

Alice Y. Tseng. Modern Kyoto: Building for
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BOOK REVIEW BY YU YANG

KYOTO is packed with tourists who admire its tranquil scenery and old buildings as timeless, untouched elements of beauty, and the quintessential evidence of Japanese tradition. English-language scholarship on the architecture and urban spaces of Kyoto has focused primarily on the eras before the Meiji period (1868–1912), emphasizing the old capital's unchanged spatial configuration and its lingering impact on contemporary space. Alice Tseng's *Modern Kyoto: Building for Ceremony and Commemoration, 1868–1940* offers a fresh perspective in time and space: the newly built environment after the Meiji Restoration, revealing a less discussed but decisive chapter in defining Kyoto's landscape and identity. Tseng meticulously organizes her examination of a cluster of modern landmarks, such as the Kyoto Imperial Palace (Kyoto Gosho 京都御所), Heian Shrine (Heian Jingū 平安神宮), Lake Biwa Canal, Kyoto Station, and Kyoto Botanical Gardens, around a central query into relationships between the traditional city and the modern monarchy. She argues that, after the Meiji emperor permanently departed for Tokyo, Kyoto reclaimed its significant connections with the imperial family through a series of commemorative ceremonies and affiliated urban projects and exhibitions, and these phenomena also structure her chapters.

The making of modern Kyoto, Tseng observes, be-

gins with crisis management: how the ancient capital filled the physical and symbolic emptiness after the emperor moved to Tokyo. Chapter 1 gives two cases—the modification of Kyoto Imperial Palace and the building of Heian Shrine in 1895—to illustrate how Kyoto reconstructed the historical experience of modern times in architectural and urban forms. The emperor-absent Kyoto Gosho and its surroundings, the dilapidated nobility town area (Kyūmon 九門, Nine Gates), were remade into a public park with walking paths, a greenbelt, and widened avenues. In 1873, the renovated park in turn became the primary site for the Kyoto Exhibitions (Kyoto Hakurankai 京都博覧会), which attracted many tourists. At first sight, these visits and tours seemed to continue the tradition of “Gosho tourism” (p. 34) in the Edo period, when commoners visited the Gosho on special occasions. Tseng astutely observes that the spatial connotation was the exact opposite. The Gosho served as a “backdrop,” where Edo commoners experienced the “palpable presence” (p. 36) of the emperor, whereas the Meiji-period recreated Gosho itself became the central object for the tourists' gaze. Despite the constant removal of actual structures, as documented by Tseng, scholarly and popular writings, as well as abundant visual representations, constructed the Kyoto Gosho as a symbol of quintessential Heian architecture. Tseng addresses the influential role that

visual representation played in forming the public reception of architecture. As she observes, Meiji-era photographs present the structure as an isolated and empty site, creating an aura of serenity and timelessness. Its inaccessibility is reinforced by the demolition of large clusters of service buildings attached to the main buildings, which reduced Kyoto Gosho into an “incomplete” fraction like “the front lobby of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Imperial Hotel” (p. 44).

Heian Shrine is located at the northern end of Okazaki Park, a public park newly designated in eastern Kyoto during the Meiji period. Its monumental, brightly painted structures, together with the huge concrete torii gateway that dominates the threshold of the central avenue bisecting the district, is the object of Tseng’s discussion that recurs in several chapters. Examining various changes in the style and site plans of Heian Shrine, Tseng argues that although intended as a replica of the Daigokuden 大極殿 of Emperor Kanmu 桓武天皇 (735–806), Heian Shrine exemplifies Kyoto’s modern invention of the imperial past in architecture and social milieu. The construction of Heian Shrine was tactically combined with the Fourth National Industrial Exhibition, held on the adjacent site, as the celebration of the 1,100th anniversary of the transfer of the capital to Heian (present-day Kyoto). Aided by visual representations that fictively integrated the new structure harmoniously into the signature landscape of “Old Kyoto,” Tseng writes, “Heian Shrine represented an active site of memory-making for imperial culture” (p. 64). She argues that, despite architect Itō Chūta’s 伊東忠太 (1867–1954) dissatisfaction and inattention to historical accuracy, Heian Shrine was embraced by the public as “classic” and successfully attracted tourists for its picturesque qualities. Kyoto Gosho and Heian Shrine, therefore, were a set of very different responses to fill in the physical and symbolic emptiness. The removal of structures within the Gosho reduced it to a synecdoche, whereas a new ritual site was constructed as a public space with tangible imperial affiliations. Together “they effectively fixed the memory of an imperial presence in Kyoto exactly when the emperor stopped being a local presence” (p. 65). Tseng mentions historian Itō Yukio’s research, which examines Kyoto Gosho in relation to imperial ceremonies, urban development, and political milieu from the Meiji to

postwar periods.¹ One would have benefited from further discussions of their different approaches in methodology and perspectives.

Chapter 2 traces the urban developments of Okazaki Park and surrounding areas, adjacent to Heian Shrine, which represented Kyoto’s efforts toward revival through a series of commemorative events of imperial weddings, enthronements, and funerals. Kyoto was considered a central stage for such imperial ceremonies: the Meiji Constitution stipulated that the enthronement (Sokui no rei 即位の礼) and the Food Offering Festival (Daijōsai 大嘗祭) were to be held in the city of Kyoto. The Meiji government bestowed new social meaning on imperial ceremonies: these pageant-ries engaged a broad audience, from nobles to the general public, to form a collective identity centering on the modern monarch. Building upon Takashi Fujitani’s discussions on the relationship between the publicity of the Meiji emperor’s tours and modern nation-building,² Tseng examines processions and documentations of Crown Prince Yoshihito’s wedding and pilgrimage tour to Western Japan, highlighting Kyoto’s efforts to create its central position within imperial splendor.

Tseng argues that the urban transformation of the Okazaki area from a paddy field to the very center of modernization has to do with conspicuous imperial patronage. The imperial family actively participated in the modernization of the old city by providing financial support to Lake Biwa Canal, one of the three public projects in Kyoto, and gifting exotic animals to Kyoto Zoological Garden. Tseng also mentions two new structures built in the area: the garden villa Murin-an 無鄰菴 (1903) built by Yamagata Arimoto 山縣有朋 (1838–1922), and Kyoto Prefectural Library (1909), designed by architect Takeda Goichi 武田五一 (1872–1938). Her discussions suggest new directions and potential for a full-length study. This reader was fascinated by details of tea gatherings at Murin-an and new art exhibitions at Kyoto Prefectural Library. The monograph would have benefited from further insights into the geo-cultural dynamics of these sites in relation to imperial culture, as well as to later urban developments in the same area, such as Kyoto Enthronement Memorial Museum of Art (1933, discussed in chapter 4), and another Takeda Goichi building, Yūrin Museum (Fujii Saiseikai Yūrinkan 藤井齊成会有鄰館, 1926), located next to Murin-an.

1 Itō, *Kyōto no kindai to tennō*.

2 Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy*.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine Kyoto's efforts to engage the public audience in the commemoration manifested in the enthronements of the Taisho emperor in 1915 and the Shōwa emperor in 1928. These efforts entailed a broad spectrum of activities in urban landscape and society—renovating the roads, decorating streets, building new temporary and permanent structures, holding affiliated exhibitions, and publishing textual and visual representations of the ceremonies. In this way, as Tseng observes, the two enthronements and affiliated activities became imperial spectacles encompassing all aspects of Kyoto, which branded its modern identity as a “ceremonial” city with special ties to the imperial house rather “than with the central administrative regime *per se*” (p. 115).

Tseng's examinations of “ephemeral architectural and urban social arrangements” (p. 115) give important insights into how and to what degree the general public participated in imperial events. Although no longer in existence, street decorations, the celebratory arch, and lighting on the bridges displayed a full-scale celebration in the city. Moreover, Tseng points out that photographs of enthronement rituals, *Sokui no rei* at Kyoto Gosho and *Daijōsai* at Sentō Gosho 仙洞御所, purposely created opacity: they did not show the emperor and presented a distant view of structures. Daily encounters with the celebratory objects, together with textual descriptions, visual representations, and models of the enthronement in department stores mediated the general public experience with the imperial house. The reader will find Tseng's description timely and informative in light of the present moment, as the enthronement of the Reiwa emperor took place on 22 October 2019. Indeed, the public experiences of recent enthronements—Emperor Akihito in 1990 and Emperor Naruhito in 2019—were in striking contrast to previous occasions. For example, *Sokui no rei* is no longer held at Kyoto Gosho but at the Hōmeiden 豊明殿 in the Imperial Palace in Tokyo. And although one could still recognize similarities to past enthronements in the spatial arrangements, procedures, and decorations during the hours-long TV and Internet (2019) broadcasts, the symbolic meaning and aura of the rituals was deconstructed by the steady broadcast exposure of the emperor, imperial family members, and guests. Kyoto became absent: the impeccable orchestration of a picturesque enthronement and a celebratory parade were all organized in Tokyo. Kyoto's loss of its special ties to the imperial house, as articulated in the epilogue,

occurred in the postwar period.

Tseng considers the affiliated exhibitions the most important examples among the temporary structures, as they were “performances to enhance the visibility and ideology of the modern monarchy as an all-encompassing consideration” (p. 116). She compares the architecture and site of the 1915 Enthronement Commemoration Exhibition (Taiten Kinen Kyōto Hakurankai 大典記念京都博覧会) in Kyoto with contemporaneous exhibitions in Japan and abroad, arguing that the unique characteristic of the Kyoto exhibition was Kyoto's central status within imperial culture. According to Tseng, this goal was realized through display tactics. The exhibition displayed an abundance of objects from imperial collections, local Kyoto artwork and crafts, and directed the viewing sequence to create a narrative of “the imperial household, artistic heritage, and national identity as explicitly synonymous” (p. 156).

In chapter 4, Tseng continues her examination of urban structures erected in Okazaki Park—the Shinto gateway and Kyoto Enthronement Memorial Museum of Art, as well as the train station and Kyoto Botanical Gardens. She analyzes these structures not only in the context of Kyoto's reinforcement of imperial ties, but also in a broader context of the developments of Japanese modernist architecture and the city's expansion, providing a vivid account of Kyoto's “architectural engagement with trends and concerns universal to major Japanese cities of the interwar period” (p. 207). Tseng's accurate characterizations of architectural style and formal analysis attending to details are exemplified in her detailed comparisons between Kyoto Station (the second-generation building) and Tokyo Station, and between Kyoto Enthronement Memorial Museum of Art and the Imperial Tokyo National Museum. Tseng also astutely points out that photographs of Kyoto Station carefully orchestrated the composition and perspective to enhance the monumentality of the station and an orderly atmosphere. This alerts us to the potential of a discrepancy when relying on visual materials to reconstruct buildings no longer extant.

One of Tseng's most important arguments is that she considers the confluence of Kyoto's reinforcement of imperial ties and modernization that shaped the spatial configuration of modern Kyoto. According to Tseng, two widened avenues became the central axes around 1930: the north-south Karasuma Avenue linking Kyoto Botanical Gardens to Kyoto Station, and the horizontal Marutamachi Avenue that linked Nijō Cas-

tle on the west side of the Kamo River to Okazaki Park in the eastern area. For Tseng, the coexistence of this axis-centered system and the old grid streets makes Kyoto a successful implementation of grand modern urban planning, the opposite of Tokyo's urban renovations which "could not be realized atop the castle-town footprint of Tokyo, not even in the post-earthquake rebuilding in the mid- to late 1920s" (p. 207). Current studies of Japanese urban planning, as Tseng observes, have considered Tokyo's modern urban planning a failure due to limitations in reality. In contrast, they have addressed Japanese urban planning in colonies such as Taiwan, Korea, and Manchuria as successful and characterized these large-scale projects as idealistic and utopian because they were carried out full-scale and with little local resistance. Tseng addresses Kyoto's urban development as an alternative to the Tokyo-centric narrative, which sheds light on the comparative study of Japanese and colonial urban spaces. One would have benefited immensely from further detailed comparisons of blueprints of maps, regulations, and public receptions among regional Japanese cities and colonial cities. Recent scholarship in colonial studies has revealed the discrepancy in the "utopian" rhetoric, which was fabricated mostly by abundant writings and visual representations of the space.³ Recent studies of colonial urban planning have challenged the utopian narrative by articulating chaotic circumstances, incomplete executions, and compromises in Japanese urban planning and execution in major colonial cities.⁴

The epilogue revisits Heian Shrine and Kyoto Botanical Gardens and traces their changing public reception in Japan from the wartime to postwar periods through the perspective of two influential novels: *The Makioka Sisters* by Tanizaki Jun'ichirō 谷崎潤一郎 (1886–1965) and *The Old Capital* by Kawabata Yasunari 川端康成 (1899–1972). Tseng focuses on the excerpts that describe the protagonists' flower viewings at these two sites to decipher "the symbolism of imperial commemorative sites at the height of war and after war" (p. 209). Tseng traces how Heian Shrine's imperial association transformed the site into a tangible symbol of imperial ide-

ologies in wartime; public ceremonies held at the shrine aimed to mobilize Japanese people to embark upon militaristic and colonial expansion in Asia. Against the backdrop of increasingly fanatic imperialism, Tanizaki's description of Heian Shrine, however, was picturesque and tranquil, a site where the wealthy sisters immersed themselves in peaceful joy. Tseng considers this contradiction to be Tanizaki's subtextual resistance to the reality of war as the writer fantasized about an unchanged Heian Shrine and an uninterrupted life. Tseng considers the symbolic meaning of Heian Shrine as the opposite to Kyoto Botanical Gardens in postwar Japan, despite both having suffered damage during the Allied Occupation of Japan. Tseng uses Kawabata's depiction of the protagonists' visits to the sites as metaphors: while the female protagonist Chieko identifies herself with an aestheticized and "abandoned" Heian Shrine, the Sada family encounters the "Western" tulips in Kyoto Botanical Gardens as a symbol of recovery and embraces them for the future.

The monograph applies an interdisciplinary approach integrating a broad spectrum of fields such as architecture, urban planning, regional studies, and cultural studies. Tseng's meticulous articulation reconstructs an important chapter in the modernization of Kyoto's urban space. Her study contributes to the English-language scholarship on Japanese architecture and urban spaces in both method and conceptualization. The rich historical details and masterly analysis convincingly reveal how social and cultural activities, as well as visual and textual representations, influence the public reception of built environments. Nowadays, those who visit the Okazaki area will notice the emptiness and grand scale that seemed out of proportion to Kyoto's densely populated residential areas. Tseng articulates Kyoto's painstaking efforts to integrate the new area into Kyoto's old fabric by forming imperial connections and concludes with a characterization of the city's changing identity. "A city broken down by the loss of the emperor in residence, built up by commemorations of imperial history and history-in-the-making, broken down once again by defeat in the Asia-Pacific War, and back on the road to recovery by stripping itself of the recent imperial veneration" (p. 220).

3 For a visual representation of Manchuria, see Kishi, *Manshūkoku no bijuaru media*; Shepherdson-Scott, "Conflicting Politics."

4 The majority of Japanese and English scholarship on colonial architecture and urban studies still emphasizes the utopian narrative; see Sewell, *Constructing Empire*. For examples of challenges to the utopian narrative in colonial Korea and Manchuria, see Sunamoto, "Kyōjōfu no kōgai jūtakuchi"; Ueda, *Hōten no kindai*; Yang, "At the Crossroads."

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