

# Representational Space in the Prince Asaka Residence

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## ABSTRACT

*Jun'ichirō Tanizaki's In Praise of Shadows (1933) describes a theory of aesthetics based on shadows. He suggests that contrary to Western ideas of highly visible space, ambiguity and darkness are distinct characteristics of Japanese interiors. Kazuo Nakajima describes this condition as the blending of social practices and interior elements in indeterminate spaces of the vernacular Japanese home, and suggests the decline of such interiors has threatened the psychological stability of Japan since Western engagement, from the Meiji restoration of 1868.*

*Almost as affirmation of Nakajima's fears, the same year Tanizaki's essay was originally published in Japan, the Art Deco Residence of Prince Asaka was completed in Minato-ku, Tokyo. Now a house museum, this assemblage of interiors is credited room-by-room to either the French interior designer Henri Rapin or the Japanese Construction Bureau of the Imperial Household, confirming for Nakajima a division between Western and Japanese concepts of space.*

*This paper questions Nakajima's dualist reading of the Residence's interiors by unpacking the complexities of Western engagement in the Japanese interior since the Meiji restoration until the 1930s. Additionally, this paper examines parallel concepts of interior space that directly influenced the Residence's conception, from the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris and the 1920s Culture Life movement in Japan. From these historic and contextual examinations, this paper demonstrates a fundamental shift from the concept of space in the Japanese interior described by Tanizaki and Nakajima. It suggests that Western engagement displaced how value was attributed in the interior, from things that were unseen to things that were seen.*

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.<sup>1</sup>

Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows* (1933)

Jun'ichirō Tanizaki's essay *In Praise of Shadows* outlines an aesthetic theory based on shadows. Tanizaki writes this essay in an autobiographical manner, providing anecdotal accounts of everyday shifts in the objects and social practices of the Japanese interior, to accommodate impositions from Western modernity, urbanization and domestic commodification. Tanizaki contrasts his

irritation with these foreign intrusions through atmospheric descriptions of a pre-Meiji traditional lifestyle. Central to these persuasive descriptions is the role of shadows, which he suggests are the essential element to beauty in the Japanese interior. Tanizaki unpacks the role of the shadow through describing the *tokonoma* or alcove. He suggests the darkness of the alcove epitomizes an emptiness of the Japanese interior that, through its obscurity of vision, results in an aesthetic condition of space that is felt, rather than seen.<sup>2</sup>

Kazuo Nakajima explores the spatial emptiness discussed by Tanizaki through reminiscing on the home of his childhood, built in the 1930s. Nakajima appears to be describing an early twentieth century variation of a *Kyo-Machiya*,<sup>3</sup> which was a type of vernacular Japanese urban housing in continuous use since the twelfth century,<sup>4</sup> and prolific at the time of Western engagement in the 1850s.<sup>5</sup> In describing its interior, Nakajima introduces two concepts of space, *ura* and *omote*. He defines *ura* as private, real and unreal, a space full of imagination and desire. Read against the more rational and public *omote* space, he suggests *ura* is a type of otherness of the home that 'separated and protected' its inhabitants by being 'unknown and ambiguous' to outsiders.<sup>6</sup> Nakajima suggests the causality of this otherness arises from the use of *shoji* or paper screens in the interior. These opaque, moveable partitions afford spatial flexibility that create an uncertain delineation of rooms and uses to one unfamiliar with Japanese social practices.

Richard Pilgrim suggests this uncertainty in the Japanese interior is indicative of the concept of 'Ma' from Shinto aesthetics. Referring to the description of Japanese culture as a 'culture of grays',<sup>7</sup> Pilgrim describes an indeterminate and obscure 'world between' that is a key feature to a Japanese understanding of space.<sup>8</sup> *Ma* is commonly translated as 'interval'<sup>9</sup> or 'interstice,' which Arata Isozaki describes as a non-Cartesian concept of space-time based on his reading of Tanizaki's text.<sup>10</sup> Similar to *ura*, *Ma* describes an ambiguous 'world of shadings and shadows'<sup>11</sup> that Pilgrim goes on to suggest is the means by which emotional and imaginative meaning enters Japanese spatial reality.<sup>12</sup> This correlation between spatial indeterminacy and meaning-making is used by Nakajima to establish a dichotomy between traditional and modern interior space in Japan. He describes the 'perennial semidarkness' of his childhood home compared to the 'luminous and functional' interior of the modern houses of his neighbours.<sup>13</sup> He demonstrates this dichotomy is a key characteristic of Japanese literature from the Meiji period (1868 – 1912) until Tanizaki's work in the 1930s, and suggests that such a dichotomy reflects a psychological division in Japanese cities of the early twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> Like Tanizaki, Nakajima pits nostalgia for darkness and ambiguity against the luminous and determinate space of modern interiors.

One example that Nakajima uses to articulate this dichotomy is the Residence of Prince Asaka, completed in 1933.<sup>15</sup> This Residence, now the Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum, was built on land gifted to Prince Asaka Yasuhiko by Emperor Meiji after marrying the emperor's eighth daughter Princess Asaka Nobuko, in 1906.<sup>16</sup> The Prince and Princess decided to build this Residence after their first home was partially destroyed during the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923.<sup>17</sup> Known for

its exquisitely detailed modern French interiors, the Residence would later be described as an exemplar of Japanese Art Deco.<sup>18</sup>

The decision to include such ostentatious elements of modern French design appear to have resulted from the Imperial couple's immersion in the French decorative arts during the 1920s. In 1922, while in Paris for military training, Prince Asaka badly injured his leg in a car accident and Princess Nobuko travelled to Paris in April 1923 to assist in his recovery. Their stay lasted three years and was described as a 'flamboyant' affair with French culture.<sup>19</sup> Whilst in Paris the Imperial couple visited the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* of 1925. This Exposition, later described as the origin of Art Deco,<sup>20</sup> appears to have been pivotal in the design of the Residence.

On their return to Japan, the Prince and Princess began planning the Residence with the young Japanese Architect Yōkichi Gondō of the Imperial Household Ministry's Construction Bureau. Gondō himself had recently returned from a study tour of Europe and America, including at least five separate visits to the Exposition.<sup>21</sup> The uniquely modern design of the Residence was described as an eccentric mix of French and Japanese influences,<sup>22</sup> unlike the other residences built for the Imperial family during the same period, including the Prince Yi Residence (1929), the Prince Chichibu Residence (1927), and the Prince Higashi-Fushimi Residence (1925).<sup>23</sup>

A key contribution to the design for the Asaka Residence came from the French interior designer Henri Rapin, who is credited for his graphic, interior and exhibition designs at the Exposition.<sup>24</sup> The interiors of the Residence are widely described as consisting of two types of space; those designed by Rapin and those designed by Gondō and the Construction Bureau. Interiors credited to Rapin emulate the extravagance of the French decorative art displays of the Exposition, including the Great Hall, Grand Guestroom, Great Dining Hall, Small Guestroom, Anteroom, Prince's study and private living room.<sup>25</sup> The remaining rooms are credited to Gondō and the Construction Bureau, and demonstrate a blend of modern and vernacular Japanese features, including the private dining room, second floor bedrooms, and living areas.<sup>26</sup>

*In Praise of Shadows* was originally published in the same year the Residence was completed, and its dichotomies of East and West, traditional and modern, provide a plausible lens through which to read these interiors. Indeed, even Tanizaki's description of the uncomfortable need to conceal modern services<sup>27</sup> parallels the elaborate crawl spaces between the walls and floors of the Residence, built specifically for this purpose.<sup>28</sup> When Nakajima discusses the Residence, he echoes Tanizaki's sentiment, describing the situation where the 'family preferred to spend most of their time in a few rooms on the upper floor. Where the traditional Japanese style and way of life were maintained.'<sup>29</sup> He suggests that the 'cosmopolitan prince and his cultivated wife had trouble accepting an occidental space, firmly divided and defined by abundant Western decoration.'<sup>30</sup> Nakajima uses these examples to articulate an incongruity between the space's appearance and its use — a point he uses to establish the idea of a deep, emergent separation between social practices of the Japanese interior and its now foreign appearance. He describes this separation as a kind of 'spatial schizophrenia' that he suggests emulates a parallel development in greater Japan.<sup>31</sup>

Although Nakajima's insight is compelling, its validity must be read against the everyday use of the Residence's interiors. For instance, Princess Asaka Nobuko passed away only six months after the Residence was completed in November 1933, and shortly thereafter her two sons left for military and naval service respectively. For the most part, only Prince Asaka and his youngest daughter Princess Kiyoko lived in the Residence for an extended period.<sup>32</sup> Such details demonstrate that the Residence was only used as its design intended for the summer of 1933, and that there had been little time to establish the patterns of behaviour Nakajima suggests. Further, his account pays no attention to the interior spaces of the support staff, which consisted of over thirty people, including approximately ten ladies-in-waiting who lived on the grounds. Compared to the family's private rooms, the spaces provided for these women were much more in line with the pre-Meiji imagery evoked by Tanizaki and Nakajima, including a 'Japanese-style house' behind the Residence,<sup>33</sup> and the only *tatami* mat room in the main building.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, these women were restricted from entering the modern French interiors on the ground floor and not permitted to use the main stairs.<sup>35</sup>



These restrictions on the ladies-in-waiting highlight a separation between the arrangement of interior spaces and the affordance of social practices, and suggest a third typology of interior space that complexifies Nakajima's and Tanizaki's dichotomy between Western and Japanese influences. This in turn calls for clarity regarding the specific effect of Western engagement on the dark and ambiguous qualities of Japanese space. The remainder of this paper will unpack the influence of the West on the interior elements and social practices of the Residence's three interior typologies to determine its effects on the 'world of shadings and shadows'.<sup>36</sup>

When considering Western engagement in the Japanese interior, it is important to understand several 'mechanisms' that emerged prior to the design of the Residence. From Tanizaki's and Nakajima's accounts, this engagement appears to follow a colonialist model of occupier and occupied. Jordan Sand finds this position not entirely without merit, suggesting that Meiji period interiors were often considered imitations of the West. Sand goes on to problematize this understanding of Meiji interiors, suggesting their emulation of Western aesthetics was a result of complex debates concerning national representation both inside and outside Japan.<sup>37</sup> Sand uses the interior as the

Above

Figure 1: Salon, 1933.

Interior design: Henri Rapin

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locality to identify how such global debates affect individuals by considering their 'selection and placement of objects and the treatment of surfaces.'<sup>38</sup> He establishes various 'mechanisms of displacement' that affect social practices in the interior through displacing familiar interior objects and social practices in order to satisfy global perceptions of Japanese identity in the wake of Western engagement.<sup>39</sup>

The first mechanism of displacement concerns the emulation of Western lifestyle during the early Meiji period. Sand challenges the idea that the mimicry of Western interiors was the result of oppression or praise. He argues that from concerns about appearing exotic and inferior in Western perception, Japanese aristocrats went through a process of 'self-colonizing' which included the construction of European style interiors to meet foreigners on equal ground.<sup>40</sup> The *Rokumeikan* or *Deep Cry Pavilion* was an example of such space. Built to accommodate foreign dignitaries in 1883, it quickly came to 'epitomize the new way of life' through its emulation of European interiors and customs.<sup>41</sup> *Oyatoi* or foreign architects were brought to Japan to perform the dual role of designing European spaces and educating the first generation of Japanese designers.<sup>42</sup> New institutions such as 'post offices, palaces, ministries, and schools'<sup>43</sup> were built in European styles to demonstrate national stability internally, and national legitimacy externally.<sup>44</sup>

In the interior, Sand suggests this process was epitomized by a particular relationship between fashion and space. As Western dress and Western shoes were adopted, the Japanese social practice of removing one's shoes when entering the interior was displaced. This shift in self representation through fashion resulted in the displacement of tatami mats for timber floors and carpets,<sup>45</sup> in turn accommodating the inclusion of Western furniture with floors that could now bear its weight.<sup>46</sup>

Simultaneously, a second mechanism of displacement developed in opposition to the emulation of Western appearances. Instead of mimicking Western national identity, this mechanism combined 'native tradition' with ideas of Western self-representation to present a partially invented image of Japanese identity.<sup>47</sup> One example included the *shojiyo* or Shrine and Temple style architecture created by the first generation of architects trained entirely by Japanese teachers and master carpenters.<sup>48</sup> Shrine and Temple style used Western technology, including orthographic projection and planning, integrated with the techniques of Japanese carpentry<sup>49</sup> to create self-conscious spaces of traditionalism.

In the interior, fashion again played a significant role. As suggested by Sand, the adoption of Western dress by male businessmen shifted the perception of historic appropriation to the 'feminine sphere.'<sup>50</sup> The emulation of the West's 'position of women in society'<sup>51</sup> resulted in the emergence of gender-specific parlours that were smaller in scale<sup>52</sup> and displaced familiar social practices from the Japanese interior. Patterns and fabrics with 'native aesthetic motifs'<sup>53</sup> became associated with women's space and began to displace familiar interior elements through the inclusion of soft coverings, traditional ornaments and lighter furniture.

Associated with traditionalism was a third mechanism of displacement concerning the self-conscious image of Japan as the rightful 'museum of Asia.' Hyungmin Pai and Don-Son Woo suggest that this 'pan-Asian' image was predicated on Japanese claims of historic superiority in the Asia-Pacific, in reaction to engagement with Western hegemony.<sup>54</sup> The result was a national self-image that in part was used to justify Japanese imperial dominance and occupation of countries including Korea, Manchuria, Taiwan and China. Sand suggests that such actions established an 'orientalist relationship to cultural artifacts,'<sup>55</sup> that resulted in the displacement of familiar objects and social practices from the Japanese interior for those collected from occupied Asia, to emulate an image of enlightened supremacy.<sup>56</sup>

In the context of the Residence, these three mechanisms of displacement establish various responses to Western engagement as the origins of the spaces it contains. That said, it is important to understand how each mechanism shifted in relation to the rapidly changing conditions in Japan, from the Meiji period to the time the Residence was conceived in the 1920s. During this time, the population of Tokyo doubled to almost four million people, and was accompanied by new urban issues of industrialization, housing crises and the rapid development of an educated middle class. All of which called for the continuous reform of interior practices to match the shifting conditions of foreign engagement.<sup>57</sup>

Sand suggests that reform movements 'followed the well established Meiji formula of bourgeois voluntary societies promoting state modernization goals.'<sup>58</sup> In the 1920s interior, such processes emulated the self-colonising mechanism of the early Meiji period, though now through a rapidly expanding network of print media,<sup>59</sup> and exhibitions aimed at educating new clientele on domestic products and Western interiors. In 1915, the house exhibit of Chûta Itô and architect Arata Endô demonstrated the continued displacement of interior elements and social practices from the Japanese interior through modern reforms. Their new plan for the 'middle class house' included features that would later appear in the Residence, including 'Western style' reception rooms, a study by the entry, and the separation of servants' spaces.<sup>60</sup> Other modern interior reforms of the time included raising door heights for the increased expectation of foreign guests and the inclusion of Western toilets to 'better accommodate people wearing Western clothes.'<sup>61</sup> In the Everyday Life Reform Exhibition of 1920, architect Junkichi Tanabe proposed that the 'problem' of the Japanese interior was that each room's function was poorly defined. He advocated Western practices of prescribing a function for every room, and called for the abandonment of 'floor living' for Western furnishings. Though as in the Residence, he maintained the maid's room should remain unchanged, with a *tatami* floor.<sup>62</sup>

In the same exhibition, the journalist Motoko Hani presented articles on the modern domestic interior, which included drawings to demonstrate the 'rational usage' of the modern home. As described by Izumi Kuroishi, these drawings depicted interiors without 'clutter, souvenirs' or any object of sentimental significance. Instead Hani depicted interiors reflecting an upper-middle-class

domestic lifestyle described as 'modern, bright, and healthy.'<sup>63</sup> Kuroishi observes that her method of drawing established a visual description of the exact objects and their specific arrangement needed to achieve a totally modern lifestyle in the Japanese interior. The result were depictions that went beyond the incremental changes of the Meiji period mechanisms of displacement, to completely artificial representations of modern Japanese lifestyle.

These drawings reflect a broader shift in displacement practices of the Japanese interior, from changes caused by the accumulation of foreign objects, to changes caused by the adaptation of foreign representations. Depictions of modern lifestyle such as Hani's moved quickly beyond the confines of the imaginary to define impossible expectations for the middle class home. Appearances became paramount and concealed an ever-growing struggle to maintain them. In the interior, familiar social practices that did not support such appearances were rendered meaningless and displaced.<sup>64</sup>

During the same time period, many believed the problems addressed by reform movements were the result of modernization itself.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, a 'counter-narrative'<sup>66</sup> opposing the importation of Western modernization took hold in the interior, emulating the mechanism of traditionalism from the Meiji period. A proponent of this movement was architect Wajiro Kon, who argued that it was meaningless to focus solely on reforming lifestyle. Kon developed a method of visual ethnography called *Modernology*, that used highly detailed drawings of quotidian interior settings to portray the owner's disposition. Kuroishi suggests that Kon's drawings were an attempt to depict how the inclusion and arrangement of objects affected habits and social practices in interior space.<sup>67</sup> A process that, Kuroishi suggests, was central to the production of meaning for inhabitants by creating a 'locus of their identity.'<sup>68</sup>

Takako Kobayashi was a student of Kon's whose own drawings included interior objects that were 'rarely used,' 'broken,' or 'useless,' accompanied by explanations of associated memories and stories.<sup>69</sup> As described by Kuroishi, she argued that living in a manner proposed by the reformists was 'spiritually impoverishing,'<sup>70</sup> and

used drawing to emphasize the importance of an emotional engagement with tradition in order to make meaning in interior space. Importantly, through drawing, Kobayashi selectively represented the Japanese interior as a locality of sentimentality and nostalgia, displacing actual arrangements of interior elements in order to present the past as an aesthetic device.<sup>71</sup> Like Hani's depictions of modernity, Kobayashi constructed representations of Japanese lifestyle steeped in the persuasion of the past.

Kobayashi's drawings reflect a broader resurgence of nostalgic traditionalism in greater Tokyo during the same period.<sup>72</sup> Evelyn Schulz suggests that the devastating effects of the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923 associated discontent with modernization to a longing for the destroyed past. She describes the highly popular *Dai Tōkyō hanjōki* essays (1927), which depict an imaginary Edo period city through the memories of each essayist. These emotional works omitted descriptions of modernization prior to the earthquake, and like Kobayashi's drawings, use nostalgia to justify representations of a traditionalized Japanese identity.<sup>73</sup>

Emotional persuasion was used to justify interior designs that hybridized modern techniques with the appearance of traditional space. One example includes Isoya Yoshida's interiors, that enclosed vernacular timber frames with stucco, and returned the plan to a less defined use of space through increasing spans with 'hidden structural steel.'<sup>74</sup> Cherie Wendelken explains that Yoshida justified these hybridizations by attempting to reclaim the 'sensuous qualities of *gei* in Edo.'<sup>75</sup> Wendelken demonstrates that Yoshida went further and used overtly emotional persuasion to validate emerging representations of Japanese nationalism. She points to Yoshida's comments concerning the need for a unique 'atmosphere' in the Japanese interior that could only be achieved by one 'descended from a Japanese blood-line.'<sup>76</sup> In spite of the highly nationalistic sentiment, Wendelken suggests Yoshida saw his work as apolitical and in a 'realm of pure Japanese-ness.'<sup>77</sup> She goes on to outline the danger of separating representations of identity from their political context, suggesting that such images of a spiritual and cultural Japan were the very same used to justify colonial and military engagements in the 1930s. She describes such apolitical representations as 'cultural

armature' that conceal political agency by claiming to transcend its concerns.<sup>78</sup>

This hybridization of Yoshida's interiors appears to emulate and shift the pan-Asian mechanism of displacement of the Meiji period. Wendelken suggests that after the Russo-Japanese war in 1905, Japanese cultural identity shifted to accommodate its colonial commitments and began to self-consciously represent itself as both Western and Asian. The result was increased engagement of Japanese architects in Asian colonies.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, Sand suggests that Japanese consumer tastes shifted to include exotic appropriations from both the 'empire and the global marketplace.'<sup>80</sup> Both examples demonstrate the shifting representation of pan-Asian dominance from the image of Japan as the historic apex of Asia, to an image of Japanese supremacy as the 'culmination of East and West.'<sup>81</sup> Wendelken suggests that the representation of this unreal lifestyle was contingent on the idea that Japan was somehow privileged and separate from both contexts,<sup>82</sup> a point echoed by Sand when he suggests Japan's colonial self-image relied on an 'abstracted concept of modern civilization.'<sup>83</sup> The result was exaggerated hybrids of Western/Japanese architecture and interiors constructed in the colonies as cultural armature, to demonstrate supremacy through decontextualized modernity.

In the 1920s and 1930s in Taiwan, these exaggerated hybrids took the form of what would later be recognized as Art Deco architecture and interiors. Chao-Ching Fu tells us that the Japanese administrative buildings, including the Tainan Police Headquarters (1931), Hsinchu Yuraku Hall (1933), Taichung Entertainment Hall (1931), and Taipei Public Hall (1936) illustrated this phenomenon. These buildings demonstrated familiar Art Deco compositional elements, including 'hard edges, cutting angles, stepped elevations, layers of horizontal lines, zigzag decorations, sun-rising diagrams, and chevrons,'<sup>84</sup> many features which appeared in the Residence in 1933.

Returning to the Residence, it is possible to read each of its three interior typologies as emulations of the three representations of Japanese identity discussed above. The inclusion of the interiors

by Henri Rapin, for instance, reflects representations of a modern Japanese identity through self-colonization. Hiroyuki Suzuki states that Rapin never came to Japan; instead his designs were realized through drawings, models and correspondences.<sup>85</sup> Additionally, almost all of the fittings, fixtures and materials for these interiors were directly imported, and Rapin coordinated several French decorative artists to develop specific elements in these interiors,<sup>86</sup> including: the glass-relief doors in the entry hall; chandeliers in both the salon and the great dining hall by René Lalique; the etched paneled doors to the salon and great dining hall by Max Ingrand; ornamental iron work in the salon by Raymond Subes; and the marble reliefs in the Great Hall and Great Dining Hall by Ivan-Léon Alexandra Blanchet.<sup>87</sup> Similar to Hani's completely artificial representations of upper-middle class modern lifestyles, Rapin's rooms displace familiar interior elements through the inclusion of exclusively foreign objects, creating completely fabricated interior settings. Further, these interiors displaced Japanese social practices by specifying particular activities to emulate the unreal lifestyle suggested by their modern appearances, such as entertaining foreign ambassadors and ministers.<sup>88</sup>

Against these representations of modernity, it is possible to read the interior spaces of the ladies-in-waiting as representations of Japanese traditionalism. As mentioned earlier, the ladies-in-waiting room in the Residence was the only interior with *tatami* mats,<sup>89</sup> and the accompanying quarters for these women were built separate to the main Residence as a 'Japanese-style house.'<sup>90</sup> Additionally, as suggested by Sally Hastings, ladies-in-waiting of the Meiji imperial system entered into service at around age ten and had limited engagement with Western practices and fashion, independent of their role.<sup>91</sup> Such sheltered conduct reflects the specific areas of the Residence these women were permitted to occupy. One can read such restrictive interior and social practices through the association of these women with the 'feminine sphere'<sup>92</sup> that was aligned with representations of Japanese traditionalism during the Meiji period and steeped with sentimentality in the years that followed. The inclusion of such spaces in the modern Residence displace familiar social practices for representations of Japanese identity driven by nostalgia.

Finally, the private interiors designed by Gondô and the Construction Bureau appear to reflect representations of Japanese pan-Asianism. Machiko Takanami suggests that these interiors were intended to blend both modern French and traditional Japanese elements as a hybrid style that would later be described as Japanese Art-Deco.<sup>93</sup> A key example of this is the private dining room on the ground floor, which includes the signature pre-Meiji feature of a *tokonoma* or alcove<sup>94</sup> discussed by Tanizaki. Further, this room's dimensions are significantly smaller and more evenly proportioned than the French interiors in spite of its frequent use,<sup>95</sup> and it features exposed timber framing which reflects Japanese vernacular carpentry practices. At the same time, this room's Western features include parquet floors, electric lighting and patterned fabrics for the lamp-shades, drapery and carpet. The doors, windows and walls reflect Western construction techniques, and the *tokonoma* has been modified with a built-in seat. Read in its entirety, this room emulates the hybrid representation characteristic of pan-Asianism by blending elements of both Western and Japanese influences, though clearly reflecting neither. This room displaces familiar interior elements and social practices by cultivating the representation of Japanese supremacy through a unique form of decontextualized modernity. Embodying the principles of culture-armature, this interior cultivates a sense of privilege by appearing as a culmination of Western and Japanese influences.



Each of these three interior typologies emulate different representations of Japanese identity that either imitate, reject or transgress Western engagement. This conclusion is not dissimilar to Sand's findings when he conceptualized the mechanisms of displacement from the Meiji period.<sup>96</sup> An important shift from the Meiji period to the 1920s appears to be the distinct consolidation of Western engagement through the paradigm of representation. In each example above, this shift results in the displacement of familiar interior elements and known social practices in order to legitimize self-conscious and unreal images of Japanese identity in response to Western influence. This displacement links the perception of value in each space with the nature of their appearance, resulting in an authority of appearances that is distinctly different to the concept of *Ma* and its key features of indeterminacy and obscurity. Indeed, in spite of the increased complexity of Western engagement outlined above, the central dichotomy argued by Tanizaki and Nakajima between allegorical dark and light space appears to remain unchallenged. In the context of the Residence, this dichotomy can be acutely described as a shift in relevance from a spatial paradigm of *Ma* where meaning is constructed through a culture of shades and shadows, to a spatial paradigm of representation where meaning is constructed through a culture of appearances.

Importantly, a key feature in understanding this effect of representation on the Residence's interior is unpacking the specific agency of 'Western' engagement itself. In her discussion of the origin and evolution of 'Japanese culture,' Tessa Morris-Suzuki considers the generality around the concept of foreign engagement. Paraphrasing the political scientist Kang Sang-Jung, she suggests that Japanese discourse on identity was shaped by a pre-existing image of a unified 'West', resulting in a limited series of moves through which this discourse could define itself.<sup>97</sup> She goes on to suggest that the idea of 'the West' is itself a very 'Western' concept, and that the resulting East/West dualist worldview evolved from nineteenth-century European classical and historicized societal models.<sup>98</sup> In light of this, it is important to consider the specific context and effect of foreign engagement on the design of the Residence by considering the circumstances of its conception at the 1925 Exposition in Paris, which was attended by both the Imperial couple and their architect.

The *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* was a design and architecture world fair held in Paris, France from April to October 1925.<sup>99</sup> Retrospectively speaking, this Exposition has been described as both the beginning and the end of what was later labelled Art Deco. Alastair Duncan suggests that the ideological impetus for the Exposition had originated prior to World War One, making the Exposition more a 'capstone' to an already familiar movement by 1925.<sup>100</sup> Tag Gronberg shows that the term Art Deco originates from the late 1960s in discourse on Pop-Art themes of commercialism and advertising in art.<sup>101</sup> Contrary to Duncan, this posterior application of the term to the Exposition suggests it was the origin of the following commercial popularity of the movement. This tentative position between ideology and commercialism provides an insightful lens through which to understand interior space at the Exposition.

**Opposite**

Figure 2: Private Dining Room, 1933.  
Interior design: Construction Bureau, Imperial Household Ministry  
© Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum

Simon Dell suggests the initial motivation for the Exposition developed in 1906/7 during discourse on the future of French craftsmanship in light of increasing separation between design and labour in the decorative arts.<sup>102</sup> He suggests a major influence on this discourse was the commercial and manufacturing success of the German *Austellung München* exhibition (1908),<sup>103</sup> after the consolidation of craft and industry practices with the 1907 *Werkbund* charter.<sup>104</sup> One element of this exhibition that had particular impact was the construction of approximately fifty domestic interior settings that displayed innovations of German manufacturing in the context of the domestic interior. At the 1910 *Salon d'Automne*, the same interior settings were displayed in Paris to demonstrate a 'lived-in environment of a wealthy, cultivated family' to the French public.<sup>105</sup> According to Dell, reports on the future of French craftsmanship and the purpose of the proposed Exposition emerged in the 'anxiety' over the success of such innovative interior settings and their foreseen effect on the French market.<sup>106</sup> As a result, discourse shifted away from ideological concerns of production to commercial concerns of consumption. Audience accessibility became the dominant focus of interior design, and interior settings developed as a key device to assemble representations of lifestyle and the locality through which such representations were consumed.<sup>107</sup>

In spite of the postponement of the Exposition due to World War One, the emphasis on consumption practices continued to define interior settings until 1925. Dell suggests that after the war, manufacturers worked with decorative artists to further develop lifestyle products and secure the upper end of the market, so that by the time the Exposition began, art and ideas of good taste had returned to the privilege of the élite.<sup>108</sup> At the Exposition, interior settings were organized to reflect income brackets of the consuming public,<sup>109</sup> making taste itself a product of purchasing power.

This alignment between consumption and prestige had a very significant effect on the relationship between consumer and commodity in the interior settings. Dell suggests that post-war austerity led to a shift from ideas of expenditure and extravagance in the élite market to ideas of restraint and elegance. A shift that

caused consumption practices to be perceived as a reflection of one's identity instead of one's wealth. This personalization of consumption led to the perception that the arrangement of interior commodities was an act of personal expression, the nuances of which were seen to reflect one's elegance, as the 'disposition of objects was made a sign of the disposition of the consumer.'<sup>110</sup> Such practices reframed interior space as a device in which the arrangement of commodities went beyond constructing representations of lifestyle to constructing representations of personal identity.

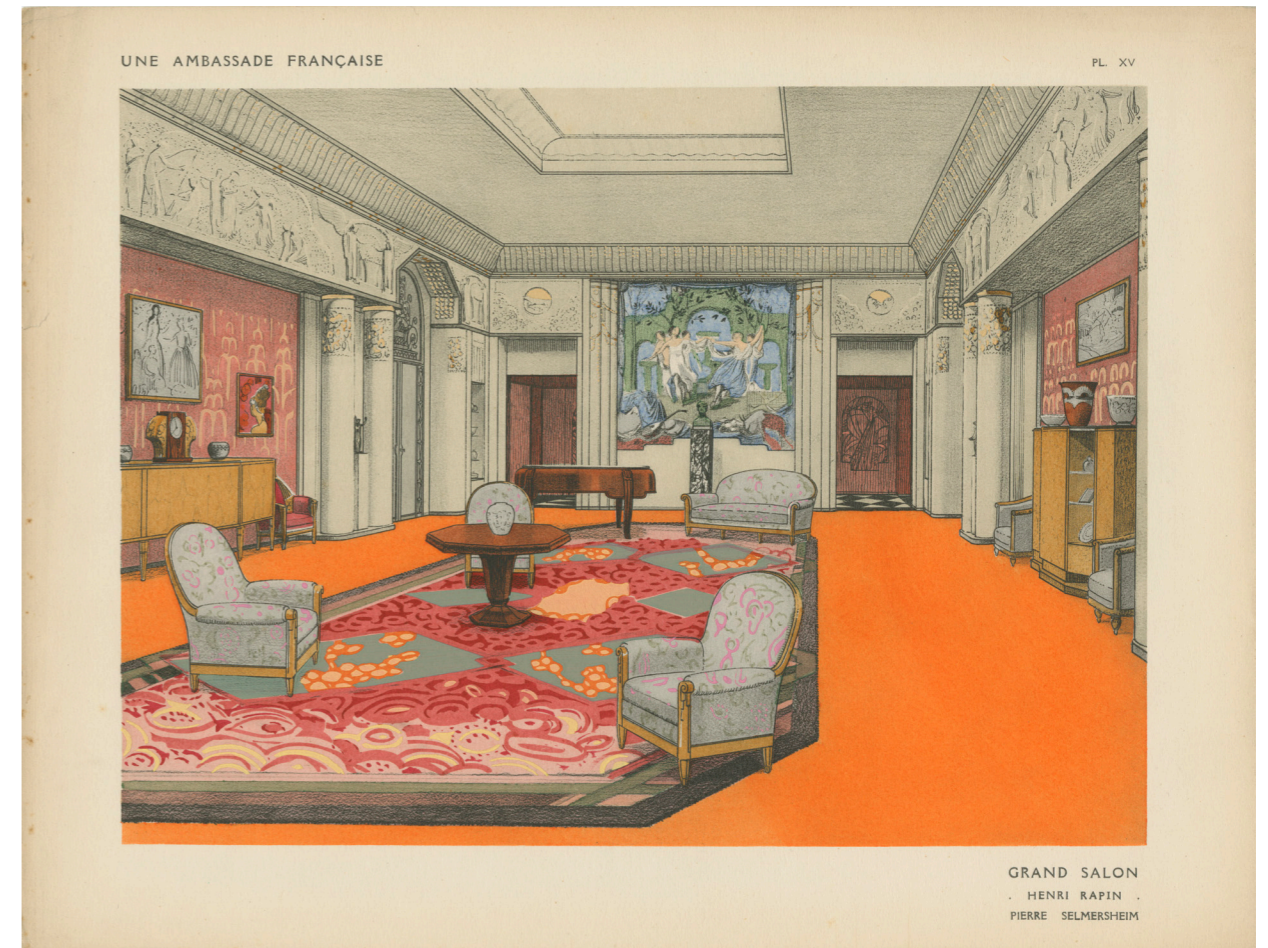
This relationship between commodities, consumption and identity in the interior reflected a similar phenomenon in Japan prior to the Imperial couple's visit to the Exposition in 1925. Morris-Suzuki suggests that a confluence of these ideas took place in 1920s Japan around the term *bunka* or culture. Morris-Suzuki tracks the use of this term to the Meiji period, when it was associated with *bunmei kaika* or 'civilization and enlightenment.'<sup>111</sup> She explains that this phrase was derived from 'Japan's westernizers'<sup>112</sup> to describe the transformation of Japan through the importation of European science and technology. She goes on to suggest that from World War One until the early 1930s, its meaning shifted from the appropriation of European achievements for the purpose of Westernization to the consumption of commodities as a means of demonstrating 'Japanese uniqueness.'<sup>113</sup> Sand echoes this position, observing that between 1917 and 1926 the associated term *bunka seikatsu* or Culture Life became extremely popular, promoting consumption of international and local commodities. This correlation between culture and consumption coincided with increased wealth in Japan after World War One, resulting in the rise of what Sand describes as the 'dream of cosmopolitan modernity.'<sup>114</sup>

Like the interior settings of the 1925 Exposition, Culture Life promoted representations of commodified identity. Such representations took the form of cosmopolitanism, which was characterized by the self-conscious image of Japan 'unencumbered by either local traditions or the established distinctions of native and foreign.'<sup>115</sup> Culture Life produced a representation of Japanese identity indifferent to its context; a depoliticized image of Japan

unrealistically removed from its history of Western engagement and the struggles that defined it. Further, during its peak, Culture Life shifted the perception of foreign engagement to something novel, harmless and ultimately meaningless; 'the West as a font of fantasy.'<sup>116</sup> The pursuit of cosmopolitanism became the pursuit of depoliticized charm through the consumption of Western commodities.

One product of this consumption of fantasy was *bunka jûtaku* or culture residence/house,<sup>118</sup> which embodied the discourse of

Culture Life in architecture and the interior. The culture residence was, in its widest definition, a type of suburban home for a newly established middle class, though its parallels with the Prince Asaka Residence are evident: the exterior walls were stucco or cement; guest rooms were wallpapered and 'very probably hung with reproductions of French paintings;' 'carpet or linoleum on the floor; Western style furniture, electric lighting, and, as likely as not, a piano in one corner.'<sup>119</sup> Beyond the correlation in material elements, the Residence demonstrates significant parallels with the consumption of cosmopolitan fantasy seen in Culture Life.



Above  
Figure 3: Grand Salon – Henri Rapin and Pierre Selmersheim, 1925.  
Engraving from the catalogue, *Une ambassade française organisée par la Société des artistes décorateurs for the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, 1925*<sup>117</sup>

As described earlier, Henri Rapin never travelled to Japan,<sup>120</sup> meaning his interior designs were literally constructed from the consumption of images, models and commodities of imagined Parisian lifestyle. Further, the interior settings at the 1925 Exposition from which the Residence was inspired were constructed representations themselves.

Importantly, as described by Dell, these interior settings at the Exposition had become an expressive act,<sup>121</sup> resulting in an understanding of personal identity defined through the consumption of representations of interior lifestyle. In the case of the Residence, this understanding appears to have been embraced unconditionally by Princess Nobuko, resulting in particularly exaggerated emulations of imaginary French identity in its interiors. Apart from Princess Nobuko's significant involvement in the planning of the Residence, she wore Western dresses and Western shoes. Meals were served in both Japanese and French cuisine after the Princess translated French cookbooks for her chefs, and during meal times, the Princess insisted the family speak French.<sup>122</sup> She received books in French, and was schooled in French art<sup>123</sup> and French embroidery.<sup>124</sup> It has even been suggested that the Princess's extensive involvement in the project contributed to the illness that resulted in her death soon after its completion.<sup>125</sup>

Such devotion to fulfilling an imaginary French identity demonstrates the highly personal pursuit of fantasy that was central to Culture Life. Seen as a product of this pursuit, the Residence becomes a kind of 'phantasmagoria'<sup>126</sup> of French cosmopolitanism, imagined into every fixture, lamp, painting, fabric, chair, dress, meal, conversation and custom. Where Sand and Morris-Suzuki focus on the pursuit and ultimate failure of the 1920s middle class to achieve this fantasy,<sup>127</sup> for a brief moment in the summer of 1933, we see its fulfilment in the Residence as a constructed 'cosmopolitan utopia.'<sup>128</sup> Set against the backdrop of successive eras of foreign engagement, this utopianism of Culture Life is unique. From the mechanisms of displacement of the Meiji period to the constructed representations of Japanese identity that followed, the effect on every element, arrangement and social practice of the Japanese interior by the West is unequivocal. In the Residence, the manifestation of Culture Life as fantasy suggests a kind of amnesia of this history. The consumption of cosmopolitanism was accepted through the persuasion of its appearance in spite of its continuation of Western hegemony. A process that mythologized appearances, making the Residence a space made entirely from unreal representations.

In greater Tokyo, as in the Residence, the rise of representations can be described through the forgetting of its past. In 1923, during the peak of Culture Life, the Great Kanto earthquake gave this forgetting physical manifestation, when almost 60 per cent of Tokyo's buildings were destroyed.<sup>129</sup> Plans to rebuild were pervaded by the rhetoric of *shinko* or new,<sup>130</sup> as many of the remaining Edo period architecture and interior spaces had been lost. Those spaces were localities of social practices that Schulz suggests held the Edo period city together as a generationally coherent urban whole.<sup>131</sup> This loss of social memory in the urban fabric of the city coincided with the accelerated consumption of Western fantasies via 'wire services, cinema, radio, graphic magazines, and other

media.'<sup>132</sup> What resulted was a spatial amnesia similar to that of the Residence, that embraced the fantasy of appearances by forgetting social meaning.

*Kanban kenchiku* or 'signboard architecture' was one form of spatial design that emerged during this period as a direct result of the earthquake. Its outstanding characteristic was its copperplate front façade that was designed in response to the new regulations for wider streets and the use of fire resistant building materials.<sup>133</sup> As suggested by Sand, these façades proliferated as a canvas for avant-garde artists to display international imagery of cosmopolitanism, advertising Culture Life to the Japanese consumer.<sup>134</sup> Takanami suggests that these façades were developed through the appropriation of *komon* patterns from the Edo period, by shopkeepers familiar with modern European decorative motifs from print media.<sup>135</sup> Importantly, these patterns were part of an Edo period system of social meaning, and their translation into representations offers a key insight into the mechanism at the core of Culture Life. Through their translation, value changed from social practices invisible to unfamiliar onlookers, to surface compositions validated by a resemblance to imported imagery.

Returning to the Residence, Takanami observes parallel processes of translation in the ornamentation of the private living spaces. He cites the Japanese Art Deco *kô-no-zu* pattern, derived from *kôdô* or 'way of Incense-Burning' in the private dining room, and the *Seigaiha* motif that the young princess designed herself, incorporated into the cover of the modern radiator.<sup>136</sup> He goes on to outline a direct account by an assistant engineer involved in drafting the Residence, who described the Construction Bureau's process, like that of the shopkeepers, of familiarizing themselves with foreign print media as reference material for their designs.<sup>137</sup> As with greater Tokyo, in the Residence such translations evidence the fundamental shift in the way value was attributed in interior space, from social practices that were imperceptible to the unfamiliar eye, to systems of representation substantiated by imported appearances.

Nakajima indicates a similar shift when describing the occupation of vernacular *Minka* interiors. He observes that 'firm rules of behaviour' maintained the order and privacy of the interior space in spite of the 'virtually transparent structure' of movable *shoji* screens. He goes on to suggest that even when such fluid partitions were left open, a 'psychological boundary' in the form of social practices administered how one occupied the space.<sup>138</sup> Nakajima cites the loss of these unseen social practices as a specific consequence of the ossification of interior space through the increasing use of cement construction,<sup>139</sup> a process reflected throughout greater Tokyo with reinforced concrete in the wake of the earthquake<sup>140</sup> and in the Residence itself.<sup>141</sup> This rise of spatial determinacy parallels the rise of appearances, together displacing the spatial 'darkness' of indeterminacy and ambiguity for an understanding of space that is permanent and visible.

Returning to Tanizaki and the spatial concept of *Ma*, it can now be demonstrated how fundamental this shift was on the Japanese interior. According to Pilgrim, *Ma* was the locality through which

emotional and imaginative meaning entered Japanese spatial reality,<sup>142</sup> and its presence in the interior was contingent on Nakajima's spatial indeterminacy and Tanizaki's visual ambiguity. In the shift away from these qualities, the parameters to sustain this concept of space were displaced. The world of shades and shadows was replaced by highly visual, finite interiors concerned entirely with self-conscious representations. How things looked became more important than how they did not, and the very foundation for the production of meaning in the Japanese interior shifted to a paradigm of appearances.

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## NOTES

1. Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, trans. Thomas Harper et al. (London: Vintage, 2001), 29.
2. Ibid., 33.
3. Based on the proximity of Nishinomiya to Kyoto and the high proliferation of *Kyo-Machiya* across Japan during the Edo period. Other parallels include: timber construction; relationship to the street; separation in use of the ground floor *Kyoshitsubu* area and the upper floor area; flexibility of use of the *Kyoshitsubu* area through the use of *shoji* and the separation of public and private space. See: Martin Morris, 'Kyo-Machiya: Tracing the Development of the Traditional Town House of Kyoto Through the Medieval Centuries,' *Vernacular Architecture* 37 (2006): 2-5., and Kazuo Nakajima, 'Uneasy rooms: The concept of space in modern Japan,' *World Policy Journal* 13 (1996/7): 67-69.
4. Morris, 'Kyo-Machiya: Tracing the Development,' 6.
5. Ibid., 2.
6. Nakajima, 'Uneasy rooms,' 71.
7. Pilgrim is quoting Kisho Kurokawa's idea of a 'culture of grays' directly; see Richard Pilgrim, 'Intervals ('Ma') in Space and Time: Foundations for a Religio-Aesthetic Paradigm in Japan,' *History of Religions* 25 (1986): 267.
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9. Ibid., 256.
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19. Hiroyuki Suzuki, 'The Architecture of the Prince Asaka Residence: A Note on its Uniqueness,' in *25th Anniversary of the Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum*, 258-9.

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21. Yukihide Muta, 'Gondo Yokichi's Dairy of His Travels in Europe: European and American Architecture through the Eyes of a Young Architect of the Imperial,' in *25th Anniversary of the Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum*, 263.
22. Takanami, 'Tokyo and the Prince Asaka Residence,' 270.
23. Suzuki, 'The Architecture of the Prince Asaka Residence,' 259.
24. *Encyclopédie Des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes au XXème siècle*, (New York: Garland, 1977), Vol. 1, pl. xxxiv; Vol. 2, pl. xxix, xlv, xlv; Vol. 3, pl. lxiv; Vol. 4, pl. xx; Vol. 5, pl. xi, lvii; Vol. 6, pl. xxv; Vol. 7, pl. lvi; Vol. 11, pl. xxii, lxvii; Vol. 12, pl. xxi.
25. Suzuki, 'The Architecture of the Prince Asaka Residence,' 260.
26. Takanami, 'The Prince Asaka Family in the 1930s,' 266.
27. Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, 5-8.
28. Cannon-Brookes, 'The Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum,' 407-408.
29. Nakajima, 'Uneasy rooms,' 68.
30. Ibid., 68.
31. Ibid., 69.
32. Takanami, 'The Prince Asaka Family in the 1930s,' 266-267.
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35. Takanami, 'The Prince Asaka Family in the 1930s,' 268-269.
36. Pilgrim, 'Intervals ('Ma') in Space and Time,' 268.
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40. Ibid., 646.
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47. Sand, 'Was Meiji Taste in Interiors 'Orientalist?,' 647.
48. Wendelken, 'The Tectonics of Japanese Style,' 29-30.
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 69. Ibid., 111.  
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 119. Morris-Suzuki, 'The Invention and Reinvention of 'Japanese Culture',' 763.  
 120. Suzuki, 'The Architecture of the Prince Asaka Residence,' 260.  
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130. Sand, *House and Home in Modern Japan*, 208.  
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