

A Black Lacquered Wooden Bowl Made by Bruno Taut and his Building Science Honorary Member Tatsuaki TANAKA (Ochanomizu University)

Bruno Taut was a talented architect who built about 12,000 houses in Berlin in the 1920s. And the four housing estates (Siedlung) he built are listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. But his socialist ideas were met with scorn by the Nazis. As a result, Taut came to Japan in 1933 to seek asylum. He introduced the beauty of Japan to the world by praising Katsura Imperial Villa and Ise Shrine. During his stay in Japan, he could not do much architectural design work. Instead, he worked in crafts during his stay in Takasaki. I would like to describe the relationship between the black lacquered bowl he made there and the traditional Japanese house, from the point of view of building science.

Introduction

Brief Biography of Bruno Taut

Bruno Taut came to Japan in 1933 at the mercy of the waves of the time. The life of Bruno Taut has followed a strange trail, is as follows.^{1),2)}

4.May 1880 Born in Königsberg, East Prussia
 1897 Graduated from high school in Königsberg
 1897-1901 Attended the Baugewerkschule (Architectural School) in Königsberg, apprentice mason
 1902 Employed by architect Neugebauer, Hamburg-Altona
 1903-1904 Employed by architect Bruno Möhring Berlin
 1904-1906 Employed by Theodor Fischer, Stuttgart
 1906 Married Hedwig Wollgast from Chorin, returned to Berlin
 1908 Employed by Heinz Lassen, Berlin
 1909 Independent architect in collaboration with Franz Hoffmann, Joint office as “Taut & Hoffmann”
 1910 Member of German Werkbund
 1913 Consulting architect of the Deutsche Gartenstadt-Gesellschaft (German Garden City Society), began very copious publication activity
 1913-1914 Joint office with his brother , Max Taut “Taut Brothers & Hoffmann”
 1914 Participation in the Werkbund Exhibition in Cologne with “Glashaus” (Glass House)
 1917 Active in the Deutsche Gartenstadt-Gesellschaft in Bergisch -Gladbach; made acquaintance with Erica Wittich, his later life-companion
 1918 Member of the „November Gruppe“(November Group) Co-founder of the “Arbeitsrat für

Kunst” (Work council for Art)
 1921-1924 Stadtbaurat (Municipal Building Council in Magdeburg
 1924 Returned to Berlin and re-established his own architect’s office
 1924-1932 Chief architect of the GEHAG
 1926 Member of the architects association “Der Ring”
 1930 Honorary Professor at the Technische Universität (Technical University) Berlin Charlottenburg, teaching activity
 1931 Member of the Preußische Akademie der Künste (Prussian Academy of the Arts) zu Berlin
 1932 Moved to Moscow
 1933 Returned to Berlin Fled to Switzerland, then to Japan, via Marseille, Naples, Athens, Istanbul, Odessa, Moskow and Vladivostock
 1933-1936 Resided in Japan-
 1936-1938 Resided in Turkey, held appointment at the Academy of the Arts in Istanbul, Professor in the Architecture Department, Director of the construction department at the ministry of Education
 1938 Retrofit of complete works in Istanbul
 24. Dec. 1938 Died at home in Istanbul-Ortaköy

1. Tableware and Houses

An exhibition of Bruno Taut’s works was held at the Gunma Prefectural Museum of History from January 5th to February 7th, 2021. Among the exhibited works was a black lacquered bowl. (Photo 1) There were no black-painted tableware in Germany at that time. Most are painted plain white or in a floral pattern. In this report, I would like to consider why Taut made black tableware in relation to living science engineering.

Photo-2 shows the house in Dahlewitz where Taut lived with his family until he came to Japan. The house was designed by him, and for a German house, it has large windows and bright interiors.



Photo 1 Black Lacquered wooden bowl made by Taut⁵⁾

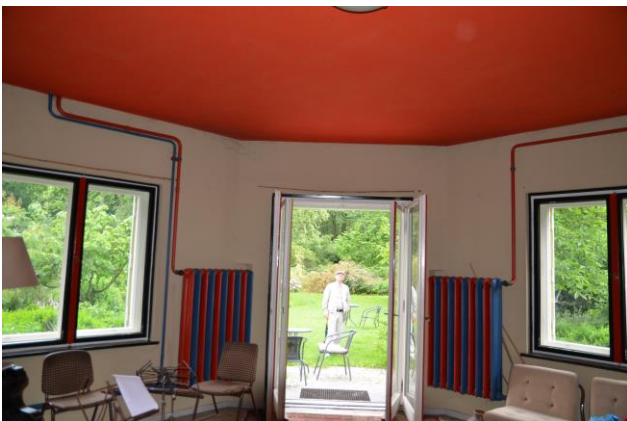


Photo 2 Taut's Residence in Dahlewitz

Tableware that was often used by a German family at that time (Weimar republic era) is displayed at the Werkbund Museum in Berlin. (Photo 3). As we can see, it is based on a white color. Perhaps Taut and his family used such tableware in Germany.



Photo 3 Most popular tableware in Weimar Republic era

Traditional Japanese wooden houses had large roofs with large eaves. The eaves prevented both rain and sunlight from entering the room during the warmer months. Contrarily, in winter it was devised to allow the sun's rays to enter the house. Such control of solar radiation was an important area of research in building science engineering.

Bruno Taut, who built many apartment houses in Germany, was persecuted by the Nazi regime and came to Japan with his partner and secretary, Erica Wittich, in 1933 to seek asylum. Taut stayed in Japan for three years and six months, of which he two years and three months were at Senshitei of Shorinzan Darumaji Temple in Takasaki, Gunma Prefecture.

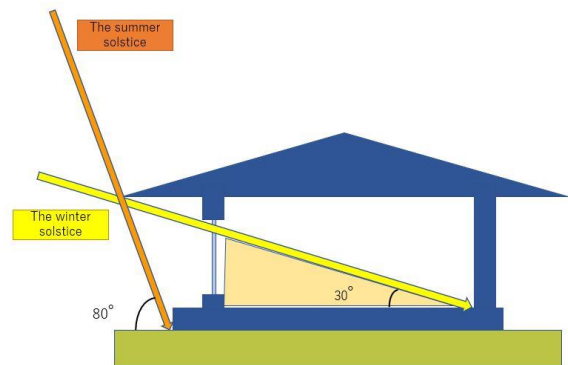


Fig. 1 Sun's Ray Control by Eaves

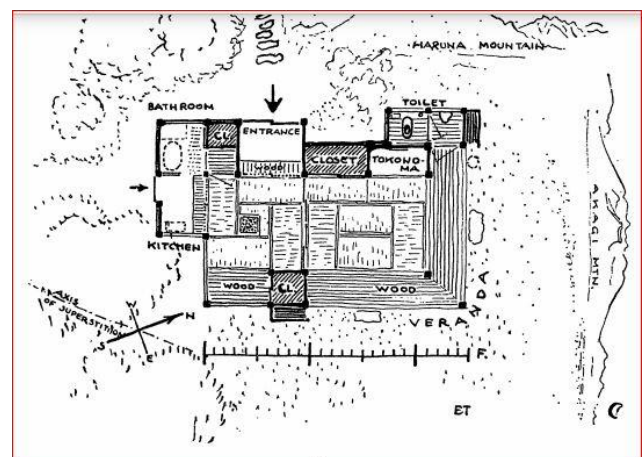


Fig. 2 Plan of Senshitei drawn by Bruno Taut

This Senshitei was relocated to this temple from another location and the orientation is not ideal. Bruno Taut and Erica lived mainly in a four-and-a-half Tatami mat room with a hearth. This room is related to the orientation of the house, but there are large rocks around it, and it was always difficult for sunlight to enter it. So, Bruno Taut and Erica lived in dimly lit quarters.



Photo 4 Outside View of Senshintei



Photo 5 Inside View of Senshintei

2. Features of traditional Japanese houses.

The great writer Junichiro Tanizaki described in his essay, "In Praise of Shadows"*¹, the characteristics of traditional Japanese houses.

*From "In Praise of Shadows" by Junichiro Tanizaki (Translated by Thomas J. Harper & Edward G. Seidensticker)

"I possess no specialized knowledge of architecture, but I understand that in the Gothic cathedral of the West, the roof is thrust up and up so as to place its pinnacle as high in the heavens as possible-and that herein is thought to lie its special beauty. In the temples of Japan, on the other hand, a roof of heavy tiles is first laid out, and in the deep, spacious shadows created by the eaves the rest of the structure is built. Nor is this true only of temples; in the palaces of the nobility and the houses of the common people, what first strikes the eye is the massive roof of tile or thatch and the heavy darkness that hangs

beneath the eaves. Even at midday cavernous darkness spreads over all beneath the roof's edge, making entryway, doors, walls, and pillars all but invisible. The grand temples of Kyoto-Chion'in, Honganji-and the farmhouses of the remote countryside are alike in this respect: like most buildings of the past their roofs give the impression of possessing far greater weight, height, and surface than all that stands beneath the eaves.

In making for ourselves a place to live, we first spread a parasol to throw a shadow on the earth, and in the place light of the shadow we put together a house. There are of course roofs on Western houses too, but they are less to keep off the sun than to keep off the wind and the dew; even from without it is apparent that they are built to create as few shadows as possible and to expose the interior to as much light as possible. If the roof of a Japanese house is a parasol, the roof of a Western house is no more than a cap, with as small a visor as possible so as to allow the sunlight to penetrate directly beneath the eaves. There are no doubt all sorts of reasons-climate, building materials-for the deep Japanese eaves. The fact that we did not use glass, concrete, and bricks, for instance, made a low roof necessary to keep off the driving wind and rain. A light room would no doubt have been more convenient for us, too, than a dark room. The quality that we call beauty, however, must always grow from the realities of life, and our ancestors, forced to live in dark rooms, presently came to discover beauty in shadows ultimately to guide shadows towards beauty's ends. And so it has come to be that the beauty of a Japanese room depends on a variation of shadows, heavy shadows against light shadows- it has nothing else. Westerners are amazed at the simplicity of Japanese rooms, perceiving in them no more than ashen walls bereft of ornament. Their reaction is understandable, but it betrays a failure to comprehend the mystery of shadows. Out beyond the sitting room, which the rays of the sun can at best but barely reach, we extend the eaves or build on a veranda, putting the sunlight at still greater a remove. The light from the garden steals in but dimly through paper-paneled doors, and it is precisely this indirect light that makes for us the charm of a room."

3. The black lacquered wooden bowl

Tanizaki also described the black lacquered bowl.

"Whenever I sit with a bowl of soup before me, listening to the murmur that penetrates like the far-off shrill of an insect, lost in contemplation of flavors to come, I feel as if I were being drawn into a trance. The experience must be something like that of the tea master who, at the sound of the kettle, is taken from himself as if upon the sigh of the wind in the

legendary pines of Onoe.

It has been said of Japanese food that it is a cuisine to be looked at rather than eaten, I would go further and say that it is to be meditated upon, a kind of silent music evoked by the combination of lacquerware and the light of a candle flickering in the dark. Natsume Soseki, in *Pillow of Grass*, praises the color of the confection Yokan, and is it not indeed a color to call forth meditation? The cloudy translucence, like that of jade; the faint, dreamlike glow that suffuses it, as if it had drunk into its very depths the light of the sun; the complexity and profundity of the color-nothing of the sort is to be found in Western candies. How simple and insignificant cream-filled chocolates seems by comparison. And when yokan is served in a lacquer dish within whose dark recesses its color is scarcely distinguishable, then it is most certainly an object for meditation. You take its cool, smooth substance into your mouth. And it is as if the very darkness of the room were melting on your tongue; even undistinguished yokan can then take on a mysteriously intriguing flavor. “

4. The black lacquered wooden bowl, which Taut loved

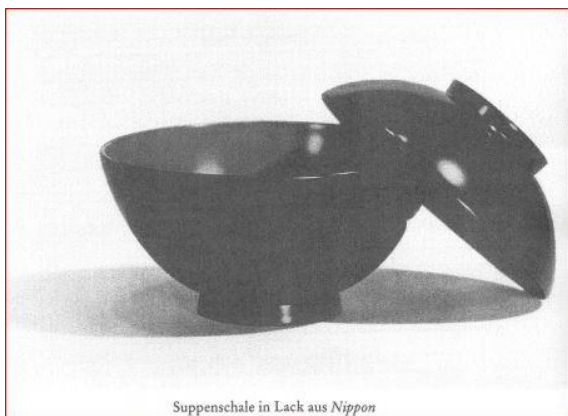


Photo 6 Black lacquered wooden bowl, which Taut loved

The interior of old Japanese houses was dark. As Tanizaki wrote, Japanese people are raised in dimly lit spaces. (Since Koichiro Kimura conducted research on daylight rates, the interior of Japanese buildings has become brighter.)

It is certain that Taut ate at Senshintei with black lacquered tableware. He introduced the black lacquered wooden bowl he used, in his book “Japanese Houses and Life” with photographs. Taut probably ate miso soup in a dimly lit room using such a bowl. He understood the Japanese culture that Tanizaki wrote about and thus made his own such traditional bowl. It was exhibited at the Gunma Prefectural Museum of History this time, attracting the attention of many visitors.

5. On the plan of Taut’s architectural School in Shorinzan Darumaji Temple

Bruno Taut once planned to establish a Japanese Bauhaus in Shorinzan Darumaji Temple. The contents are described in Reference 4. This was to be provided financially by Mr. Fusaichiro Inoue, a sponsor of Bruno Taut in Takasaki. His school building was supposed to use the auditorium of Darumaji Temple. The contents of the lectures are also described. 16 items are listed. Of these the 7th item is related to sewerage, heating technology, ventilation, water supply, gas and electricity. In addition the 8th item includes a kitchen, a bathroom, a toilet, and other facilities. It can be seen that Bruno Taut was also focusing on heating, ventilation and sanitary engineering.

Conclusion

There is a stone monument beside Senshintei, Darumaji Temple. On it are Taut’s words. “I love Japanese culture.” Taut probably lived in the dark room of Senshin-tei, ate miso soup in a black wooden lacquered bowl, and understood Japanese culture. As a result, he probably made the bowl himself. This is Taut’s precious souvenir for Japan.

Taut put together a Taut architectural school proposal at the end of 1934. Taut was famous for publishing fantastic art books as an expressionist architect. However, the school’s classes were also scheduled to teach heating, (photo 2) ventilation and sanitary engineering. In fact, Taut’s residence in Dahlewitz was equipped with naturally circulated warm water heating, which was rare at that time. It is conceivable that Taut used a kiln (Kachelofen) in a house built for others and used warm water heating in his residence for testing.

[Space]

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