

## **TWO NATIONS IN THE PROCESS OF MODERNIZATION – PERSPECTIVES ON THE INTERIOR SPACE IN TURKEY AND JAPAN IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD**

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### **Introduction**

The interwar period has marked an important stage in the social, economical, and political histories of the countries throughout the world. Meanwhile, architecture has kept on being used as a means of expressing the state of the mainstream as well as the changing notions. Especially for the newly flourishing nation-states such as Turkish Republic and for the growing economies such as Japan's, the explicit presentation and concrete modeling of their developing societies could be achieved by architecture. For the time period in concern, modern architecture was perceived as a tool for displaying/promoting the ways that those countries maintained for the development of their societies and their statue among of the leading powers of their time.

Published in the magazines and newspapers, endorsed by the state, and seen by the public from the exterior, modern architecture was introduced by several different channels and was favored by the local architects, educational curriculum, and some parts of the society, both in Turkey and in Japan. However, the question was how the modern architecture could be a part of the social transformation more thoroughly. The groundbreaking ideas of the supporters of the modern architecture should have penetrated into the minds of every citizen in such a way to establish the notion of the new society more effectively. The way to achieve this was to promote new ways of living through new domestic interiors. Yet, how would these novel interior spaces, hence new ways of living, be introduced into two introverted societies like Turkey and Japan? In which means the interior spaces would be presented to spread the transformation to the overall segments of the society?

Within the lead of these questions, this paper will analyze the modern interiors designed and promoted in Turkey and Japan in the interwar period. In addition, the issue of furniture design as a significant denominator of the interior space will be examined along with the aspects that affect the production and consumption process. As the studies on the era reveal, some of the periodicals of the period were to be the essential resources with articles, drawings and even advertisements they presented to their readers as well as the essays by the prominent architects from Europe and Japan, which will be examined through the research. [1] [2]

### **Modernization of Interior Space in Turkey and Japan in the Interwar Period**

As Selçuk Esenbel asserts, both Turkish and Japanese societies have resemblances in introducing the western culture particularly to their everyday lives. [3] Although affiliation with

the West sets back to earlier periods, the westernization process in the Ottoman Empire began in the second quarter of the nineteenth century and it did not have any direct accounts on altering the very nucleus of the society, the family, until the first decade of the twentieth century. After the proclamation of the constitutional monarchy for the second time in 1908, the government was eager to modernize the domestic structure of the society. Yet, the members of the family began to be affiliated with the new (European) home furnishings and modern way of living through school books. [4] The first two decades of the twentieth century, the residential architecture was open to the current stylistic approaches such as neoclassicism, neo-baroque, Art Nouveau and Art Deco, along with the new types of housing such as the apartments. Meanwhile, there was a search for a national style among the Ottoman architects which were accompanied by several foreign architects. Especially after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the First National Style –or the Ottoman Revivalism-, which was criticized as being anachronistic and eclectic, was abandoned in the beginning of the 1930s and the newly established republic promoted the modern architecture as a means of “official production, supervision, and dissemination of a distinctly republican visual culture of modernity”. [5] The prominent architectural magazine of the era, *Mimar*, strengthens the visualization of the modernist cities and spaces with the articles, photographs and sketches being published constantly (Fig.1).

Meanwhile on the other side of the world, Japan had already started to be a medium where different approaches towards architecture became apparent. Westernization and introduction of western architectural practices and techniques in Japan were started with the Meiji Era. The new Japanese government executed reforms and enacted a national policy to catch up with the western social, economical and cultural developments. Modern architectural design and techniques were introduced both by invited foreign architects and specialists who were to design or supervise the existing and new constructions and lay the foundations for a Western system of architectural education; and by the Japanese architects, who went abroad to study or work with leading architects of the time. [6] Different architectural movements and phases of modern architecture such as Art Deco, Expressionism and Bauhaus were studied and reflected to the Japanese architecture, domestic interior space and furniture, where the primal motivation was to “disseminate functional homes” and “the amelioration of domestic fittings in a moderate and progressive manner” [7] and accordingly, their reception and reaction in the society varied. (Fig.2)

Development of industrialization and modernization improved the educational methods both in Japan and Turkey; hence, this improvement caused the creation of a distinction between social classes with an increase in the urban population. Domestic interiors were altered in the meantime, while experiencing radical changes in social developments, household roles and occupation. Transformation of the household was observed according to the changes in new patterns of habits and perspectives on family life in the new domestic interiors. Certain parts of the house, which had been identified with specific gender, became common spaces both for male and female inhabitants, such as reception and study rooms. For the publicity and debates on these alterations, not only works of the local or Western architects (such as Bruno Taut, Richard Neutra, Antonin Raymond, Yamamoto Setsuro and Abidin Mertaş) or articles in daily newspapers or architectural magazines (such as *Ulus* and *Mimar* from Turkey) were involved in introducing new styles and furniture choices, but also magazines for women (such as *Ladies' Graphic* and *The Housewife's Companion* from Japan) were used as a medium for promoting modern interiors. [8] [9]



Fig.1: Lighting proposal for a living room in *Mimar* (May 1931), p.175



Fig.2: Dining room, Higuchi Hisagoro model house (1924)

## Conclusion

This paper examines the impact of modernization on Japan and Turkey in the early 20th century. Japan and Turkey, which have long-standing cultures and traditional architectural background, are selected to analyze the resemblances and differences in terms of their encounters with westernization through modern architecture. The outcome of this research is to execute a comparative reading on Japanese and Turkish domestic interiors and furniture in the interwar period with reference to social, cultural and architectural developments.

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