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## **The Rediscovery of Japan: The Critical Reception of Japanese Architecture in Portugal after the Opening of Japan to the West**

*By João Miguel Couto Duarte*<sup>\*</sup>

*The opening of Japanese ports to the West in 1854 enabled the rediscovery by the rest of the world of Japan as a country, which, until then and throughout the more than two centuries of the Sakoku or closed country period, had maintained an isolationist policy in relation to the outside world. This opening up allowed for contact with Japanese art, including architecture, which was progressively absorbed by Western art, giving rise to Japonisme. Portugal was receptive to Japonisme, even if that receptiveness was motivated more by a taste for the exotic than genuine interest in the values of Japanese art. Even though its influence on Portuguese architecture was practically zero, Japanese architecture was divulged in Portugal. The aim of this paper is to determine an initial understanding of the reception of Japanese architecture in Portuguese books and architecture-related magazines published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The investigation is sustained in interpretative-historical research, and seeks to assess how the contact with Japanese architecture unfolded and also examine the reasons behind its dissemination in Portuguese publications. This assessment is preceded by a contextualisation that sets out to clarify the reception given to Japonisme in the Portuguese art scene.*

### **Initial Considerations**

The aim of this paper is to provide an initial understanding of the reception given to Japanese architecture in Portuguese books and architecture-related magazines published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Two separate periods in said reception can be considered: that of the first encounter, which is directly connected to the re-establishment of ties between Portugal and Japan after the latter's re-opening to the West in 1854, which anticipated the Portuguese adherence to *Japonisme*; and that of the second encounter, now in the early twentieth century, which took place against the background of discussions around progress and the affirmation of an own cultural identity in Portugal. Despite this reception, the actual influence of Japanese architecture on Portuguese works of architecture built in the period was practically zero, reflecting a certain difficulty of understanding and absorbing *Japonisme* on the part of the Portuguese art scene. An influence can be found only in a small number of interior designs and the design of a sales pavilion for a faience factory.

The assessment of the reception given to Japanese architecture is based on interpretative-historical research, as defined by David Wang: "We define

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interpretative research specifically as *investigations into social-physical phenomena within complex contexts, with a view toward explaining those phenomena in narrative form and in a holistic fashion.*”<sup>1</sup> The publications mentioned form the fundamental research documentation. The understanding of Japanese architecture in the two aforementioned periods is preceded by a contextualisation which clarifies the reception of *Japonisme* in the Portuguese art scene. Proceeding from the observations of David Wang, this paper seeks to form a narrative that can explain the circumstances and reasoning that determined both the understanding – or lack thereof – of Japanese architecture in Portugal and its divulgation in Portuguese publications.

This matter is currently not the object of any other research project, giving this study a trailblazing character. The reception given to *Japonisme* by the Portuguese art scene is still in need of systematic research.

### The Encounter with Japan

The opening of Japanese ports to American ships brought about by Commodore Matthew C. Perry (1794-1858) in 1854 enabled the world to rediscover Japan. This ended the *Sakoku*, or closed country, period, which spanned more than two centuries, during which Japan maintained an isolationist policy, withdrawing into itself, and refusing almost all contact with the outside world.<sup>2</sup> The United States interest in Japan reflected the expansionist appetite of the West, and was marked by a desire for hegemony over the world’s main trade routes. As early as 1858 the initial agreements between the United States and Japan were to be consolidated, and to be followed by similar agreements with Holland, Russia, Great Britain, and France that same year. These became known as the Ansei Treaties. The European powers strengthened their dominance over Asia, and the United States guaranteed control over the Pacific crossing. The cultural and political affirmation of the West was given a continuity that was considered both natural and necessary for the exploitation of the economic benefits provided by the territories under its control.<sup>3</sup>

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1. David Wang, “Interpretive-Historical Research,” in *Architectural Research Methods*, ed. Linda Groat and David Wang (New York: Wiley, 2002), 136.

2. This isolation of Japan was determined by Tokugawa Iemitsu (1604-1651) through several policies and edicts successively implemented in the 1630s. Iemitsu was the third *shogun* of the Tokugawa period. The aim was to annul the European religious and colonial presence in Japan. Christianity was banned and access to the country was severely limited for foreigners. The Dutch were the only Westerners allowed to trade with Japan, even if they were only allowed to dock on the island of Dejima in Nagasaki Bay. Trading was also maintained with China and Korea. Despite this self-imposed isolation, Japan experienced a period of considerable peace and prosperity. The opening to the West was to bring about the end of the shogunate period. For further discussion of this period in Japanese history and the period following its opening to the world, see Brett L. Walker, *A Concise History of Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

3. For further discussion of the significance of the treaties signed by Japan and the Western powers, as well as the conflicting interests in the East Asia and Pacific Region of the day, see Michael Auslin, *Negotiating with Imperialism: The Unequal Treaties and the Culture of Japanese Diplomacy* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

This encounter with Japan soon led to contact with the country's artistic production, which rapidly became an obsession for, and indeed began to be absorbed by, Western art.<sup>4</sup> The increasing presence of Japanese objects in Europe and the USA formed the basis for widespread interest in Japan. In 1872, Philippe Burty (1830-1890), a French art critic, coined the term *Japonisme*, adopting it in a series of texts published in the magazine *La Renaissance littéraire et artistique* [The Literary and Artistic Renaissance].<sup>5</sup> Burty used the term *Japonisme* to refer to the Japanese prints and objects that met with such enchantment within his own circle of artistic friends. *Japonisme* came to be used to identify the influence of Japanese art on Western art. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Japanese influence was reflected in painting, printmaking, graphic design, textiles, costumes, jewellery, furniture, ceramics, but also in literature, theatre and opera. Less immediate, but no less important, was the impact of Japan on architecture.

The absorption of Japanese architecture by Western architecture was more expressive in the USA, especially on the West Coast, to which contributed the presence of Japanese architecture at the Centennial International Exhibition held in Philadelphia in 1876 and the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893; the geographical proximity to Japan; and the presence of North American architects and researchers in Japan. This absorption was more common in residential architecture. In Europe, *Japonisme* spread to architecture only at a later date, even though contact with Japanese art took place earlier there and the adoption of Japanese references in interior decoration was also more common.<sup>6</sup> Clay Lancaster clarifies the origins of the distinct European and North American approach to Japanese art and architecture:

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4. During the *Sakoku* period, Europe continued to import Japanese goods, first and foremost porcelain and lacquer work that was frequently manufactured specifically for the Western market. Such pieces nourished the European taste for the exotic, and often ended up in cabinets of curiosities and collections. The taste for things Japanese came to be reflected in the European porcelain and furniture manufacture, as well as in the creation of architectural environments. A clear distinction between Chinese and Japanese pieces was not always made, and this was reflected in the fact that all pieces became known as *chinoiseries*. For further discussion of the impact of Japanese art on European art before the opening of Japan, see Oliver Impey, "Japanese Export Art of the Edo Period and Its Influence on European Art," *Modern Asian Studies* 18, no. 4 (October 1984): 685-697, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/312344>.

5. The terms *japonaiseries*, *japoniaiserie* and *japoneries* were already commonly used, but most of them had a depreciative connotation. As an aesthetic current in the arts, *Japonisme* was referenced by the French art historian and critic Ernest Chesneau (1833-1890) in 1873 in the magazine *Musée universel* [Universal Museum]. See "L'invention du japonisme," Gallica, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, accessed December 27, 2021, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/html/und/asie/l'invention-du-japonisme?mode=desktop>.

6. Japan's impact on European architecture before the Modernist period has been the subject of some, albeit limited research. Of the research work carried out, one should mention the work of Jean-Sébastien Cluzel, who served as editor for *Le japonisme architectural en France 1550-1930*. See Jean-Sébastien Cluzel, ed., *Le japonisme architectural en France 1550-1930* (Dijon: Éditions Faton, 2018). For further discussion of the impact of Japanese architecture in the USA in that period, see Clay Lancaster, *The Japanese Influence in America* (New York, NY: W. H. Rawls, 1963).

The cultural climate of the United States and the circumstances under which Japanese art was introduced here were quite different from those of Europe. [...] [T]he first taste of things Japanese in Europe was in incidental discoveries – Hokusai's *Manga*, *ukiyo*e prints and decorative articles – and the influences from these imports were felt mostly in Impressionist and related paintings, posters and Art Nouveau designs. In the United States the art of Japan made a big splash at the first important international fair in two authentic buildings filled with bronzes, ceramics, carvings and lacquer wares. It is not surprising, therefore, that in practical-minded America the imprint of Japan should become more prominent in the three-dimensional domestic setting, and should figure only slightly in the specialized two-dimensional field of painting and printmaking.<sup>7</sup>

Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Commerce between His Majesty the Emperor of  
Japan and His Majesty the King of Portugal

The West's encounter with Japan naturally had an impact in Portugal. The Portuguese had been the first documented Westerners to arrive in Japan, in 1543, in Tanegashima Island, and Portugal had been the first European country to be visited by Japanese, in 1553, in this case by Bernardo the Japanese (?-1557), an early Japanese Christian.<sup>8</sup> In 1860, just two years after the signing of the Ansei Treaties, the "*Tratado de Paz, Amizade e Comércio entre Sua Magestade o Imperador do Japão e sua Magestade o Rei de Portugal*" [Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Commerce between His Majesty the Emperor of Japan and His Majesty the King of Portugal] was signed.<sup>9</sup> The relations between the two countries were confirmed with the visit of a Japanese mission to Portugal in 1862. A second visit was planned for 1864, although it was cancelled by Japan shortly before it was to take place.<sup>10</sup> Several gifts of manifest artistic value have remained from the 1862 mission – a saddle and harness set, two ornamentally-cut swords, paintings, ten folding screens, one display cabinet, one paper box and inkstand and assorted silk pieces.<sup>11</sup> In 1864 more gifts were received, which were probably sent because of

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7. Lancaster, *The Japanese Influence in America*, 51. Lancaster refers to the Japanese dwelling and to the Japanese Bazaar and Garden presented at the Philadelphia exposition. The workers who built the two structures and the materials used came from Japan.

8. For further discussion of the beginning of relations between Portugal and Japan, see Xavier de Castro, ed., *La découverte du Japon: 1543-1552* (Paris: Chandeigne, 2017).

9. Ana Fernandes Pinto, "The Reunion (1854-1900)," in *A Striking Story: Portugal - Japan, 16th-20th Centuries*, eds., Ana Fernandes Pinto, Alexandra Curvelo and Maria José Gaivão de Tavares (Lisbon: Galeria de Pintura do Rei D. Luís – Palácio Nacional da Ajuda, 2018), 91.

10. The visit of the Japanese diplomatic mission to Portugal in 1862 was part of a wider tour of Europe, taking in France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Prussia and Russia. The aim of the mission was to renegotiate the treaties of 1858 and take knowledge of European technological advances that could help to modernise Japan. The diplomatic mission of 1864 visited France only, and its fundamental objective was to close the port of Yokohama to foreign trade. The mission was not successful, which may have led to the cancellation of the visit to Portugal. For more on the Japanese diplomatic missions to the West, see Auslin, *Negotiating with Imperialism*.

11. Maria José Gaivão de Tavares, "Japan in the Ajuda Palace," in *A Striking Story: Portugal - Japan, 16th-20th Centuries*, eds. Ana Fernandes Pinto, Alexandra Curvelo and Maria José Gaivão de Tavares (Lisbon: Galeria de Pintura do Rei D. Luís – Palácio Nacional da Ajuda, 2018), 115.

the planned Japanese mission – five swords, rolls of velvet and of delicate fabric, pieces of white and red silk, two card game boxes, a lacquered shelf, an office shelf, a writing desk, two pairs of porcelain vases, one porcelain punch bowl and one porcelain jar, one crystal figure representing a man, one writing table and two boxes of assorted games.<sup>12</sup> The interest in Japan that was established at then was confirmed by the existence of a Japanese section at the Porto International Exhibition in 1865. It was, however, an unofficial and small-scale representation, made up of objects chosen by Edward Clarke, the Portuguese consul in Kanagawa who was responsible for negotiating the coming of the first Japanese mission to Portugal in 1862.<sup>13</sup> The taste for pieces related with Japan spread progressively, thus confirming Portugal's adherence to the *Japonisme* then en vogue. The Retrospective Exhibition of Spanish and Portuguese Ornamental Art that was held in Lisbon in 1882 featured a section dedicated to Japan that presented a few dozen Japanese and Japan-inspired porcelain pieces.<sup>14</sup>

The agreements with Japan offered Portugal similar conditions to those achieved by other Western nations. However, application thereof was not very consistent, mainly because of Portugal's political and economic incapacity. The absence of a resident Portuguese diplomatic mission in Japan until 1903, a fact that greatly displeased Japan, confirmed said incapacity. To quote Ana Pinto:

the political consensus around Portugal's imperial vocation was not matched by the administrative and political reforms or the economic investment necessary for a modern imperial sovereignty. [...] In time, the lack of interest by the Portuguese on this trade opening would become increasingly evident, alongside a series of other obstacles to diplomatic relations.<sup>15</sup>

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12. Tavares, "Japan in the Ajuda Palace," 116. A number of these gifts, together with other Japanese pieces and European pieces of Japanese inspiration acquired by the Portuguese royal family around Europe are today on display at the National Palace of Ajuda in Lisbon and at the National Palace of Pena in Sintra. The taste for such pieces spread to the aristocracy and collectors.

13. *Catalogo official da exposição internacional do Porto em 1865* (Porto, Typographia do Commercio, 1865), 162. The objects featured at the show included a book on silk farming and examples of painted paper. The painted paper objects are now part of the Porto Public Library collection. The existence of a Japanese section at the Porto exhibition followed Japan's presence at the London International Exposition in 1862, where, for the first time, Japan was represented on the circuit of major international expositions. The second time was in Porto. As was the case in Porto, the Japanese participation in London was not official. It was organised by a European official, Rutherford Alcock (1809-1897), the first British diplomatic representative to Japan. The collection of pieces on exhibition was significantly larger and more diverse than the representation at Porto. See Rutherford Alcock, *Catalogue of Works of Industry and Art, Sent from Japan* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1862). Japan's first official participation in a large international exposition was at the Exposition Internationale de Paris in 1867, where a Japanese pavilion was built, most likely by Japanese craftsmen. See Jean-Sébastien Cluzel, "Les pavillons japonais de 1867, édifices authentiques?" in *Le japonisme architectural en France 1550-1930*, ed. Jean-Sebétien Cluzel (Dijon: Éditions Fatou, 2018), 121. The international expositions played a decisive role in consolidating and spreading the taste for all things Japanese in the West.

14. See *Catalogo illustrado da Exposição retrospectiva de arte ornamental portuguesa e hespanhola* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1882), 1: 290-293.

15. Pinto, "The Reunion," 90-91.



Diametrically opposed to what happened in France, the United Kingdom and the USA, Portugal's difficulty in sustaining well-defined relations with Japan was reflected in a certain disaffection of the Portuguese artistic milieu from Japanese art. This disaffection was even greater when one took architecture into consideration. The ambience of a possible Japanese influence that resulted from the application of the silks and other pieces gifted by the Japanese mission of 1862 in one of the rooms of the Palace of Ajuda, in Lisbon, is significant for being unusual, not so much for reflecting a general adherence to *Japonisme*. The sales pavilion of the Caldas da Rainha Faience Factory, with its clear references to Japanese architecture, was an exception (Figure 1). It was most likely designed by Raphael Bordallo Pinheiro (1846-1905), an illustrator, sculptor and ceramicist, who was the owner of the factory. The pavilion was completed in 1885.<sup>16</sup>



**Figure 1.** *Raphael Bordallo Pinheiro, Sales Pavilion of the Caldas da Rainha Faience Factory, Caldas da Rainha, Portugal, 1885 (photograph by unknown author, c. 1889)*

Source: © Courtesy Museu Bordalo Pinheiro, Lisbon. MRBP.FOT.0693.

Some of the Bordallo Pinheiro objects reveal the influence of Japanese values. The comments in the press on the pavilion were typical of the confusion that characterised the reception given to *Japonisme* – Japanese architecture was “a very good choice, as this is a faience factory, an industry in which China is a leading

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16. José-Augusto França, *Rafael Bordalo Pinheiro: O Português Tal e Qual*, 3rd ed. (Lisbon: Livros Horizonte, 2007), 104.

manufacture.”<sup>17</sup> The pavilion was demolished in the 1980s. The few references to Japan in Portuguese art of the late nineteenth century are more the result of a circumstantial taste for the exotic than of a conscious absorption of the values of Japanese artistic culture. Significantly, the room in the Palace of Ajuda eventually became known as the “Chinese Room”. Literature was the only exception in this context of alienation, with the figure and work of Wenceslau de Moraes (1854-1929) taking on particular importance.<sup>18</sup> Wenceslau de Moraes gave up his career as a Navy officer to settle in Japan in 1898. He was consul in Kobe and Osaka. He became a writer and maintained a long-standing fascination for Japan.

His personal discovery of the Land of the Rising Sun, with its landscapes, legends, history, art, literature and religions and the way of life of the Japanese people became the central theme of his works. The many years he lived in Japan, first as Portuguese Consul, and later simply as one who was fascinated by this land, his marriage with Ó-Yoné, his attempt to “become Japanese”, are the most striking aspects of his biography.<sup>19</sup>

José-Augusto França helps us understand the distaste for Japan when he criticises the ambience in which the realist writer Abel Botelho (1854-1917) appears in a portrait painted by António Ramalho (1859-1916) in 1889 (Figure 2). According to França:

António Ramalho [...] depicts him dressed in a kebaya surrounded by Japanese objects of the bric-a-brac type that Barão de Lavos [one of Botelho’s characters] would appreciate, totally unaware of the modern values that *Japonisme* represented.<sup>20</sup>

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17. Anonymous, “Fabrica de Faianças das Caldas da Rainha.” *O Occidente*, November 21, 1887, 262, [http://hemerotecadigital.cm-lisboa.pt/OBRAS/Ocidente/1887/N321/N321\\_item1/P6.html](http://hemerotecadigital.cm-lisboa.pt/OBRAS/Ocidente/1887/N321/N321_item1/P6.html). Translation by the author. Original text: “muito bem escolhida, tratando-se de uma fabrica de faianças, industria de que a China é produtora por excellencia.”

18. For further discussion on the presence of Japan in Portuguese literature at the time, see José Carvalho Vanzelli, “Entre o passado e o presente: um estudo do orientalismo literário português na segunda metade do século XIX,” (PhD. diss., University of São Paulo, 2020), <https://www.teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8156/tde-02062020-135310/pt-br.php>.

19. Natália Vital, “Japan in the works of Pierre Loti and Wenceslau de Moraes,” *Bulletin of Portuguese - Japanese Studies*, no. 9 (December 2004): 47, <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/361/36100903.pdf>.

20. José-Augusto França, *A Arte em Portugal no Século XIX*, 3rd ed. (Lisbon: Bertrand Editora, 1990), 2:104. Translation by the author. Original text: “António Ramalho [...] figurando-o de cabaia, entre objectos japoneses dum bricabraque que o seu «Barão de Lavos» apreciaria, e bem inconsciente dos valores modernos que o japonismo trazia em si.” Abel Botelho is, in fact, wearing a kimono, and not a kebaya, as França writes, although this fact does not affect the accuracy of his observations. António Ramalho also painted several paintings of Japanese influence in one of the rooms of a chalet belonging to Queen Maria Pia (1847-1911) in Estoril, a seaside resort town just outside Lisbon. See António Cota Fereiro, “A iluminação no chalet do Estoril ao tempo da Rainha D. Maria Pia,” *Herança – Revista de História, Património e Cultura* 3, no. 1 (2020): 56, <https://doi.org/10.29073/heranca.v3i1>.





**Figure 2.** António Ramalho, *Retrato de Abel Botelho*, 1889, Oil on Canvas, 59 x 44 cm. Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea – Museu do Chiado, Lisbon (photograph by Carlos Monteiro, 1993)

Source: © DGPC/ADF. 06288 TC.

### The First Portuguese Encounter with Japanese Architecture

The first Portuguese texts examining Japanese architecture after Japan's opening to the West coincided with the beginning of the interest in Japan that was generated in Portugal. They are also indicative of the important role literature was to play in the reception of *Japonisme*. The texts have to do with the Portuguese diplomatic missions to Japan in 1860 and 1873. They are *Viagem da corveta Dom João I á capital do Japão no anno de 1860* [Voyage of the Corvette Dom João I to the Capital of Japan in the Year 1860] by Feliciano Marques Pereira<sup>21</sup> (1802-1864), which was completed in Macao in 1861 and published in Lisbon in 1863, and *O Japão: Estudos e Impressões de Viagem* [Japan: Studies and Travel Impressions] by Pedro Gastão Mesnier<sup>22</sup> (1846-1886), written and published in Macao in 1874. These are the first two Portuguese accounts, among the first in the West, of Japanese society and the changes it underwent because of its opening to the West. The year 1878 saw the publication in the *Boletim da Real Associação dos Architectos Civis e Archeologos Portuguezes* [Bulletin of the Royal Association of Portuguese Civil Architects and Archaeologists], of a short text titled "Architectura Japoneza" [Japanese Architecture] by Januário Correia de Almeida (1829-1901), the Viscount São Januário.<sup>23</sup> The Bulletin was the first Portuguese periodical dedicated to architecture.

#### Voyage of the Corvette Dom João I to the Capital of Japan in the Year 1860

1863's *Voyage of the Corvette Dom João I to the Capital of Japan in the Year 1860* by Feliciano Marques Pereira was based on the voyage to Japan in 1860 by Isidoro Francisco Guimarães (1808-1893), the Viscount of Praia Grande and Portuguese Minister Plenipotentiary, to sign the treaty negotiated with Japan that year (Figure 3). Marques Pereira was the commanding officer on the Corvette that carried the diplomatic mission to Edo, the current Tokyo. The Japan he found was still very much untouched by its recent opening to the West. The book contains a general reflection on the country, delving into the political structure, its customs, literature and its arts, but also its history and geography. Marques Pereira drew on the account of Commodore Perry's expedition to Japan written by Francis Hawks<sup>24</sup> (1798-1866), thus confirming access to more recent sources.

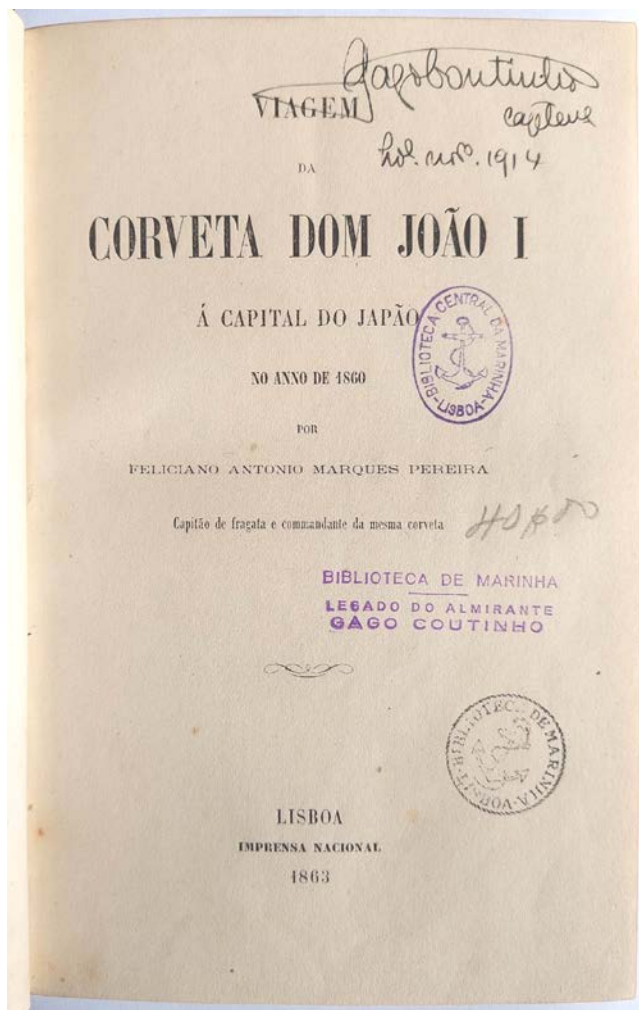
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21. Feliciano Antonio Marques Pereira, *Viagem da corveta Dom João I á capital do Japão no anno de 1860* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1863).

22. Pedro Gastão Mesnier, *O Japão: Estudos e Impressões de Viagem* (Macao: Typographia Mercantil, 1874).

23. Visconde de São Januário, "Architectura Japoneza," *Boletim da Real Associação dos Architectos Civis e Archeologos Portuguezes* 2, no. 5 (1878): 67-69, [https://www.museuarqueologicodecarmo.pt/publicacoes/arqueologia\\_historia/serie\\_2/Tomo\\_II/s2\\_tomo\\_II\\_Bol5.pdf](https://www.museuarqueologicodecarmo.pt/publicacoes/arqueologia_historia/serie_2/Tomo_II/s2_tomo_II_Bol5.pdf).

24. Francis L. Hawks, *Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Seas and Japan: Performed in the Years 1852, 1853 and 1854 under the Command of Commodore M. C. Perry*, 3 vols. (Washington, DC: Congress of Unites States, 1856).



**Figure 3.** First Page of the 1863 Edition of Feliciano Antonio Marques Pereira's "Viagem da corveta Dom João I á capital do Japão no anno de 1860" (photograph by João Duarte, 2022)

Source: © Biblioteca Central de Marinha, Lisbon. 3F2-45.

Despite the wealth of information provided by Hawks, Marques Pereira's comments on the Japanese cities and architecture were the result of direct experience. He went to Edo, Kanagawa and Yokohama. On Edo he writes: "seen from close-up or from afar, there is nothing agreeable or admirable about it; and it does not enable any comparison with European cities, nor with any others in the Christian world."<sup>25</sup> He also writes that the city centre is marked by two concentric sites, and that the innermost one, where the Emperor lives, is surrounded by a thick, high stone wall and a moat connected to the port. The streets are wide, and the

25. Pereira, *Viagem da corveta Dom João I*, 22. Translation by the author. Original text: "vista de perto ou de longe não tem nada de aprazível, nem de admirável; e não admite mesmo comparação alguma com as cidades da Europa, nem com quaesquer outras do mundo christão." For further discussion on Edo in the period following the opening of Japan to the West, see Hiroo Ichikawa, "The Evolutionary Process of Urban Form in Edo/Tokyo to 1900," *The Town Planning Review* 65, no. 2 (1994): 179-196, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40113289>.

blocks are very long; the squares are irregular in shape and informal but spacious. Marques Pereira confirms that the city is dissected by many water channels. Most of the buildings seem insignificant to him – “ordinarily, they are no more than street-level huts, even if they are covered with well-built roofs that feature thick roof tiles.”<sup>26</sup> From the outside, the houses of the daimyos and the pagodas distinguish themselves from common buildings by being higher. However, on the interior, the pagodas stand out for the parks and gardens that surround them and the majestic arches – the *Torii* – that punctuate the latter, and that the more refined houses reveal an unexpected generosity of space that is provided by their courtyards. Marques Pereira goes into greater detail on such houses. He observes their spatial organisation and their building system; how the spaces, which are devoid of furniture, can be easily transformed; and the singular relationship the spaces establish with the gardens, particularly in the larger and wealthier houses.

It is clear that similar residences may present few aspects of beauty on the exterior; but the same is not true of the interior, or the garden side; ordinarily, they have gardens, which one accesses by going down a few steps. Seen from there, from amongst the trees and flowers, the half-open walls, the completely open veranda, which normally goes the whole way around the house, the cleanliness and the attractive painted paper objects – all unite to give them a very original and agreeable aspect, a certain kiosk-like character, or that of pavilions, making them appear beautiful and ideal for a hot climate.<sup>27</sup>

Marques Pereira’s observations reflect the understandable feeling of discomfort Edo and its architecture provoked in someone from Europe in 1860. Images of Japanese buildings were not so common in the West at the time and not very precise, making it more difficult to understand Japanese architecture. The descriptions that were available were not very favourable. Hawks writes that, with the exception of one or the other temple or gateway that stood out from the low houses, “there were no buildings seen which impressed the Americans with a high idea of Japanese architecture.”<sup>28</sup> However Marques Pereira’s observations are also characterised by a free openness that was capable of appreciating the architecture without necessarily subjecting it to comparison with European models and without lingering only on the decorative elements. Descriptions of the interiors of more refined houses are the most evident expression of this.

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26. Pereira, *Viagem da corveta Dom João I*, 22. Translation by the author. Original text: “ordinariamente não passam de barracas ao rez da rua; bem que cobertas com bem construidos telhados de grossas telhas.”

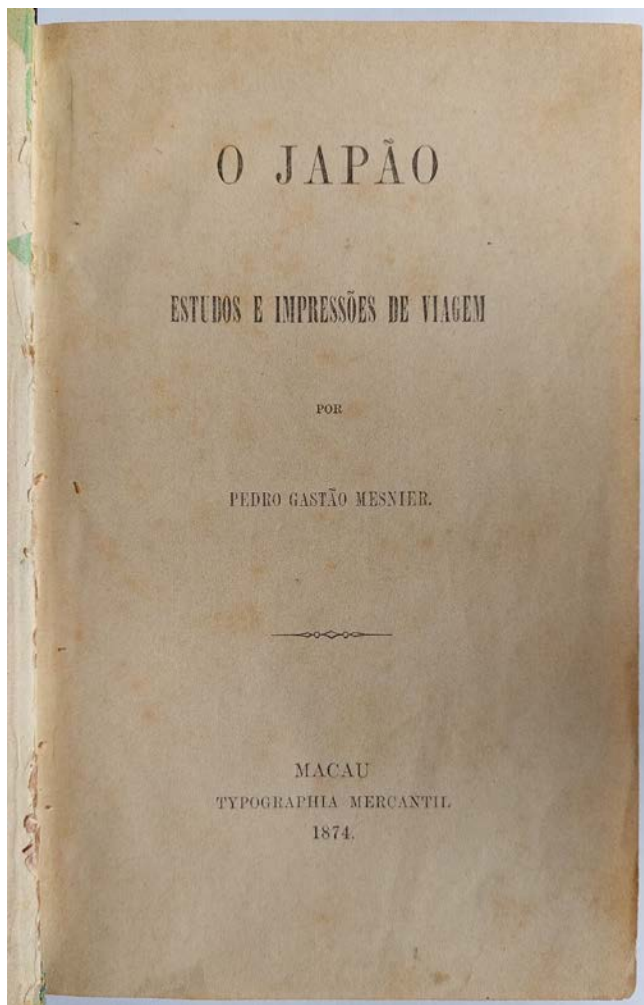
27. Pereira, *Viagem da corveta Dom João I*, 22. Translation by the author. Original text: “Bem se deixa ver que semelhantes habitações pouca perspectiva de beleza poderão apresentar no exterior; mas não acontece outro tanto no interior, ou do lado dos jardins, que ordinariamente têm, e para os queaes se desce por poucos degraus. Vistas d’ahi, por entre as arvores e flores, essas paredes meia rotas, essa varanda toda aberta que as cerca ordinariamente em roda, o aceio e o vistoso dos papeis pintados, tudo isto lhes dá um aspecto muito original e agradável, certo caracter de quiosques, ou pavilhões, que as faz parecerem bellas e muito proprias para um clima quente.”

28. Hawks, *Narrative of the Expedition*, 1:463.



### Japan: Studies and Travel Impressions

*Japan: Studies and Travel Impressions*, published in 1874 by Pedro Gastão Mesnier, presents an in-depth description of Japan that was compiled with the express purpose of introducing the country in Portugal.<sup>29</sup> It is based on the journey to Japan in 1873 by Viscount São Januário, Portugal's Minister Plenipotentiary to Japan from 1872 to 1874, to whom Mesnier was the private secretary (Figure 4). Just a few years after the visit of Marques Pereira, Japan was now in a clear process of westernisation.



**Figure 4.** First Page of the 1874 edition of Pedro Gastão Mesnier's "*O Japão estudos e impressões de viagem*" (photograph by João Duarte, 2022)

Source: © Biblioteca Central de Marinha, Lisbon. 2P6-27.

Mesnier goes into the history of Japan and also deals with the Portuguese presence; he describes the cities, populations and their customs, while also

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29. Mesnier lost part of the book's original manuscript in a typhoon that hit Macao, thus restricting the final size of the work. See Mesnier, *O Japão*, IX.

providing a glossary of Far-East terms and tables containing geographic, historical and demographic data. The country's literature and arts are described as part of the characterisation of Japanese society and culture. The book relies on wide-ranging sources, works on Japan – both books and periodicals – some of them preceding the re-opening to the West.<sup>30</sup> Of those works, one should mention, on account of its size, the at the time recently published *Le Japon Illustre* [The Japan Illustrated] by Aimé Humbert<sup>31</sup> (1819-1900), a Swiss born diplomat who became the envoy plenipotentiary of the Swiss federal government to Japan. Mesnier does not mention Marques Pereira's book, but it is very plausible that he was acquainted with it.

Mesnier visited several Japanese cities – Nagasaki, Kobe, Osaka, Yokohama and Edo. He evaluates the emergence of new cities that were Western in aspect and frequently grew up out of the already existing ones. Mesnier describes a few castles, highlighting that the lower level was built of stone and the upper levels of wood. He notes that the palaces of the former daimyos differ from normal housing merely through their size. As for the former residences, which, he emphasises, are made of wood only, he notes the singularity of the joints between the constituent pieces and the care taken in selecting and finishing the various woods used in the floors. He also appreciates the lightness of and the silence with which the room panels are moved. "Houses built like this have the effect of a huge chest that is full of drawers of all sizes, but the orderliness in even the poorest houses is admirable."<sup>32</sup> Mesnier devotes a significant part of his book to Edo and its architecture. He remarks on how wide the streets are and the erection of buildings of a European aspect amongst the rubble caused by a recent fire<sup>33</sup>. Here he finds renewed order. The palaces of the former daimyos are regarded as examples of primitive architecture. Like the castles, their lower floors are made of stone and the upper floors are in wood. They are characterised by their extensive horizontality. Only the high volumes that mark the respective entrances give them some special flair. "There is nothing sadder or more monotonous than the aspect of these buildings, in which the most uniform regularity has nothing that surprises or delights the sight."<sup>34</sup> The temples are more appreciated, but they do not match the majesty and grandeur of the architecture of India and Europe. "Ultimately, the Japanese seek to conserve in their architecture as little symmetry as possible, and in many of their works of art, they seem to intentionally flee from all and any

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30. Mesnier, *O Japão*, XI-XIII.

31. Aimé Humbert, *Le Japon Illustre*, 2 vols. (Paris: L. Hachette, 1870). As with Marques Pereira the works referred to by Mesnier confirm ease of access to updated sources on Japan.

32. Mesnier, *O Japão*, 113. Translation by the author. Original text: "Casas construídas por essa forma produzem o efeito de uma enorme commoda, cheias de gavetas de todos os tamanhos, mas é admirável a limpeza que reina mesmo nas mais pobres."

33. This was a fire that spread in 5 May 1873 and destroyed the Emperor's residence in Edo castle. See Donald Keene, *Emperor of Japan: Meiji and His World, 1852-1912* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002), 236.

34. Mesnier, *O Japão*, 189. Translation by the author. Original text: "Nada mais triste e monotono do que o aspecto d'estes edificios, onde a mais uniforme regularidade não tem cousa alguma que surprehenda ou deleite a vista."

symmetric arrangement.”<sup>35</sup> Mesnier believed that superiority in architectural matters, which came from the Greeks, was determined by the principle of symmetry. In relation to the gardens, Mesnier finds that they limit themselves to being free imitations of nature. In terms of layout, they come close to English gardens. He concludes that “they do not have the geometric regularity that was so valued by the French at the time of Le Nôtre.”<sup>36</sup> They are, nevertheless, impressive. “The walker feels transported to an enchanted world.”<sup>37</sup>

Mesnier’s impressions reveal an understandable interest in the cities and architecture of Japan; this interest often serves to frame the more mundane episodes he relates. Traditional houses and, above all, the parks and gardens, seem to have had a particular impact on him, that was perhaps unexpected given the descriptions he was working on. Nevertheless, his gaze is that of someone convinced of the referential and civilising role of Europe in relation to the rest of the world. Mesnier’s observations are marked by a constant desire to compare to European models, in relation to which Japanese architecture always emerges as inferior. There is no openness to looking at the architecture beyond the differences that distinguish it from European architecture. And there is also no nostalgia whatsoever for traditional Japan at a time when the country was beginning to undergo transformations.

### “Japanese Architecture”

“Japanese Architecture” by Viscount São Januário, published in 1878, also originated from the Portuguese diplomatic mission to Japan headed by the former in 1873<sup>38</sup>.

Viscount São Januário’s comments reflect the alienation caused by the radical difference between Japanese and Western architecture. The first gaze is one of rejection. “We are forced to recognise that Japanese architecture is much inferior in taste and grandeur to the styles that civilised peoples most cultivate and practise.”<sup>39</sup> The diplomat’s models were classical – Greek and Roman – and Gothic architecture. However, the strangeness eventually gives way to progressive recognition. “Japanese

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35. Mesnier, *O Japão*, 196. Translation by the author. Original text: “Emfim os japonezes procuram conservar na sua arquitectura o menos que é possível de symetria, e em muitas das suas obras d’arte, parecem fugir adrede de qualquer disposição symetrica.”

36. Mesnier, *O Japão*, 200. Translation by the author. Original text: “Não possuem a regularidade geometrica tão apreciada pelos francezes no tempo de Le Nôtre.”

37. Mesnier, *O Japão*, 201. Translation by the author. Original text: “O passeante julga-se transportado n’um mundo encantado.”

38. Viscount São Januário had amassed quite a collection of objects from Japan, as well as a few others from China, India, Ceylon, Korea, Siam and Egypt. He displayed them in his house in Lisbon. Part of the collection was auctioned off in 1877. See João Luís Cardoso, “O General Conde de S. Januário (1827-1901) Um português de excepção,” *Estudos Arqueológicos de Oeiras* special issue (2018): 88, <https://eao.oeiras.pt/index.php/DOC/article/view/327>.

39. Visconde de São Januário, “Architectura Japoneza,” 67, [https://www.museuarqueologico.docarmo.pt/publicacoes/arqueologia\\_historia/serie\\_2/Tomo\\_II/s2\\_tomo\\_II\\_Bol5.pdf](https://www.museuarqueologico.docarmo.pt/publicacoes/arqueologia_historia/serie_2/Tomo_II/s2_tomo_II_Bol5.pdf). Translation by the author. Original text: “somos forçados a reconhecer que a architectura japoneza é muito inferior, em gosto e em grandeza, aos generos que os povos civilisados mais cultivam e exercitam.”



[architecture] is good, from an artistic point of view; in relation to its style and the surrounding environment, it satisfies the requirements that awaken the idea of beauty.”<sup>40</sup> The reflection is focused on the temple of Kamakura, in the region of Yokohama, with the Viscount relying on *Le Japon Illustré*, by Humbert<sup>41</sup>. Viscount São Januário was struck by the magnificence and the shape of the roofs and the decoration of the buildings, as well as by the leafy presence of nature and the landscape. Japan captivated him through its picturesqueness. The buildings were like pictures framed by nature.

### The First Encounter

It is difficult to assess the impact the observations on Japanese architecture made by Marques Pereira, Mesnier and Viscount São Januário had in Portuguese intellectual circles, particularly amongst architects, even when one accepts that Viscount São Januário’s account was naturally divulged amongst the ranks of the profession. The poet and writer Antero de Quental (1842-1891) commented on Mesnier’s book in a review published in *Revista Occidental* [Western Magazine] in 1875<sup>42</sup>. Quental praises the work’s usefulness in understanding Japan but makes no reference to Mesnier’s observations on Japanese architecture.

The observations made by Marques Pereira, Mesnier and Viscount São Januário were isolated cases in the Portuguese critical landscape of the nineteenth century. They are attributed more to the fact that all three visited Japan than to a specific interest in Japanese architecture, which at the time was non-existent in Portugal. Portuguese architecture of this period was motivated by a romantic ideal of affirmation of the national identity and found in revivalisms – the Neo-Arab and, above all the Neo-Manueline styles – its preferred form of expression.<sup>43</sup> Japan had nothing to do with the roots of that identity, even if it could help to revive the nineteenth century affirmation of an imperial Portugal. And they were the observations of people who were not closely involved with architecture, although

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40. Visconde de São Januário, “Architectura Japoneza,” 68, [https://www.museuarqueologico.docarmo.pt/publicacoes/arqueologia\\_historia/serie\\_2/Tomo\\_II/s2\\_tomo\\_II\\_Bol5.pdf](https://www.museuarqueologico.docarmo.pt/publicacoes/arqueologia_historia/serie_2/Tomo_II/s2_tomo_II_Bol5.pdf). Translation by the author. Original text: “A architectura [japonesa] é boa, debaixo do ponto de vista artístico, quando em relação ao seu estylo e ao meio que a circunda, reúne condições que despertam a idéa do bello.”

41. It is not clear which temple Viscount São Januário visited. Humbert devotes several pages to the temples at Kamakura, which he complements with images. Humbert, *Le Japon Illustre*, 1870, 1:234-244.

42. [Antero de Quental], “O Japão: estudos e impressões de viagem, por Pedro Gastão Mesnier. Macau, Typographia mercantil,” *Revista Occidental*, May 31, 1875, 254-256, [http://hemerotecadigital.cm-lisboa.pt/Periodicos/AnuariodaSociedadedosArquitectosPortugueses/AnoII/AnoII\\_item1/in dex.html](http://hemerotecadigital.cm-lisboa.pt/Periodicos/AnuariodaSociedadedosArquitectosPortugueses/AnoII/AnoII_item1/in dex.html).

43. For further discussion on Portuguese architecture in the late nineteenth century, see Maria Helena Barreiros, “Arquitecturas do século XIX português, entre o fim do Absolutismo e a abertura da Avenida da Liberdade,” in *Da expressão romântica à estética naturalista*, eds. José Luís Porfírio and Maria Helena Barreiros, vol. 15 of *Arte Portuguesa: da Pré-história ao século XX*, ed. Dalila Rodrigues (Lisbon: Fubu Editores, 2009), 99-140.

Viscount São Januário was very much interested in heritage issues, as his pioneering visit to Angkor in Siam (now in present-day Cambodia) confirmed.<sup>44</sup>

### The Second Portuguese Encounter with Japanese Architecture

Despite the pioneering nature of these three texts, interest in Japanese architecture in Portugal only returned in the early twentieth century. The *Annuário da Sociedade dos Architectos Portuguezes* [Yearbook of the Society of Portuguese Architects], an architecture-related magazine, even had a Japanese correspondent from 1906 to 1910, the year it ceased publication. That correspondent was Chujo Seiichiro<sup>45</sup> (1868-1936). The architectural firm he founded in Tokyo together with Sone Tatsuzo (1853-1937) gained prominence for adopting Western architectural models. Seiichiro was the first representative of the Institute of Japanese Architects at the Seventh International Congress of Architects, held in London in 1906<sup>46</sup>. Seiichiro's appointment as a correspondent was the result of contacts with the Portuguese delegation to the congress, which included José Alexandre Soares (1873-1930), the President of the Society of Portuguese Architects. It is not clear what role Seiichiro may have played within the *Annuário*.

### Modern Construction

The periodical *A Construção Moderna* [Modern Construction], which was published from 1900 to 1919, featured several articles on Japan, some of which focused on the country's architecture. *Modern Construction* was the first Portuguese magazine specifically dedicated to architecture and construction. Heritage was not a particularly important issue, contrary to what was the case at the previously

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44. Viscount São Januário was one of the first Europeans to visit the ruins of Angkor in what is now Cambodia, where he went in 1875. He wrote about the Angkor ruins. See Visconde de São Januário, "A Architectura Khmer – Ruínas de Angkor Wat no Reino de Cambodge (Parte 1/2)," *Boletim da Real Associação dos Architectos Civis e Archeologos Portuguezes* 1, no. 12 (1878): 67, [https://www.museuarqueologicodocarmo.pt/publicacoes/arqueologia\\_historia/serie\\_2/Tomo\\_I/s2\\_tomo\\_I\\_Bol12.pdf](https://www.museuarqueologicodocarmo.pt/publicacoes/arqueologia_historia/serie_2/Tomo_I/s2_tomo_I_Bol12.pdf); Visconde de São Januário, "A Architectura Khmer – Ruínas de Angkor Wat no Reino de Cambodge (Parte 2/2)," *Boletim da Real Associação dos Architectos Civis e Archeologos Portuguezes* 2, no. 2 (1878): 17-21, [https://www.museuarqueologicodocarmo.pt/publicacoes/arqueologia\\_historia/serie\\_2/Tomo\\_II/s2\\_tomo\\_II\\_Bol2.pdf](https://www.museuarqueologicodocarmo.pt/publicacoes/arqueologia_historia/serie_2/Tomo_II/s2_tomo_II_Bol2.pdf); Visconde de São Januário, "A Architectura Khmer – Ruínas de Angkor Wat no Reino de Cambodge (Parte III)," *Boletim da Real Associação dos Architectos Civis e Archeologos Portuguezes* 2, no. 3 (1878): 33-37, [https://www.museuarqueologicodocarmo.pt/publicacoes/arqueologia\\_historia/serie\\_2/Tomo\\_II/s2\\_tomo\\_II\\_Bol3.pdf](https://www.museuarqueologicodocarmo.pt/publicacoes/arqueologia_historia/serie_2/Tomo_II/s2_tomo_II_Bol3.pdf).

45. Sociedade dos Architectos Portuguezes. "Socios Honorarios e Correspondentes" (*Annuário da Sociedade dos Architectos Portuguezes*, 1906), s.p., [http://hemerotecadigital.cm-lisboa.pt/Periodicos/AnuariodaSociedadedosArquitectosPortugueses/AnoII/AnoII\\_item1/index.html](http://hemerotecadigital.cm-lisboa.pt/Periodicos/AnuariodaSociedadedosArquitectosPortugueses/AnoII/AnoII_item1/index.html).

46. Royal Institute of British Architects, *International Congress of Architects: seventh session, held in London 16-21 July 1906: under the auspices of the Royal Institute of British Architects: transactions* (London: Royal Institute of British Architects, 1908), 17, <https://archive.org/details/cu31924015677812>.

mentioned two periodicals<sup>47</sup>. The magazine had as its mentors, José Mello de Mattos (1856-1915), an engineer and mathematician, and Rosendo Carnevalheira (1864-1919), an architect with a Romantic spirit dedicated to the cause of Portuguese culture.

Japan was examined in a variety of ways, the first time being referenced in an article on the railway in 1900.<sup>48</sup> The articles looked at transport systems, mining, shipbuilding, metalworking and electricity generation, amongst other things. Most of these articles were sourced in foreign publications, reflecting a regularly updated network of contacts and publications which encompassed Spain, France, Britain, Italy and, perhaps more unexpectedly, the USA. The Japan portrayed in the *Modern Construction's* articles was a nation undergoing a huge transformation, characterised by progress and modernisation, seeking to assert itself in the context of world powers. The technical articles, with those dedicated to the railways and mining standing out, highlighted Japanese industrial and infrastructure construction capacity. The recognition of Japan's progress served to point out the delay in development which continued to mark Portugal. The remarks that precede the introduction to the article "Trinta annos de desenvolvimento dos caminhos de ferro japoneses"<sup>49</sup> [Thirty Years of Japanese Railway Development], published in 1903 in three parts and translated from *Bulletin De La Commission Internationale Du Congrès Des Chemins De Fer*, [Bulletin of the International Commission of the Railroads Congress] state: "news [of this development] is of great interest, as it shows how, in countries we consider uncivilised, economic issues are being confronted that we dare not even consider."<sup>50</sup> Although the railways in Portugal predated those in Japan, the Japanese railway network had long since outgrown the Portuguese network.

Japanese architecture is looked at in three articles: "No Japão"<sup>51</sup> [In Japan], published in 1908; "As cidades arruinadas: alguns problemas de reconstrução"<sup>52</sup>

47. For further discussion of the significance of magazines and periodicals in the renewal of architectural scene in Portugal, see Paulo Simões Nunes, "A cultura arquitectónica em Portugal na dobra do século XIX para o século XX: sinais da influência estrangeira nas páginas d'A *Construção Moderna* (1900-1919)," in *Revistas de Arquitectura: Arquivo(s) da Modernidade*, ed. Marieta Dá Mesquita (Casal de Cambra: Caleidoscópio, 2011).

48. Anonymous, "Os Caminhos de Ferro no Mundo," *A Construção Moderna*, September 16, 1900, 4, [http://ric.slihi.pt/A\\_Construcao\\_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.001.016&pag=4](http://ric.slihi.pt/A_Construcao_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.001.016&pag=4).

49. Anonymous, "Trinta annos de desenvolvimento dos caminhos de ferro japoneses (Parte 1/3)," *A Construção Moderna*, July 1, 1903, 128, [http://ric.slihi.pt/A\\_Construcao\\_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.004.016&pag=8](http://ric.slihi.pt/A_Construcao_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.004.016&pag=8); Anonymous, "Trinta annos de desenvolvimento dos caminhos de ferro japoneses (Parte 2/3)," *A Construção Moderna*, July 10, 1903, 136, [http://ric.slihi.pt/A\\_Construcao\\_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.004.017&pag=8](http://ric.slihi.pt/A_Construcao_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.004.017&pag=8); Anonymous, "Trinta annos de desenvolvimento dos caminhos de ferro japoneses (Parte 3/3)," *A Construção Moderna*, August 1, 1903, 151-152, [http://ric.slihi.pt/A\\_Construcao\\_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.004.017&pag=8](http://ric.slihi.pt/A_Construcao_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.004.017&pag=8).

50. Anonymous, "Trinta annos (Parte 1/3)," 128, [http://ric.slihi.pt/A\\_Construcao\\_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.004.016&pag=8](http://ric.slihi.pt/A_Construcao_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.004.016&pag=8). Translation by the author. Original text: "a notícia é deveras interessante para mostrar como é que em países que reputamos pouco civilizados se encaram questões económicas com que não nos atrevemos sequer a arcar."

51. Anonymous, "No Japão," *A Construção Moderna*, January 1, 1908, 135, [http://ric.slihi.pt/A\\_Construcao\\_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.008.017&pag=7](http://ric.slihi.pt/A_Construcao_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.008.017&pag=7).

[Ruined Cities: Some Reconstruction Issues] written by Mello de Mattos and published in 1909; and “Arquitectura doméstica japoneza”<sup>53</sup> [Japanese Domestic Architecture], published in 1916 in five parts.

The first two pieces deal with technical construction questions. The first one highlights the recent appearance of a fireproof house building, called the *kura*. It was likely based on another article from outside Portugal, although that is not mentioned. One should point out that the structure of the building, whether it was made of steel or timber, was covered in several layers of damp clay, thus ensuring fire protection. The article manifests its own belatedness in relation to the issue at hand, given that the protection system was already in use in Japan for quite some time and had already been the subject of other pieces by Western writers. And the *kura* was not a new type of building, but the name given to traditional Japanese storehouses. Of greater relevance is the reference to the “invasion of European civilisation when it comes to improving building methods”<sup>54</sup>, confirming the ongoing process of Westernisation in Japanese architecture. The second article mentions the architecture of Japan in the context of a discussion on anti-seismic construction. It is the translation to Portuguese of an article in the British periodical *The Illustrated Carpenter and Builder*, as Mello de Mattos points out.<sup>55</sup> It registers the Japanese choice of wooden structures reinforced with iron and resting on solid foundations, although it reaches the conclusion that the system would be inviable in European cities, as it would increase the risk of fire. Mello de Mattos notes that the wooden building system based on the triangle used in Japan, which the British magazine presents as a new development, had already been used in the reconstruction of Lisbon following the earthquake of November 1, 1755.<sup>56</sup>

The third article delves much deeper into Japanese architecture, and more specifically, traditional Japanese housing. The time lapse of almost 40 years between the text published by Viscount São Januário and this article confirms that

52. Mello de Mattos, “As cidades arruinadas: alguns problemas de reconstrução,” *A Construção Moderna*, April 1, 1909, 202-204, [http://ric.slihi.pt/A\\_Construcao\\_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.009.026&pag=2](http://ric.slihi.pt/A_Construcao_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.009.026&pag=2).

53. Anonymous, “Arquitectura domestica japoneza (Parte 1/5),” *A Construção Moderna*, June 10, 1916, 84, [http://ric.slihi.pt/A\\_Construcao\\_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.017.011&pag=4](http://ric.slihi.pt/A_Construcao_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.017.011&pag=4); Anonymous, “Arquitectura domestica japoneza (Parte 2/5),” *A Construção Moderna*, June 25, 1916, 92, [http://ric.slihi.pt/A\\_Construcao\\_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.017.012&pag=4](http://ric.slihi.pt/A_Construcao_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.017.012&pag=4); Anonymous, “Arquitectura domestica japoneza (Parte 3/5),” *A Construção Moderna*, July 10, 1916, 110, [http://ric.slihi.pt/A\\_Construcao\\_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.017.013&pag=4](http://ric.slihi.pt/A_Construcao_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.017.013&pag=4); Anonymous, “Arquitectura domestica japoneza (Parte 4/5),” *A Construção Moderna*, July 25, 1916, 108, [http://ric.slihi.pt/A\\_Construcao\\_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.017.014&pag=4](http://ric.slihi.pt/A_Construcao_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.017.014&pag=4); Anonymous, “Arquitectura domestica japoneza (Parte 5/5),” *A Construção Moderna*, August 10, 1916, 116, [http://ric.slihi.pt/A\\_Construcao\\_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.017.015&pag=4](http://ric.slihi.pt/A_Construcao_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.017.015&pag=4).

54. Anonymous, “No Japão,” 135, [http://ric.slihi.pt/A\\_Construcao\\_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.008.017&pag=7](http://ric.slihi.pt/A_Construcao_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.008.017&pag=7). Translation by the author. Original text: “invasão da civilização europeia no aperfeiçoamento dos methodos de construir.”

55. Mello de Mattos, “As cidades arruinadas,” 203, [http://ric.slihi.pt/A\\_Construcao\\_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.009.026&pag=2](http://ric.slihi.pt/A_Construcao_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.009.026&pag=2).

56. Mello de Mattos, “As cidades arruinadas,” 203, [http://ric.slihi.pt/A\\_Construcao\\_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.009.026&pag=2](http://ric.slihi.pt/A_Construcao_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.009.026&pag=2).

practically no attention was paid to this matter. Although no reference is made to the fact, the article is an adaptation of “Japanese Domestic Interiors” by Ralph Adams Cram<sup>57</sup> (1863-1942), published in the British periodical *The Architectural Review* in 1900. The author of the adaptation is unknown, but it was most likely Mello de Mattos. The adaptation does not include any of the images that accompanied the original text. Cram was an American architect who designed one of the first American houses to reveal an influence of Japanese architecture, in the late 1890s<sup>58</sup>. He visited Japan in 1898. Cram’s article had the peculiarity of devoting itself to residential architecture, continuing the pioneering work of Edward Morse<sup>59</sup> (1838-1925) and his *Japanese Homes and Their Surroundings*, published in 1885. In line with Cram’s text, the Portuguese adaptation praises traditional Japanese houses, noting the vitality they showed in comparison to housing designed by Western architects for the wealthier classes. The majority of these dwellings failed to adapt to the Japanese customs and environment. “This kind of construction hurts the eye, making an unpleasant impression.”<sup>60</sup>

The article presents a detailed description of Japanese residential architecture, benefitting from the rigour of Cram’s text. It lists the principles and main characteristics of Japanese houses, which always have to do with the customs of the Japanese people. And it underlines the importance of wood and the sophistication of the houses, despite their apparent simplicity. “At first sight, the construction might appear poor and sad, but in reality it is not, for each detail, form and colour is so infinitely studied, that the dwelling, still empty, is sufficient for itself.”<sup>61</sup> Despite its criticism of the importing of foreign models, publication of the article seems to have been more motivated by the curiosity that Japanese residential architecture aroused in Portugal than by any contribution it could make to the then ongoing debate on the definition of a national style<sup>62</sup>, which was also marked by criticism of the adoption of foreign architectural models.

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57. Ralph Adams Cram, “Japanese Domestic Interiors,” *The Architectural Review: for the Artist & Craftsman*, January-June 1900, 9-15, [https://archive.org/details/sim\\_architectural-review\\_january-june-1900\\_7/page/8/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/sim_architectural-review_january-june-1900_7/page/8/mode/2up). The article would later appear as one of the chapters of Cram’s book *Impressions of Japanese Architecture and the Allied Arts*, published in 1905. See Ralph Adams Cram, *Impressions of Japanese Architecture and the Allied Arts* (New York: Baker & Taylor Co, 1905): 115-142, <https://archive.org/details/impressionsofjap00cram/mode/2up>.

58. Lancaster, *The Japanese Influence in America*, 70-71.

59. Edward S. Morse, *Japanese Homes and Their Surroundings* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1885), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015031800371&view=1up&seq=10>.

60. Anonymous, “Arquitetura domestica japoneza (Parte 1/5),” 84, [http://ric.slhi.pt/A\\_Construcao\\_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.017.011&pag=4](http://ric.slhi.pt/A_Construcao_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.017.011&pag=4). Translation by the author. Original text: “Este género de construção fere a vista, causando uma impressão desagradável.”

61. Anonymous, “Arquitetura domestica japoneza (Parte 2/5),” 92, [http://ric.slhi.pt/A\\_Construcao\\_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.017.012&pag=4](http://ric.slhi.pt/A_Construcao_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.017.012&pag=4). Translation by the author. Original text: “Á primeira vista parecerá este conjunto pobre e triste, porém, realmente, não é assim, pois cada detalhe, forma e côr, estão tão exquisitamente estudados que a habitação, ainda vazia, basta a si mesma.”

62. See Nunes, “A cultura arquitectónica em Portugal”, 236.

### The Second Encounter

The diverse Japan-related articles published in *Modern Construction* do not reflect a consolidated and widespread interest in that country; much less so in its architecture. They constitute a loose collection of materials that does not establish a line of continuity. They are, above all, connected by the idea of progress associated with Japanese society and, accordingly, the backwardness that continued to persist in Portugal. Publication of the article “Japanese Domestic Architecture”, an adaptation of a text made available by *The Architectural Review*, as pointed out above, is important for the rigour of its observations and for affirming the bond between traditional Japanese residential architecture and the identity of the Japanese people and, therefore, with Japan itself. It is, however, an isolated article that makes the scarce interest in Japan and its architecture, even more evident, when one considers the fact that other articles on the subject matter existed in other magazines that were equally accessible to the publishers of *Modern Construction*, such as the British periodical *The Illustrated Carpenter and Builder* and *Architectural Review* from the USA. The absorption of Japanese architecture that was experimented with in Europe and the US, was ignored in the contents of *Modern Construction*. This explains the ridiculing tone with which a house built in California with an obvious oriental appearance is described in an article published in 1916 (Figure 5):

we are not repelled by the idea that the owner [be he Chinese or Japanese], while now living in America, wanted a remembrance of his native country, and recommended that the architect add a little of his country’s characteristics to the construction.<sup>63</sup>

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63. Anonymous, “Arquitectura na California (Estados Unidos da America),” *A Construção Moderna*, November 25, 1916, 172, [http://ric.slihi.pt/A\\_Construcao\\_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.017.022&pag=4](http://ric.slihi.pt/A_Construcao_Moderna/visualizador/?id=11214.017.022&pag=4). Translation by the author. Original text: “não nos repugna a ideia que o seu proprietário [seja chinês ou japonês], embora na América, quisesse recordar o seu país natal, recomendando ao arquitecto que lhe desse um pouco da feição do seu país na construção.”



**Figure 5.** Article “A Arquitectura na California (Estados Unidos da America)” Published in “A Construção Moderna” in November 25, 1916.

Source: © <http://ric.slihi.pt/>.

### A Disencounter – Final Considerations

The reception given to Japanese architecture in Portugal in the period between Japan’s opening to the West and the 1920s was very restricted, superficial, inconsistent and inconsequential. In the first encounter, which took place in the 1860s and 1870s and was a result of Portuguese diplomatic missions to Edo, understanding Japan was always marked by the omnipresence of European models, in relation to which Japanese architecture was considered inferior. Even so, said understanding had the peculiarity of being based, at least in part, on direct contact with the architecture of Japan, with this fact being reflected in the astonishment at Japanese residential architecture and the genuineness of the assessment thereof. In the second encounter, in the 1910s and 1920s, comprehension of Japan is marked by an interest in its development, much in line with the recognition of the backwardness of Portugal. The information on Japanese architecture was sourced



from foreign publications, as very little relevance was given to the subject matter in the Portuguese publishing scene. The publication of the adaptation of a foreign article on Japanese residential architecture in Japan is not enough proof of a widespread interest in the subject matter, even though it did confirm the fascination in the West for said architecture. The Far Eastern flavour noticeable in some Portuguese architecture from late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries does not mean that the architectural culture of the time had internalised or even consciously contemplated the values of Japanese architecture, even if said values were accessible and provoked a certain amount of fascination in the artistic culture of Portugal.

Eduardo Lourenço Throughout this whole period, Portugal was coming to terms with its own identity, while registering the profound time-lag that the country had in relation to the industrialised West, of which it was a part. The first reflections on a Japan that only shortly before had re-opened to the West focused on a country that was backward and primitive, even if certain aspects of it were surprising. Compared to Japan, Portugal saw itself as superior. Four decades later, the second wave of reflections gave an inkling of the Portuguese discontent with the progress Japan was showing. Any direct comparison with Japan now highlighted Portuguese weakness. The inability to understand the modern values of *Japonisme*, as revealed by José-Augusto França in his critique of how António Ramalho painted Abel Botelho<sup>64</sup> was also typical of Portuguese architecture.

(1923-2020) was a philosopher who dealt with the Portuguese identity in his work. His synthesis of the encounter between nineteenth-century Portugal and Japan clarifies the impossibility of the Portuguese cultural scene fully understanding Japanese architecture. It was, in the end, modernity itself that Portuguese architecture showed itself to be incapable of understanding. Lourenço writes:

[a] Portugal timidly open to industrialisation and open, a little, as if we were the Japan of Europe, at the same time violated by *Uncle Sam* without him giving it a second thought [...] sees itself at a pinnacle confounded with a cultural avalanche which it can by no means deal with in terms that are, shall we say, acceptable.<sup>65</sup>

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64. França, *A Arte em Portugal no Século XIX*, 2: 104.

65. Eduardo Lourenço, *O labirinto da saudade*, 6th ed. (Lisbon: Gradiva, 2009), 90. Translation by the author. Original text: “Um Portugal timidamente aberto à industrialização e aberto um pouco como se fôssemos o Japão da Europa no mesmo momento violado sem contemplações pelo *Uncle Sam* [...] vê-se num ápice confundido com uma avalanche cultural que de modo algum pode digerir em termos, digamos, aceitáveis.”

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