this idea persisted in the succeed-

ing eras, with Zen sects, which arrived late in Japan from China, doing away with pagoda altogether *(Fig 1.6)*.[10]

TEMPYO PERIOD (720 – 780 CE)

The Tempyo Period was Japan's golden age of Buddhist architecture and sculpture. Heijo-kyo (Nara), the new capital, was a city of monasteries and temples with more than fifty pagodas rearing their spires, the two loftiest being those of Todai-ji (320 feet) and Ganko-ji (240 feet). Kofuku-ji was moved to its present location in the second decade of the eighth century with its pagodas moved completely outside the cloister enclosure. Yakushi-ji was rebuilt according to its previous plan, its two pagodas framing a central golden hall. Only its 120-feet high three-story eastern pagoda survives today with its unique double eaves giving it the appearance of a six story edifice.[11]

The evolution of the Tang temple typology in Japan is thus most significant for the evolution of the Japanese pagoda. But it was tectonically a radical departure from its Chinese predecessor. Its construction centered on a single central column made of a massive tree trunk that held cantilevered bracketed members supporting the various tiered roofs. As an urban element, this vertical campanile of sorts served to announce important precincts, either alone as at Horyu-ji and Kofoku-ji, or in pairs at Todai-ji, augmenting urban navigation and engendering a readable visual order with the otherwise horizontal city. And as an autonomous built form, it formalized in a distinctly Japanese manner, the same symbolic meanings as its Indian ancestor, the *stupa*, that had initially covered the ashes of the Buddha.

During the Tempyo period then, the construction and detailing of the colossal Buddhist temple prototype and its ancillary buildings was firmly established, and their aesthetic nuances significantly refined. The Kondo (Great Buddha Hall) at Todai-ji was the largest wooden building in world, and that of Toshodai-ji with its single *azumaya* roof (hipped with kite-tail details) perhaps the finest architectural specimen *(Fig. 1.7)*. But arguably the most outstanding building of this era was the relatively smaller Shosoin, an azekura style sacred storehouse made of *hinoki* logs. Standing on circular wooden pillars raised nine feet above the ground, its mem-

Figure 1.8 Above: Shoso-in, located to the north-west of the Todai-ji Daibutsuden, Nara. The inset shows the azekura-zukuri detail of another store house at Todai-ji

Figure 1.9 Opposite page: Kiyomizu Temple, Kyoto. Top: View from south in summer. Bottom: View from east in winter.

bers were joined into three-cornered interlocks that sustained a remarkable climatic rhythm. In summer the heat contracted the logs letting in the breeze through the gaps; in winter the dampness expanded them keeping the interiors dry. This is significant because it enabled the first Nara emperor's priceless and vast collection of treasures and gifts from other rulers to survive in almost climate-controlled conditions until the present day. The Shosoin was an early evidence of the refined combination of structural expressionism and architectural simplicity that would become the hallmarks of Japanese architecture that followed *(Fig. 1.8)*.[12]

HEIAN PERIOD (789 – 1190 CE)

The four centuries that saw the shift of the capital from Heijo-kyo (Nara) to Heian-kyo (Kyoto) also saw the introduction of new sects of Buddhism, the decline of the Chinese influence in Japan, and the rise of the Fujiwara regents. The Tendai and Shingon Buddhist sects demanded a different temple prototype. For them, a flat temple precinct within a capital city like Horyu-ji or Todai-ji was no longer suitable for meditation on profound Buddhist philosophies. Remote mountain peaks were the new strategic destinations for spiritual pursuits. On these complex topographies, it was not possible to keep the older rectilinear form of the monastery, and halls had to be sited at varying levels where any small flat land seemed available. The monastery complex was now scattered irregularly, and in some cases built out from the rocks and supported on trestles from below.

The second prototype of this era was a new kind of pagoda, the Daito. Here the usual square lower story and pyramidal roof was superimposed with a round dome called a "turtle belly", eventually crowned by a circular balustrade topped by a roof with a spire supported on pillars. The great temples of the early Heian era were then a combination of these two new ideas. There was Enryaku-ji on Mount Hiei, Kongobu-ji on Mount Koya, Kyoo Gokoku-ji (now called Toji), Ninna-ji, Muro-ji and the Kiyomizudera *(Fig 1.9)*. It is amply clear that a decided development of Buddhist shrines and monasteries dominated the architecture of the time.

What the Tendai and Shingon sects did for the first half of the Heian era, the Amida sect did for the second. It sought a new temple prototype to express its

Figure 1.10 Above: Byodo-in Temple, Uji

Figure 1.11 Opposite page: Itsukushima Shrine with torii in foreground, at low tide. The mud marks at the base of the torii pillars show the level of water at high tide.

central idea of the Pure Land Paradise, the realm where the Amida Buddha dwelled. This Paradise began to be depicted in art as a model of the Imperial Palace, perhaps to incentivize the Fujiwara rulers to fund the temples.

The Imperial Palace in turn had derived its form from the largest residential prototype of this era, the Shinden (literally "sleeping chamber"). It referred to the main south-facing central hall of the building with both sides connected by covered corridors with subsidiary buildings called *tai* (literally "houses opposite"). These two arms enclosed a large central garden, lake and bridges connecting it with either bank. The Byodo-in temple at Uji was one such villa of the Regent Fujiwara Yorimichi which he later turned into a temple *(Fig. 1.10)*. The original subsidiary buildings have long since burnt down. The Hoo-do (Phoenix Hall) is the only extant portion deriving its name from the resemblance of its outline to this Imperial bird.[13]

One of the most outstanding buildings of this era is the magnificent Itsukushima Shrine in Miyajima *(Fig 1.11)*. It was incepted in the sixth century, but its current sixteenth century version follows established design from circa 1168. Dedicated to the three daughters of the Shinto deity Susano-o no Mikoto, brother of the sun deity, Amaterasu Omikami (housed at Ise), the red Shinto shrine consists of structures built over the bay, symbolizing the holy status the island once commanded. Commoners were historically not allowed to set foot on the island, approached only by boat and entering through its red "floating" gate.

Aesthetically different, but built round the same time, circa 1164, was Sanjusangendo, the main hall of the Rengeo-in temple, that was dedicated by the retired emperor Goshirakawa as a full-scale temple in itself.[14] It was thirty-three bays long excluding the isles, with a seven-bay porch and enshrined a central image and a thousand life-size images of the Thousand-armed Kannon, along with his Twenty-Eight Protectors. The building was consumed in the great Kyoto fire of 1249, but it is said that the head of the central image, 156 of the thousand other statues, and all the guardians were saved. The current hall was reconstructed between 1251 and 1256 as a replica of the original. It is the longest wooden building in Japanese history, 118.9 meters long, and in the power of its horizontality and rhythmic length, few buildings can match the rustic splendor this Kyoto temple. *(Fig. 1.12)*

The rebuilding of Todai-ji also deserves particular mention. Nara's greatest temple had been destroyed in the Gempei conflict in 1180, and reconstruction be-

Figure 1.12 Above: Sanjusangendo, the main hall of the Rengeo-in Temple, Kyoto

Figure 1.13 Opposite page top: Nandaimon, the southern gate of the Todai-ji Temple, Nara

Figure 1.14 Opposite page bottom: Kencho-ji Budsuden, Kamakura. Note the ceiling above the statue that hides the true roof.

gan the following year under the leadership of the monk Shunjobo Chogen, who having visited Song China as many as three times, chose a Song style of architecture for the rebuilding (Discussed further in Chapter 2). Today three structures remain from that endeavor, the kaizando (Founder's Hall), the hokkedo (Lotus Hall) and the one that particularly stands out, the Nandaimon (Great South Gate). This gate, rebuilt on the same location as its predecessor, is unique in its multiple tiers of brackets sunk directly into the great columns and stabilized by lateral ties extending the entire façade length. Many of the structural members being the same size are easily mass produced, and thereby well suited to efficient rebuilding on a massive scale *(Fig. 1.13)*.

KAMAKURA PERIOD (1190 – 1340 CE)

The Kamakura period marked Japan's transition to feudal land-based economies and advanced military technologies in the hands of a specialized fighting class. But it was also a period of prolific religious activity. To the Six Sects of Nara and the two more esoteric sects of Heian were now added six more–Zen, Ji, Shin, Nichiren, Jodo and Yuzu Nembutsu. With them came new architectural prototypes derived from the flourishing Chinese Sung dynasty of the time. But with its increasing adoption by the dominant military class in these war-filled times, it was Zen that would exert the most influence on the buildings of this era.

As such the most distinctive prototype of this era was the Zen temple complex. It was quite different both in plan and detail from its predecessors. One now traversed axially from the south through a two-storied *sanmon* (literally "gate of liberation"), past the *butsuden* or Buddha Hall, the *hatto* or Doctrine Hall and the *hojo* or Residence, with the *tosu* (latrines) and the *yokushitsu* (bath house) to the left and right replacing the two pagodas of their Nara age predecessor. The first of these new prototypes were Nanzen-ji and Daitoku-ji. They were followed by Tenryu-ji, Sokoku-ji, Kennin-ji, Tofuku-ji and Manju-ji in Kyoto, and Kencho-ji, Engaku-ji, Jufuku-ji, Jochi-ji and Jomyo-ji in Kamakura, all different variations in plan and detail of the same basic concept *(Fig. 1.14)*.[15]

Figure 1.15 Top: Kinkaku-ji, Kyoto (Golden Pavilion)

Figure 1.16 Opposite page: Fushimi Inari Shrine, Kyoto. Red torii path

The Zen monastery also introduced a new layer of architectural detailing: the *kato-mado* (literally "flower-headed") ornamental window with an ogival top, the *ebi-koryo*, a new kind of curved tie-beam, and more importantly the Kara style where ceilings within the sanctuary were not coffered but flat with no colored decoration. This new aesthetic preference would exert great influence on Japanese architecture, but only the Shariden (Relic Hall) of the Engaku-ji stands today as a testimony to it.[16]

MUROMACHI PERIOD (1340–1570 CE)

The Muromachi era saw Zen exert its influence on building types other than temples. The most dominant of these was the *shoin* (literally "study"), the library of the Zen temple. The increasing attraction of Zen in the military class nurtured the need for a meditation room in their residences eventually acquiring the name. The *tokonoma* or monastic study alcove containing a picture of Buddha or Daruma along with a small table holding a candlestick, flower vase and censer now became a prominent part of the mainstream Japanese residential interior.

Simultaneously, it had become something of a vogue for the aristocrats to build fine mansions in carefully planned landscaped gardens. The Kinkaku of the Kaen-ji (Golden Pavilion) was one such villa redesigned by the Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu in 1398 on the site of the feudal lord Kintsune's Shinden style residence *(Fig. 1.15)*. This blend of residence and temple designed as a three-story pavilion represented a new prototype in its fusion of older Chinese and newer Zen influences into a single building. The ground floor reception room for guests had an open plan like the Shinden-style palace. The study on the second floor and the Zen temple of the third with its bell-shaped windows drew their inspiration from the architecture of the Zen temple. The villa had thirteen buildings arranged within a lake setting where the Shogun could escape from courtly matters to emulate the lifestyle of a Zen monk.

The Muromachi era can claim no great architectural innovation. But the Fushimi Inari Taisha in Fushimi-ku, Kyoto is unique in several respects *(Fig. 1.16)*. While its exhibition of bold red color was nothing new for Shinto precincts, what is unique

Figure 1.17 Top: Himeji castle

Figure 1.18 Opposite page: Fushimi castle

at Fushimi Inari is the meandering sequence of blood red *toriis* (Shinto gates) creating a three-dimensional serpentine corridor winding atop the sacred hill. The earliest structures were built in 711 on the Inariyama hill in southwestern Kyoto, but the shrine was re-located in 816 on the request of the monk Kukai, and the main shrine structure was built in 1499, the exact same year attributed to the infamous dry Zen garden of Ryoanji. (Discussed in Chapter 3)

MOMOYAMA PERIOD (1570-1616 CE)

The most significant buildings of the war-filled Momoyama era were not religious edifices but palatial villas and military mansions. There was the Shishinden, Seiryoden and Senyoden where the original Shinden prototype was merged with the Buddhist one. There was Toyotomi Hideyoshi's lake villa, the Hiunkaku (Flying Cloud Pavilion) appearing like an exaggerated three-storied version of the Ginkaku-ji. But it is for the establishment of two new contradictory architectural prototypes that this era stands out the most: The *soan* (Tea Hut) was a symbol of solace during these tumultuous times, the *donjon* (castle) a symbol of power.

The soan was where the Zen ritual of Cha-no-yu (Tea Ceremony) was performed. It added a new dimension to Japan's timber traditions with an even greater discrimination of timber less for its structural and more for its aesthetic sensibilities as we shall discuss further in the following chapters. The donjon in turn brought two new concepts to Japanese architecture. First, after sixteen centuries, it introduced earth and stone as dominant building materials. For purposes of defense, the castle bases were giant ramparts not always of stone, but more than often of tamped earth. Second, it introduced the idea of plastering timber for protection against fires. To avoid the danger of being torched, early wood plank walls gradually changed first to earthen walls, then into the *tsuji hei* or mud walls with a wooden framework covered by a small roof, eventually seeing the application of lime stucco.

The era of the Japanese castle began in 1576 with the building of Nobunaga's Azuchi castle on the eastern shore of Lake Biwa. Nothing remains of it today save the foundation stones. But it once stood on a stone base seventy feet high with seven stories rising over a hundred feet above it. It was followed by Hideyoshi's

Fushimi-Momoyama castle in the Momoyama Hills, his Juraku mansion in Kyoto, and his castle of Osaka. The five story keep of the Osaka castle had a seven-mile circumference, and is said to have used stones measuring up to twenty-five feet in length. Other notable castles of this age were the Hikone (1606), Himeji (1609), Matsue (1611), Himeji being the grandest surviving example of this building type. The era ended in 1615 with Ieyasu's destruction of the Osaka castle and the establishment of Edo as the new cultural and political capital of Japan *(Fig. 1.17, 1.18)*.

EDO PERIOD (1616 – 1860 CE)

Until about 1700 CE, with Momoyama craftsmen continuing their building patterns, the Edo era hardly saw any change save one major social pattern. The Samurai or military class now forbidden from trading by Shogunal mandate became poorer while the trading classes became richer and more influential. Crafts became heredi-

Figure 1.19 Top: Toshogu Shrine, Nikko

Figure 1.20 Right: Toshogu Shrine, Nikko – detail of front gate

Figure 1.21 Opposite page: Katsura Villa, Kyoto

tary repressing any originality and emphasizing technical skill. Yet with commoners now better off under the orderly Tokugawa government, new building types were emerging: theatres, inns, colleges, public baths and restaurants. In Edo, as in other cities, there were now various quarters for specific activities–one with theatres, another with restaurants and brothels–all surrounding the castle, the political and symbolic core of the wooden polis.

When Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of all this peace and prosperity died in 1616, his deified status as Toshogu Dai Gongen (Great Manifestation of Buddha Resplendent) needed a suitable shrine. It produced one of the best known works of the period in the shrine of Nikko *(Fig. 1.19, 1.20)*. It introduced a new architectural paradigm in combining the Buddhist temple, Shinto shrine and Stupa tomb. The timber building was not only unapologetically colored, it was also bedecked with a riot of golden ornament. Begun in 1634, its present appearance was primarily the result of a far reaching renovation project of Ieyasu's grandson Iemitsu, who added a second complex in 1653. The two mausolea accompanied by a variety of other establishments displayed a sense of Japanese "baroque" unseen elsewhere throughout the country.

Antithetical to the splendor of Nikko stood the austerity of the Katsura Detached Palace. It represented the largest expression of the *sakiya* style, combining the spatial precedence of the Shoin with the increasingly appealing rustic aesthetic of the Zen influenced Tea Hut. Located in the south-west of Kyoto, its Old Shoin was built in 1616, the Middle Shoin in 1641 and completed and remodeled with a Music Room and New Palace in 1660. This private Xanadu with five Tea Houses allowed unimpeded relaxation to Toshihito, Toshitada and their guests *(Fig. 1.21)*.[17]

Meanwhile, just as Rome had introduced the thermae (public bath) and the arena as new contributions to its public heritage, Edo introduced the *sento* (bath) and the Kabuki theater *(Fig. 1.22)*. Though hot-baths and springs were prevalent even before the Heian period, their distinct form as a public bath house emerged only during the Edo era. The sento (literally "one cent hot water") consisted of a large room with an entry space for clothes and a high seat for the custodian atop a partition that separated the men from the women. It gradually evolved a second story where liquor and light refreshment was served.

Figure 1.22 Kabuki-za, Tokyo. Originally built in 1889, it was destroyed in 1921, restored in 1950, demolished in spring 2010, and re-opened in March 2013. This photograph was taken in July 2013.

By the mid-eighteenth century, the Kabuki drama became the most popular form of entertainment among the commoners. Kabuki theatres built on a majestic scale found a new challenge in spanning their large interiors. A print of the Ichimura Theater from 1739 reveals ceiling beams supported in the middle by vertical posts rising from the audience boxes. But these central pillars disappear in the Torii Kiyotada print of 1743 of the Nakamura theater showing beams supported by intermediate posts fronting the second-floor tier of the audience boxes and reinforced further by diagonal trusses projecting from the side wall.[18] These intermediate posts in turn disappear in the 1830 print of the Nakamura theater eventually leading to a new construction type, the *kikkobari* (tortoise-shell beaming). These parallel ceiling beams were considerably shorter than the hall width and assembled into a huge rectangular frame with its corners resting on four diagonal beams stretching across the hall. All these theatres were destroyed in the great Ansei-era fire in 1855. Only the Kompira Oshibai in Kotohira around 75 feet wide, 110 feet deep and 35 feet high remains testimony to the achievements of Kabuki architecture.

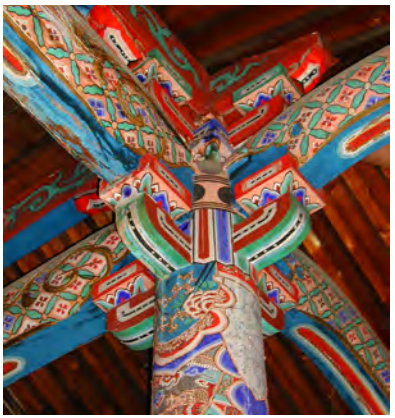
From a strictly historic standpoint, this concludes the pre-industrial overview of Japanese architecture. In 1868, the Tokugawa Shôgun who ruled Japan in the feudal period, lost his power and the emperor was restored to the supreme position. The emperor took the name Meiji ("enlightened rule") as his reign name and this event came to be known as the Meiji Restoration. It moved the capital from Kyoto to Tokyo, and sought to create a centralized state with the emperor as the symbolic impetus for citizen unity and modernization. To transform the agrarian economy into an industrial engine, many Japanese scholars were sent abroad to study Western science and languages, while foreign experts were brought in to teach. Japan opened its doors to the West and with it the isolated phenomenon of Japanese architecture, spared of any large external influence came to an end.

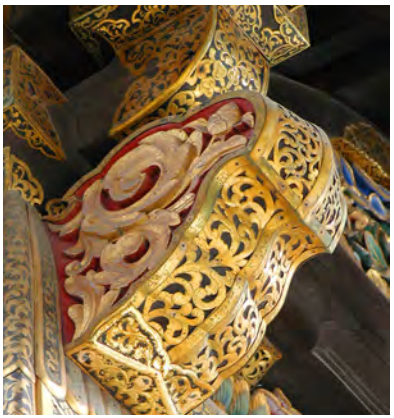
THE NATIVE & THE FOREIGN–INTERPRETING PRE-INDUSTRIAL JAPANESE ARCHITECTURE

The panorama of pre-industrial Japanese architecture can be seen, as H. Mach Horton has noted "in terms of two poles, the native and the foreign."[19] Buddhist architecture and its subsequent manifestations were essentially built upon imports from

Figure 1.23 Five aesthetic attitudes of traditional Japanese architecture. Clockwise from top right: “primitivist” (Himukai Daijingu); “structuralist” (Nandaimon at Taodai-ji), “pictoral” (Heian Palace); “minimalist” (Shoin interior), “eclectic” (Toshogu, inner shrine, Nikko)

Figure 1.24 Opposite page left: Seiryo-ji – column detail in storage hall; right: Ninomaru Palace – bracket detail





China. In fact Japan is the only place where ironically, examples of these Chinese forms still remain. On the other hand, these Chinese imports were recurrently tempered by indigenous developments with Japanese carpenters combining elements from the Great Buddha and Zen style antecedents to new effects. Throughout this process however, there was a bed-rock of consistencies, a pattern of similar traits that allows us to embrace all the above mentioned examples as traditional Japanese architecture. The most obvious is the choice of wood as building material, one of the traits that separates Japanese architecture from its Chinese predecessors as well as the West. The primary structural system is also consistently the column and the beam, with walls as non-structural partitions. Spatially, the flexible Japanese interior with movable walls, transparency of interior and exterior, lack of fixed furniture, all represent shared characteristics that lend an underlying unity to Japan's pre-industrial architectural traditions.

Within this larger frame, one must now read the multiple aesthetic attitudes of Japanese architecture that have surfaced over time.[20] For instance, a "primitivist" attitude is evident in the early Shinto shrines of Japan, and later in the Soans as well as the Katsura Villa *(Fig. 1.23)*. Rustic, rural but not raw, the aesthetic expressions of Ise or Izumo stem from exposed timber, thick thatched roofs with refined touches of formal decoration.

A "structuralist" attitude is evident in the early works of the Asuka and the Tempyo eras. Here a masculine aesthetic of colossal exposed and uncoated timber elements–columns, beams, brackets and eventually the framework of the gigantic roof dominates the architecture. It is through their extraordinary size, scale and structural poetics as seen at Todai-ji's Daibutsuden, Nandai-mon and Shosoin that one encounters an architectural structuralism parallel to the great Gothic cathedrals of the West.

A "chromatic" attitude, wherein the building is dominated by a single saturated color, and appreciated as a pictoral contrast to a natural background is seen in the unmistakable redness of the Fushima Inari Tiasha, the Itsukushima shrine, the gilded profile of Kinkaku-ji, and the white plaster of the Hime-ji castle.

The Zen influenced "austere" attitude is evidenced in the shoin interiors, where there is tendency for subdued monochromes, empty surfaces, and abstract forms and compositions.

Figure 1.25 Nishi Honganji Temple, Kyoto. Details of karamon gate

An "eclectic" attitude dominates the rich baroque of the Nikko and Gokogu shrine, or the splendor of Nishi Honganji's "Cloud Pavilion" that combines "the aristocratic shoin style with the rustic thatched hut style to create the sukiya style" or the Kabuki architecture of the Edo era.[21] Here traditional canon is amalgamated with playful grafts, ornaments and filigrees bringing about an air of wit and personalization into the reading. *(Fig. 1.24, 1.25).*

What this ultimately suggests is that while it seems like Japan secluded itself from the outside world, and even found it expedient to withdraw into this natural sequestered state, in reality, it did not shut itself off completely. "Japanese ships ranged widely, bringing back trade and new goods, ideas, arts, and techniques from many countries" even as Japan remained closed to other cultures.[22] This "semi-seclusionism" was intrinsic to its traditional architectural complexity within a larger identifiable set of thematics. It was this complexity that Bruno Taut's influential proclamation on Ise and Katsura skewed at large. And not until the eighties would this simplistic stance meet with its appropriate rebuttal, largely from architects who were transcending their Modernist training, and rediscovering the rich, expressive decorative aesthetic running through the Azuchi-Momoyama and Edo-period castles, through the shoin style, to the extravagancies of Kabuki theater and the Toshogu mausoleum in Nikko. As Kisho Kurokawa noted, "These hallmarks of decorativism are not anomalies, idiosyncratic flashes of color against a monochrome ground. In fact when one looks for this decorative aesthetic in Katsura and Ise, it is there to be found – if we have the eyes to see it."[23] The complexity of Japanese architecture was being increasingly noticed beyond Ise and Katsura, debunking after five decades, its simplistic monochromatic perception with a complex and contradictory one. It is this complexity that we shall delve into deeper in the chapters that follow.