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To the
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Review of

Ondrej Hojda. JAPAN AND MODERN ARCHITECTURE 1945-1970.
Discourse in the mid-20th-century Europe.

The study undertakes the complex task to delineate the process of Japanese traditional architecture entering the debate on "Modern Movement" during the 1950ies until 1970 in Europe as well as in Japan itself. In postwar Germany, to simplify the situation, being in a somewhat similar situation as Japan, the discussion had been a fight between the "conservatists" who tried to continue some of the ideals they were working for during the Nazi Regime, and the "modernists" who wanted to follow Mies van der Rohe's radical development in the USA or Hans Scharoun's "organic" building. The debate in Germany settled around 1953, and in an astonishing change the focus soon after turned to Japan, as in other European countries. This was mainly due to publications on Japanese architecture in architectural magazines to which the travelling architects could send reports which were welcomed by the editors. It is surprising though, as the author of this study argues, that there have not yet been careful investigations on this period as a whole, besides some special texts on the Metabolist movement of the 1960ies or monographs on the main protagonists as Kenzo Tange who excited the architectural world with his Olympic stadiums of 1964.

In a scientifically justified plan the author tries to fill the gap by taking the debate, the arguments and the images on Japanese architecture from architectural magazines and confines himself to the countries of Great Britain, France, Switzerland as well as Scandinavia and Czechoslovakia, but includes Japan. He omits the German publications which may be vindicated from the fact that one of the main reporters, Günter Nitzschke, presented his essays first in the British magazine AD, then the same in Germany. On the other side it is somehow regrettable since Tetsuro Yoshida who published "Das japanische Wohnhaus"

1935 in Germany's Wasmuth Publisher, and to which the author gives a detailed report, had a second edition of this book in Germany in 1954, and in 1952 he already gave a complete survey with the book "Japanische Architektur", and he completed the series in 1957 with "Der japanische Garten". The author mentions that Egon Eiermann, the most prolific afterwar architect in Germany, quoted in his lectures in Karlsruhe extensively from Yoshida's first book, and his way of a perfect transformation into modern architecture could be found in the German pavillon of the 1958 Brussel's World exhibition. This is not a criticism on the concept of the dissertation since I am well aware that the area of study has to be limited, and the author has very correctly founded the sources for his study.

I am convinced of the logic to let enter Japan itself in the quasi chronological line not before the Japanese magazine Shinkenchiku became international with its first English edition in 1956 when the discussion about the value of the traditional Japanese for contemporary architecture was presented in detailed English articles.

I see the advantage for the narrative of the study. Of course one would ask whether really nothing about the after-war Japanese architecture (1946 till 1955) had reached the European magazines before.

The thesis itself is a brilliant and careful study and a kind of assemblage of all the various understandings on Japanese tradition in relation to the model of European (or American) Modernism. Altogether the variations are not so different as to diverge from the general tone that traditional Japanese architecture, may it be of the 7. century Ise Shrines or the 17. century Katsura villa show surprisingly great affinities with the image of modern Western architecture even though mainly through the fotografic lenses. The author discusses the arguments and the details in 6 chapters on 140 pages, each chapter carefully framed by an "Introduction" and a "Conclusion", so the reader can well be oriented and follow the labyrinthic, also often repeating arguing.

The thesis culminates in Chapter III, "Synthesis". A synoptic table helps to compare the views of the great variety of writers, and the reader feels satisfied by the deeper comments on the topics which would characterise Japanese architecture: Material, Construction, Standardization, Nature, and especialy Space. It is interesting that the author trusts Heinrich Engel the most in his judgement also of the "deeper" meanings of Japanese tradition from his eminent study "The Japanese House", 1964.

Without going in details of each chapter I will collect as an appendix my proposals to correct some of the statements which to my knowledge are different.

As result of my reading the study twice I can say that it completely manages the requirements of a dissertation.

First: The proof that the author is able to use scientific methods. This constitutes the text throughout. He clearly states and foundes the periodic frame of his study and the

methods of disclosing the sources of information. He carefully gives introductions, i.e. the plan for each chapter, and a conclusion as opening for the next one. One condition for the study is the knowledge of such different languages as German, English and French besides the Czech motherlanguage. The English text is perfect. Only some misprints or missing words escaped the attention and can easily be corrected.

Second: The presentation of the sources, their ordering and final discussion brings many new aspects to the field of Building History for a specific period of Western as well as Japanese architecture. Especially the change of interest and of topics up to the 1970 Osaka World Fair is very well argued and convincing and a contribution to the field which was missing so far.

It would be good to find a final statement about the topics which could not be dealt with in the study resp. what should be done next in the opinion of the author, i.e. to have a list of questions for further research.

To state it clearly: I recommend the dissertation for a public defence and propose to assess it as "Pass".

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