Analyze of Japanese Culture in Contemporary Architectural Practice

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Abstract. How to deconstruct traditional culture and use it in contemporary practices has become one of the key problems in modern architecture, as modernism proved its failure in including human lifestyle in the building, and lack of consideration of how local culture portrays people and whether it should be included in design. regions with rich traditional cultures face modern urban development and architectural revolution. This paper focuses on how local Japanese architect has deconstructed traditional culture and used it in their contemporary architectural practice, by analyzing works and interviews from Ando Tadao and Kuma Kengo with their different approach in their architectural practice through philosophical and visual deconstruction of Japanese culture. This paper has concluded some key aspect in the field of using traditional Japanese element in modern architecture reviewed how their approaches has been viewed and commented on, and provided some paths that could be used in future architects when comes to projects that include some aspect of traditional local culture.

Keywords: Japan; culture; Kuma Kengo; Ando Tadao; architecture.

1. Introduction

When modernism rose, the practice of modern architecture began to take place other than its origin in Europe. As architects expanded their vision to the East, they each faced different problems and came up with different solutions that pushed modernism further toward its evolution. The use of regional and territorial elements and how they were used in the architecture through choices made by the architect is important, especially for future projects that respect the regional culture [1].

However, Modernism tends to face its drawbacks. As Robert Ventury says “Less is a bore”, Modernism architecture faced the problem of including human and their social life engaged in the architecture [2]. Modernism was first practiced as a style of architecture that focused on taking away the regional elements and decorations in order to create a universal form of architecture, Corbusier started to expand his career outside of Europe in the 1940s to East and mid-Asia.

2. The Style of Modernism and Limitation

As the early modernism movement radically takes culture and pure forms from architecture, these works and practices have been somewhat controversial in the modern age. These Ideas of culture inside architecture, led by different architects try to criticize what previous modernism has done, each has taken different paths toward the representation of the cultural elements.

In these early practices such as Corbusier and Mies, the Idea of Cultural or regional characteristics was always taken away from the architecture intentionally, seeking for internationality of the building. Such as the practice of National Western Art museums in Tokyo [3]. Although this museum was built in the 1960s, and it is referred to as Corbusier’s late work, the façade was still based on simple geometric shapes. The use of strong geometric language, such as the triangular cone in the middle of the roof, the rectangular windows, and the overall floating cubical shape of the building is a language that was considered universal and international.

The aim of early modernism in internationality and universality in architecture not only focuses on the appearance of the architecture but also a goal to be setting up people’s lifestyle into something

universal. Leading practitioners of social mechanisms such as Corbusier and his attempt in the Radiant City and practice in Chandigarh all illustrate how people in different regions will have their international and modern ways of life.



Fig 1 Picture of Villa Savoye [4]

As Figure 1 shows one of the significant works by Le Corbusier. Of people and architecture regardless of the regional differences was found to be a symbol of colonialism and Eurocent. These practices from early modernism have been criticized. Modernism's almost exclusive reliance on a language of space often seemed to be at the expense of a language of time, says Robert A. Stern.

3. Japanese Architecture and History



Fig 2. Tokyo train station [5].

Drawing attention to these regions that have experienced and been heavily influenced by early modernism, Japan stood out as one of the important ones. As one of the countries that were heavily influenced by Western culture, Japan's architectural history started with the Meiji Restoration [6, 7]. As this country absorbs all kinds of architectural theories, such as classicism and neo-classicism (such

as the Tokyo train station shown in Figure 2), the wave of Modernism reaches Japan as a popular theory of architecture.

As one of the first East Asian countries to actively expose itself to Western architecture, Most Japanese architects were heavily influenced by Corbusier's Modernism, such as Corbusier's Japanese apprentices and their following students, Tadao Ando and Kazuyo Seijima. However, as Japanese people rebuilt their cities after the destruction of WW2, they faced problems that modernist architecture could not solve completely, and many Japanese architects began their investigation of new pathways toward new architecture.

The deconstruction of the cultural element becomes necessary in the work of modern architecture. As a local culture was gradually built up from complex historical and regional preferences, determining what fracture of the culture should the building take becomes an important theme. To see what's on the surface and inner of a certain culture becomes the field of Japanese architects' struggles and performance.

3.1. Tadao Ando and Philosophical Practices

Ando Tadao, one of the most famous Japanese architects, is well-known for his use of concrete. As a huge fan of Corbusier, his early inspiration mostly comes from his sketches and works, and as he mentions in the interview, he was moved by the system of the Domino Frame and how Corbusier's architecture was revealed as a building for pure human desire. However, as he continued his career as an architect, he realized how Western modernism and minimalist architecture are based on imagination, and while putting it back to the Japanese context, he thinks that if people are only influenced by the design and method, it would be a superficial understanding of the modernism.



Fig 3. Sumiyoshi's row house [8].

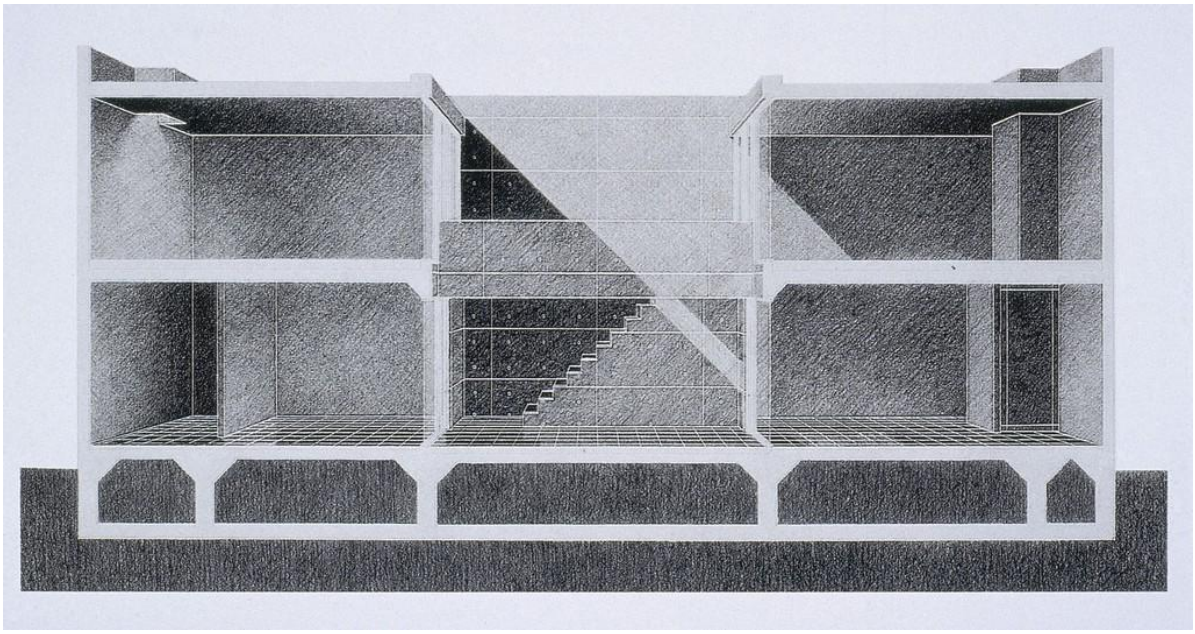


Fig 4. Section Sumiyoshi's row house [9].

Taking Sumiyoshi's row house as an example shown in Figures 3 and 4, what he extracted from the Japanese culture was based on the Idea of a tearoom, an independent and separate space from the outer world [10]. Although the form of the building still follows the path of modernism, the core element of this resident was standing contrary to it. As the open-air bridge connecting rooms exposes residents to the natural environment forcefully, the residential space has no longer been restricted to these necessary functions but focuses more on the building as a quiet and isolated space [11].

As architects like Ando deconstruct and stand against modernism by questioning functionalism and the proposed universal lifestyle, there's another architect who criticized modernism by making the façade not boring. In traditional modernist buildings, although curves were involved, the goal of the universal look of architecture, especially those in urban condensed areas extremely boring. The influence of minimalism has turned every architecture in the street into some square and cubic form.

In the 80s, several different theories were proposed to stand against modernism, and critical regionalism stood out. First created by Alexander Tzonis [12]. In the 80s, this theory of architecture proposed that architecture should go back, giving humanities to the buildings of architecture through the use of local materials, materials, and symbols. As Modernism's Universal fantasy was proven a perspective from colonialism, critical regionalism was considered a path of decolonization and deconstruction of the Eurocentric idea of modernism. This theory has heavily influenced Japanese architect in their future works. However, this concept of blending culture and history into a new form of architecture has been taken through very different paths of deconstruction and reconstruction of cultural elements.

3.2. Kengo Kuma and Visual Approach

Kengo Kuma is another famous Architect who took a different approach in opposing modernism [13]. As he continuously criticizes how modernist buildings desperately try to isolate them from their surroundings, he proposes what he called negative architecture, where he argues that modern architecture should be going back to the original form of architecture, surprisingly not structure, but caves. As he got heavy influence from Bruno Taut, he focused his architecture mainly on the use of local materials and blended them into a facade.



Fig 5. Under one roof [13].

Kengo focuses heavily on how the texture of different materials represents the difference in culture, where a significant amount of his work was famous for showing a connection to critical regionalism and having a sense of Japanese culture inside. As he chooses material for the architecture, he goes through various aspects of it, including trying, cutting, and the color of the material. He thinks the material carries the most information about the culture [13]. This characteristic of his work could be discovered through many of his buildings such as the "under one roof" project shown in Figure 5, local wood materials were chosen carefully and used in a form that has a clear connection with traditional Japanese building façade and structures.



Fig 6. Water & glass [14].

Figure 6 shows another practice by Kuma in his theory against modernism, which is his hotel design called "Water & Glass" located in Atami, Japan, where he let the building merge into the surroundings. In order to achieve this goal, he used glass and blinds to weaken the existence of the structure. Furthermore, he designed a water platform on the same surface as the room, so when people look out of the glass room, they will find that the edge of the room connects to the Ocean downhill, creating a continuous and natural view based on the local environment.

Here could see a clear difference between his approach with the traditional modernist, where he sought the possibility of making the building blend into the environment and make less presence, weakening the existence of architectural elements such as windows and walls. Similar approaches to hiding the architecture in nature could also be discovered in his Kiro-San project where he's asked to build an observation platform for the Kiro Mountain [14].

Originally, the client wanted the observation platform to be an outstanding platform that could draw people's attention and bring tourism to the area, however, different from this traditional architectural demand, Kengo Kuma decided to build tunnels that connect different parts of the mountain, and instead of building a structure on the hill, he refurnished the mountain with plants and trees in the original site, and making the mountain itself an outstanding platform.

There has been criticism against architects such as Ando and Kengo differently on their paths, for Ando, people criticize his building for concentrating too much on a singular Idea, and to proceed with his Ideas, the function of the building was always sacrificed, taking Arow house of Sumiyoshi again as an example, the sky bridge and the outdoor paths have made the building difficult to deal with inconvenient weathers. As for Kuma, his designs are always criticized and he puts forms way over functions, making his buildings only appealing to the investors, but less capable when used.

4. Conclusion

As discussed above, the paper has analyzed some of the Japanese architect's practices in deconstructing culture by taking visual elements or philosophical elements from the culture. And each different approach has reached a certain success.

The approach of both visual and philosophical elements lead to different representation in the architecture, which each stand against traditional Modernism in a good sense.

Although some of their practices still face criticism such as having a bad balance between function and form, they are eventually successful in pushing modernism forward to seek possibilities. As globalization will increase urbanization and economic development in less developed countries that have rich local cultures in the foreseeable future, these approaches and trials could be reviewed in environments more livable and successful environment and in architecture in the future.

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