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# **A Synthesis of Japanese Spirit and Western Form— Tadao Ando's Challenge to Reawaken Human Sensibilities through Architecture**

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## **Introduction**

...the Japanese spirit may work rationally as well as aesthetically and be justified in hoping to solve the difficult task of finding a synthesis of Japan and the West.

—Bruno Taut<sup>(1)</sup>, 1936

Tadao Ando (1941-) is probably the most important and influential Japanese architect working today. The great interest in his works is demonstrated not only by the frequency of his appearances in print, but also by the fact that his monographs are being published one after another. He has received such major international architectural prizes as the Pritzker Architectural Prize (1995) and the American Institute of Architects' Gold Medal (2002). He is known for his spare and rigorous compositions and use of materials, notably concrete, and is accredited with achieving a synthesis between Modernism<sup>(2)</sup> and Japanese tradition. Yale University, in appointing Ando as a fellow (2001-2002), remarked that Ando “*has earned a reputation as a cultural force throughout the world, combining Japanese aesthetic tradition with international Modernism.*”<sup>(3)</sup> Numerous foreign publications have similarly argued that Ando has successfully synthesized “Japan and the West” or “tradition and modernism.” One might say that these Western critics are unable to fully comprehend the spiritual aspects

of Japanese tradition, and furthermore, there is a danger of them to fall into the standpoint of Exoticism. However, from the beginning, a “culture” or “tradition” of a certain country is always and everywhere “discovered” by visiting foreigners or expatriates. Foreign critics hold up a mirror to their Japanese counterparts who by this external stimulation can then reevaluate their own unique culture. It seems evident that both the Western and Japanese observations complement each other in criticizing a work—in the case of Ando’s architecture as well. The role of the Japanese critic is to respond by spelling out what the “Japanese traditional aesthetic” is to a native Japanese.

The “synthesis of Japan and the West” has been a major issue in modern Japan. That is to say that the synthesis of tradition and Modernism has been an issue since Japanese culture met Western culture. Western countries did not experience the same kind of confusion and struggle when Modernism took place in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, because Modernism emerged within a western historical and social context as a continuation of previous western architectural history. However, Modernism in the Far East—including Japan—was an imported concept. Overwhelmed first by the influx of western culture after the Meiji Restoration, and then by Modernism during prewar and postwar period, Japan gradually developed a split between traditional Japanese and Western architecture. Since the inflows of western culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Japanese architects have been groping to find an ideal synthesis of Japan and the West. As Paul Ricoeur<sup>(4)</sup> has articulated, culture cannot simply return to its past.

It is a fact: every culture cannot sustain and absorb the shock of modern civilization. There is a paradox: how to become modern and to return to the sources; how to revive an old, dormant civilization and take part in universal civilization.<sup>(5)</sup>

The fact that Ando is accredited for successfully synthesizing tradition and Modernism demonstrates that the undying issue of “synthesizing

Japan and the West” has been resolved to a certain degree with Ando’s works. In what way then has Ando precisely “synthesized” them and what lies behind his achievement? What elements of “Japanese traditional aesthetics” has Ando incorporated in his architecture? Other architects challenged the same issue of reconciling tradition and Modernism, and yet Ando has been especially well received by the West. What are the reasons for his international acclaim? To attempt to answer these questions is a meaningful task, for the issue of finding a “synthesis” is not a challenge limited to the Japanese or to architecture. In an age of globalization and information technology, preserving traditional culture and identity while accepting the foreign becomes a critical issue. Examining Ando and his works will help us to understand where we stand today and provide us with a new impetus encountering different cultures and cross-cultural communication. Indeed, modernity and globalization has extinguished the distinct diversity of cultures the world once possessed, and as such it is no longer possible to clearly distinguish Japan and the West in a cultural context. Yet, the distinctions in subtle nuances in expression or physical movements observed in the people of these two locales are undoubtedly still present. In other words, these contradictions rooted in their past are what should receive attention in present-day society. Although Modernism or the so-called International Style<sup>(6)</sup> has extinguished the barriers of architecture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to reexamine the regional identities and aesthetics have become ever more meaningful.

The keywords I propose to look for in Ando’s works are “form” and “spirit” because true creative works consist of both “form” and “spirit.” Furthermore, the controversy over how Japanese architecture should be preserved has always been a controversy of these two aspects. Ando, in opposition to previous architects who placed weight on the “form,” has set the Japanese “spirit” above it. His works, utilizing mainly concrete, glass, and steel are at a glance typically modern and western. Yet, at a better look, they convey the Japanese “spirit”—it stealthily exists within the Western “form.” Keeping these keywords in mind, I will review the

footsteps of Modernism and the reception of western architecture in Japan, for the existing thoughts and works are constructed upon the past. Both of these relate to how Ando's thoughts and ideas were cultivated. Next, I will examine Ando's works and ideas behind them in order to understand how the Japanese "spirit" is actually incorporated in his Western style architecture. This will be done along with defining what traditional Japanese architectural aesthetics and conception are in comparison to that of the West. All together, the study will provide us with a better understanding of Ando's interpretation of synthesizing "Japan and the West," "tradition and Modernism," and "spirit and form," and his ultimate goal in creating architecture—to reestablish architecture centered on humanity.

### **The Path to Synthesis**

Japan in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been remarkable in its rapid assimilation of Western architectural forms and structural technology. It was not long before reactionary opinions against the rush toward Westernization appeared, making the synthesis of Japan and the West an issue. In general, although Japanese architects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have been fully conversant in Western styles and active in developing a meaningful modern style appropriate to Japanese sites, most of them remained interested mainly in preserving the traditional "form" rather than its "spirit."

It is generally thought that there were two major importations of western architecture in modern Japan—first with the launch of the Meiji Restoration in 1868, and second, with the influx of Modernism or the International Style, after World War II. The Meiji government's thrust to quickly import Western specialists to function both as practitioners and instructors resulted in Japanese copies of Western architecture. Taut again:

All the Japanese opinions about their own arts oriented themselves too much according to Western ideas; and Japan eventually was

violently affected by the carnival of styles of the West. When tradition broke down, standards of quality disappeared and one copied the foreign even though one's traditional good taste rejected it—it was exotic and therefore interesting.<sup>(7)</sup>

Although there were efforts to reconcile the West and Japan, Japanese prewar architecture in general remained imitative of Western architecture.

The years following World War II saw new and dramatic efforts to reconcile traditional and modern architecture. Kenzo Tange (1931-2005), an internationally recognized architect, managed to fuse traditional Japanese architecture with scientific and technological advancements. In the 1950s and '60s he designed several striking edifices, including Yoyogi National Stadium for the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo, which evoked early agricultural and Shinto architectural forms while retaining refreshing abstraction. A notable controversy over the issue of Japanese tradition versus Modernism erupted in 1955. With Tange taking the lead, major architects and critics such as Noboru Kawazoe, Junzo Yoshimura, Kiyoshi Seike became absorbed in heated controversies in major architectural journals.<sup>(8)</sup> The issue put on the table was centered on how Japanese traditional “form” should be preserved in modern architecture. Tange argued that there were two ways of adapting tradition: one is to work with traditional “form,” and the other is to pursue the “spiritual aspect” of tradition. Tange believed that the modern Japanese architect's mission was to reinterpret the traditional Japanese “form” through modern vocabulary. Although widely eclectic and international in scope, Japanese postwar architecture saw its achievements in contemporary interpretations of traditional forms.

Ando, by his late teens, was well aware of this issue of preserving tradition in the modernized Japan. He spent his childhood in an environment where traditional architecture was close at hand, and naturally became acquainted with its structures and ambiance. Instead of going to college, he made study trips Europe and the United States to view and

analyze the buildings of western civilization. Struck by the differences between Japanese and Western architecture, he “*became more aware of the uniqueness of traditional Japanese architecture.*”<sup>(9)</sup> He was also inspired by the efforts and achievements of his senior architects’ endeavors to resolve the undying issue. He has written how he reacted to the controversy led by Tange in 1955: “*I remember that I did not sympathize with Tange’s idea of preserving tradition in “form”—I felt that the spiritual aspect that underlies the form should receive more attention.*”<sup>(10)</sup> Ando had already begun to shape his attitude toward the issue in his early twenties. He came to think that it is the spiritual aspect of traditional architecture, rather than its superficial form, that must be preserved. His attitude was formed based upon the history of Japan’s westernization and the previous endeavors to reconcile tradition and Modernism.

With the unfortunate intersection of Japan’s economic growth and the rise of functional supremacy in architecture, Ando began to question whether civilization had truly brought spiritual richness to human life. In spite of the aforementioned achievements during the 1950s and ‘60s, standardized and insipid architecture was mass-produced in conjunction with the country’s economic growth. In 1969, Ando established his own architectural office in Osaka. At this time, Japan was in the midst of a period of rapid economic growth that saw the country’s traditional values and customs devalued in the drive for economic development. Values such as venerating the ideas of the past, treasuring the family as a part of the community, and living in harmony with nature started to fade from modern Japanese life. Architectural offices became so concerned with constructing homogeneous buildings that they forgot the human aspect of architecture. Ando wrote: “*Architecture is supposed to be created from the ideas, sentiments and anguish of humans, and yet, most modern architecture does not include these elements any longer.*”<sup>(11)</sup> Ando argues that Japanese architecture, in its pursuit of the western economy and lifestyle, devalued human thoughts and feelings that should accompany the creation of architecture.

Ando, while heavily influenced by traditional Japanese architecture,

has been greatly inspired by the Western concept of Modernism. He has mentioned how he admired the Modernist architects in his younger days. The episode of Ando finding a book of Le Corbusier's and tracing the drawings until it turned black is quite well known. He has often given names such as Mies van der Rohe, Alvar Aalto, etc. great importance in his development. He has said that during his "grand tour" of the Western countries, he was struck by the power of Western architecture, structured as it was upon human rationality and order. While viewing Western architecture from antiquity to the modern age, both his admiration and examination of Modernism was developed in his younger days. Even when Modernism began to be questioned and the majority turned tail and followed the post-Modernist crowd, Ando, receiving substantial inspiration from Modernism remained dogged in his pursuit of examining Modernism.

Modernism, which supposedly emerged with the purpose to establish the individual, in due course relinquished the spiritual aspects of human nature and created standardized human beings without individuality. In the realm of architecture, along with the maturity of Modernism emerged the International Style that introduced the world to the universal materials of steel, glass and concrete. Its physical and financial merits brought standardization to architecture throughout the world. However, Modern architecture relied too much on the functional "forms" and lost track of the human "spirit" that underlies it. One of the pioneers of Modernism, Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969)'s famous statement, "less is more," became overly mythologized, and all elements other than stoic "form" were excluded from architecture. The International Style did not give consideration to the regional peculiarities where the architecture was situated, and cities all over the world became dominated by identical square boxes. Ando argues that the original intention of Modernism became subsumed in the rationality and uniformity implied by the propositions of International Style. He has written:

Although the modern age is supposed to have originated with the



establishment of the individual, in its pursuit of rationalism and ordering of theories, it has abandoned the unspecified aspects of mankind, and has attempted to produce a human nature that is uniform and anonymous and that can be analyzed simply within set limitations.<sup>(12)</sup>

As International Style began to be called in question, the humanistic approach of Regionalism, which aimed to integrate architecture with tradition, history and customs of where the architecture was situated, began to evolve. Numerous attempts to break out of the deadlock of Modernism began in the late 70's and carried on to the 80's and 90's. A once glorified Modernism was taken over by Postmodernism, and soon the architectural realm became crowded with diverse endeavors such as Hi-tech Style, Late Modernism, Vernacularism, and Deconstructivism. Architectural fashion turned from rationalism and functionalism toward historical concerns in the guise of Postmodernism. The move toward Regionalism was evident as early as the 1960s. However, most of those who enunciated Regionalism remained superficial, applying diverse "forms" drawn from different cultural origins but ignoring their spiritual aspects. The original purpose of Modernism—establishing the individual, still seemed to be left out of architectural creations.

Kenneth Frampton,<sup>(13)</sup> who suggested the theory of Critical Regionalism in the 1980s in substitute to Regionalism, has praised Ando's works as a powerful example of his concept. The fundamental strategy of Critical Regionalism is "*to mediate the impact of universal civilization with elements derived 'indirectly' from the peculiarities of a particular place.*"<sup>(14)</sup> Frampton considers Ando as one of the flag bearers of Critical Regionalism. Ando has related how Frampton described Ando's work during a visit to Japan:

While using the modern material and method, [his] works are full of Japanese sensibilities, and takes into great consideration the environment and landscape of where the architecture is situated.<sup>(15)</sup>

Indeed, Ando's ideas seem not dissimilar to Frampton's:

Ever since I began questioning of what Modernism truly was, I have given myself a challenge—to find out how much freedom and individuality can be achieved, how the lost memories of the region, tradition and history can be revived by strictly utilizing geometry and the universal materials.<sup>(16)</sup>

In the course of examining Modernism, Ando became aware of the peculiarities of cultures. In his search to re-establish Modernism centered on the individual, Ando looked inside his own culture, to traditional Japanese architecture. Nonetheless, he does not intend to simply revive the classical concepts of Modernism or Japanese tradition. He has written:

I apply Modernist vocabulary and technology to my architecture, overlaid with distinct contextual elements such as the regional identity and lifestyles of the users. I do not intend merely to mirror the formal traditions of the past; rather, I wish to define new forms through their interpositions with lifestyles and their inter-relationships with distinct regional societies.<sup>(17)</sup>

The strategy Ando applies to incorporate the Japanese “spirit” into the modern and universal “form” of architecture can be seen in the differing methods of “dialogues” between the two. In order to convey his ideas, Ando intentionally minimizes the palette of the “dialogue,” repeating, in many projects, similar or identical elements. He has described how his work constantly oscillated between the two polar elements of spirit/form, historical/modern, abstraction/representation, natural/artificial, illogical/logical, immateriality/materiality, etc. The former elements can be thought as representative of traditional Japanese aesthetics, the latter, Western modernity. It is through this dialogue or confrontation Ando attempts to

synthesize Japan with the West, tradition with modernism.

It is worthwhile to mention that Ando's approach seems to have been cultivated also through his personal experiences. Ando, in his childhood, spent a lot of time at a wood workshop in front of his house. He has written about this experience as: *"I came to understand the absolute balance between a form and the material it is made of...I experienced the inner struggle inherent in the human act of applying will to give birth to form."*<sup>(18)</sup> This suggests that the genesis of the oscillation into the more expressive form of his buildings. His interaction with different artists also seem to have contributed to the development of the belief that "form" speaks to people only when the underlying "spirit" is present. Ando has mentioned Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988) as influential. The renowned sculptor, born of a Japanese father and an American mother struggled to balance two different cultures and identities. Ando found inspiration in Noguchi's words: *"the stone will die if you fiddle with it too much...the stone in the end becomes a form, however, the process—the depth of thinking—in order to reach the form is what interests me."*<sup>(19)</sup> Ando's struggle to create architecture where the "form" and "spirit" interact with each other seems to have originated from his personal experiences. While he fully recognizes that *"architecture, unlike art, cannot end in mere expression,"*<sup>(20)</sup> he nonetheless insists on the creative priority.

## Japanese Spirit in Western Form

Despite some notable cultural exchanges in architecture between Japan and the West, the spiritual or conceptual aspect of aesthetics in Japanese architecture seems to have received less attention than its styles and forms by the West. Japan was greatly influenced by Western architecture, though, ironically, the Japanese culture also had influenced the establishment of early European Modernism. The early Modernists saw in traditional Japanese architecture, the simplicity and spatial egalitarianism

that the West did not possess. They sought in Japanese architecture something that could replace Western architecture, which since feudal times consisted of hierarchically compartmentalized and ornamented space. Nonetheless, although the Modernists adopted Japanese forms and styles to their architecture, they failed to comprehend the conceptual and spiritual aspects of Japanese aesthetics. Indeed, there were architects like Frank Lloyd Wright (1869-1959) and Bruno Taut who came to work in Japan and reassessed Japanese aesthetics in architecture after World War I. Although Wright's Imperial Hotel in Tokyo seemed to have little lasting influence in Japan, his creations in the West revealed his indebtedness to his perceptions of the Japanese aesthetic. Taut stayed in Japan from 1933 to 1936, traveling widely to study Japanese architecture. He reevaluated the Katsura Palace placing it at the pinnacle of Japanese architecture, which provided Japan a new self-confidence in its culture. However, in general, although the Japanese forms and lifestyles were appreciated by the West, the spiritual aspects of traditional architecture could not be "read" with the fluency of a native Japanese.

Japanese aesthetics introduce a whole new set of basic concepts outside the familiar Western aesthetic framework of beauty. Trying to explain in a few words the wide range of Japanese aesthetics is impossible. However, some of the most important traditional aesthetic principles were laid out by the priest Yoshida Kenko (1283-1352), in his work, *Tsurezuregusa* (*Essays in Idleness*, 1330-33). Donald Keene<sup>(21)</sup> has chosen from Kenko's work, the most significant characteristics: simplicity, irregularity, suggestion and perishability. These concepts, reflective of Japanese taste of much earlier eras, are said to have contributed to the formation of aesthetic preferences of Japan in the following centuries. The Japanese did not separate art and aesthetics from environment, ethics, religion and daily life, and thus these characteristics are observed in their architecture as well. Ando added the Japanese sensibilities toward nature to these features and incorporates them into his architecture. Obviously, these are not always applicable to his works, however, they are frequently present in them and

are important elements reflective of the Japanese spirit.

One of the elements of Japanese architecture that Ando considers most important is the relationship between man and nature. Unlike some parts of the world, Japan has four distinct seasons. In the West, nature has been seen as a belligerent force to control and contend with. Japan, however, has traditionally embraced nature with affection as a part of daily life. The Japanese have set nature apart from the domestic habitat, while simultaneously trying to bring it inside. The traditional spatial organization keeps the garden and the interior space as a unit, where the mutual permeation of the interior and the exterior can be observed. The indivisibility of man and nature that lay at the center of Japanese culture cultivated the ambiguous, sensitive and patient nature of the Japanese people. Ando, being indebted to both tradition and Modernism, carefully integrates the contradictory elements of nature and geometry in his residential and institutional projects. Geometry derives from the Western tradition of reason and logic. Being self-contained and informed by pre-established harmony, it has positioned itself through ages as a metaphor of man's power to transcend nature through reason. Ando has written of his intention to integrate both:

My endeavor, in other words, has been to engage the logic of nature and logic of architecture in dialogue—not so that one might absorb the other, and neither so that they might obtain, as in the Japanese aesthetic, an ambiguous fusion—but in a manner by which their harsh confrontation will produce a place rich in creative resonance.<sup>(22)</sup>

The dialogue between the human and nature was evident already in his Row House in Sumiyoshi (1975-76). Ando first came to public notice with this small residence, for which he received the Japanese Architectural Association prize for architecture. This is a two-story dwelling, conceived as a megaron inserted within a row of traditional terrace houses. The

dialogue between man and nature is to be experienced in the courtyard of the house. Inhabitants are compelled to cross an open atrium in all seasons in order to pass from the living space to the dining room, or to ascend from the living level to the bedrooms above and vice versa. Such an arrangement is contrary to commonly accepted standards of occidental, or even oriental, comfort. Nevertheless, Ando believes that the westernized Japanese are more capable of enduring conditions of deprivation than their western counterparts and he challenges the potentiality of man—that through the dialogue with nature, one will reawaken his sensibilities and reevaluate his existence. While he employs geometric form, architectural reason, to give order to the whole, through its conversation with natural elements such as light, air and rain, he seeks to create situations where man and nature can commune.

With respect to the usage of light, the subtle effect of light in traditional architecture has diminished alongside modernization. Postwar Japanese architecture brightly lit the whole room equally, creating a monotonous space. In comparison to European architecture where light is employed dynamically, the traditional Japanese building brought light into the interior in a sentient manner. The “hisashi (canopy),” which lets the winter light penetrate through the room and shuts out the direct rays of the summer sun, carries both direct and reflective lights into various parts of the room. Likewise, the “shoji (paper screens)” filters indirect, subtle light into the room. This Japanese sensitivity towards light is celebrated by the famous writer Junichiro Tanizaki<sup>(23)</sup> (1886-1965)’s *In’ei Raisan (In Praise of Shadows)*, 1933, which Ando has referred to in explaining his usage of light. Tanizaki put it: “and so it has come to be that the beauty of a Japanese room depends on a variation of shadows, heavy shadows against light shadows ... it has nothing else...”<sup>(24)</sup>

It is this traditional aesthetic that we find re-interpreted in many of Ando’s works. The Koshino House (1979-81) is an example of Ando’s attempt to revive this traditional use of light. In this distinctly geometrically formed building, skylight bands and light slots allow sunlight to penetrate

into the interior, creating delicate light sculptures on the walls. A single shaft of sunlight functions as an introverted sundial. Ando depends upon light for the registration of the poetic interaction of his work with the necessary, ever-changing passage of climate and time. The cutting of planes to encompass space is done only after careful consideration of the effects of lighting and shading in Ando's works. At the Horiuchi House (1977-79), he used a free-standing glass block wall that reminds one of the "shoji" screen to define the relation between interior and exterior. Kiyoshi Takeyama<sup>(25)</sup> writes:

In many of his houses, Ando uses walls of glass blocks to admit only diffused light to interior space...His composition of glass block and translucent glass closely resembles that of the opening at the Koho-an...In saying this, however, I do not intend to give the impression that Ando is quoting traditional vocabulary. It is only that his thoughts on the treatment of light have led to a conclusion similar to the traditional one.<sup>(26)</sup>

The light in architecture, variable in colors, temperature, texture and depth, can affect the mentality and spirituality of the occupant. Ando attempts to recreate darkness in the over-lit modern architecture and to reapply delicate and subtle light. Ando has said: "*The light is what gives life to objects.*"<sup>(27)</sup> The various shades of natural light not only bring life to the artificial materials of architecture, but also revive human sensibilities.

Another illuminating aspect of traditional Japanese architecture is its simplicity. The Japanese aesthetic of reductivism reduces excessive elements and simplifies to the utmost limit. The more the excess is stripped, the more one is able to reach truth and gain spiritual richness. This idea is influenced by the concept of "nothingness" in Zen Buddhism. What Taut saw in the Katsura Palace is this concept of Japanese reductivism, which seemed to echo with the simplicity Modernism intended to achieve. Modernism has denuded impractical elements to pursue ratio-

nality and functionality and removed valuable aspects of human spirituality. The reductive behavior of both the Japanese tradition and Modernism are similar, though, there is a difference as Ando has put it:

To reduce in order to merely simplify, and to reduce in order to gain spiritual richness is different...I wanted to create a well thought-out space with spirituality, using simple materials such as concrete, glass and steel.<sup>(28)</sup>

Le Corbusier (1887-1965), by whom which Ando was greatly influenced, created dynamic and expressionistic concrete walls that jut aggressively toward the viewer. In spite of his influence, Ando strains to create simple geometric planes. His stark and stoic walls aim to eliminate superficial elaboration and direct the occupant towards inner reflection. Ando has written: “*it is an architecture reduced to the extremes of simplicity, and an aesthetic so devoid of actuality and attributes that it approached theories of ‘mu’ or ‘nothingness.’*”<sup>(29)</sup> By carving away the excess, Ando’s architecture forms ties with this aesthetical consciousness unique to Japan.

The simplicity in Japanese domestic habitat is not limited to its structure but is also seen in the limited variations of colors. The “tatami” floor, the clay walls, the wood used in ceilings and pillars are all raw materials in crude colors. In such colorless interiors, a woman in kimono or a single flower placed in the “tokonoma (a raised platform)” brings life to the room. The stark colorless and stoic walls of Ando, in a similar way, emphasize human existence. Like the single flow in the tokonoma, it is not the quantity of visual stimuli that bears richness; rather, it is the inner quality of the message. Japanese tradition has cultivated the Japanese to search for the hidden symbolic readings of true inner qualities to reveal the essence of being. To regain this quality and the fullness of life, Ando pursues the Japanese reductive aesthetic.

The Japanese have also had a special appreciation for incompleteness, irregularity, and asymmetry. Leaving something incomplete makes it



interesting, and gives one the feeling that there is some kind of growth. This value can be seen in the dynamism and spontaneity in the forming of a tea bowl, where the form is intentionally distorted in the creative process. Owing to this aesthetic, the most prized Japanese historical structures seem to cluster to one side. A Japanese of the past would not have found the geometrical precision of the famous gardens at Versailles relaxing. Similarly, Westerners, who sense stability and perfection in balanced figures, would have felt uneasy with the famous Horyuji temple and its structured asymmetry. This characteristic of irregularity can be seen in the spatial gaps and openings created in Japanese architecture. Shuji Takashina<sup>(30)</sup> has defined this difference in the conception of space between the West and Japan as follows:

Whereas Westerners tend to view space in a unified and convergent manner, that is, in terms to discrete organized whole, the Japanese see it in pluralistic, divergent manner, in terms of numerous inter-connecting fragments.<sup>(31)</sup>

The spaces—whether they are courtyards, corridors, or staircases may be seen to relate to the Japanese concept of “ma”—which might be translated as implying “the interval of transition.” Influenced by the concept of “ma,” as formulated by Motokiyo Zeami<sup>(32)</sup> (1363-1443) in the book *Fushikaden* (early 15C), Ando conceives of the connection between continuity and “ma” in the following terms:

For me the notion of “ma” is very important because not all the rooms have to function continually. It would be much better if they found themselves in a state of discontinuous movement...I wish to introduce a discontinuous movement into the continuity of my buildings.<sup>(33)</sup>

Ando's intention to recreate this Japanese quality is observed in

his shopping mall, TIME'S I (1983-84). Modern Western architecture praised continuity of space—physical movement was to be reduced to its minimum in pursuit of functionality. However, in TIME'S I, one must walk up and down the staircases and through outside corridors to move from one shop to another, which is not exactly functional. The interruption of movement causes one to experience “*the square in the sky*”<sup>(34)</sup> to coin Riichi Miyake<sup>(35)</sup>'s phrase. Ando has written: “*The human desire to settle things and to leave it as it is confront each other, creating amplitude in the mind. This is what creates spiritual richness.*”<sup>(36)</sup> The physical experience of discontinuity brings about discontinuity in the consciousness, thereby creating amplitude in feelings. The “ma” is what Ando believes produces richness in spirituality. Takeyama has written:

At a glance, Ando's buildings, especially his early ones, seem highly symmetrical...but instead of insisting on symmetry, Ando creates a subtle distortion by means of line of human motion, light or sight...<sup>(37)</sup>

It is customary, in all his works, for Ando to first establish an overall compositional framework within which the basic functional requirements are met—and then to “withdraw,” aware that human life cannot be reduced to rationality. It is these interstitial spaces that encourage the man to become a “participant” in the life of the building, rather than merely a “user” of functionally prescribed spaces.

Another aspect of Japanese traditional aesthetics Ando incorporates in his architecture is the suggestive conception of space. Japanese gardens use techniques that expand the viewer's perception of space in his imagination. At Ryoanji temple (1450) in Kyoto, one can experience the beauty of fifteen rocks strategically placed, amongst a sea of carefully raked white pebbles. The garden, surrounded by a low adobe wall called the “tsukiji” wall, becomes a universe in the Japanese mind. When a space is abstract to the utmost, the meaning of space depends highly on the imagination of the viewer. The relative device—the background scenery

in the “shakkei (borrowed scenery)” tradition is also an example of the suggestive aesthetics found in Japanese gardens. Behind the tsukiji wall of Ryoanji sit far away the mountains and abundant greenery. Without this “shakkei,” the garden loses half of its beauty, that is to say, the mountain and the greenery are “borrowed” to complete the garden. By reapplying this device, Ando succeeds in expressing the depth and the infinite quality of nature in his works. At the Chapel on Mt. Rokko (1985-86), outside the window divided into four quadrants by a concrete post and beam, the simple green garden “borrows” the trees and sky behind the garden wall. Likewise, in his Children’s Museum, Hyogo (1987-89), sheets of shallow water cascade down the side of the museum, towards the broad panorama of a reservoir backed by mountains. This aesthetic of suggestion that Ando employs strongly depends on one’s imagination and sensibility and cannot be explained by reason or logic.

In relation to this suggestive concept of aesthetics, Ando seeks to perpetuate the spatial quality of Japanese religious architecture to resurrect their spiritual qualities in the present. The Chapel on Mt. Rokko, subtly reinterprets the traditional approach for entering spiritual buildings such as shrines and teahouses. The small chapel is on a sloped and densely wooded site near the peak of Mount Rokko in Kobe. The building is composed of a chapel, a bell tower, a colonnade, and an independent wall that cuts off the surrounding greenery. The colonnade is constructed of a series of open concrete frames and steel I-beam tie bars with translucent glass infills on the walls and on the vaulted ceiling. These frames remind one of the hundreds of “torii (gates)” lined up in procession along the hillsides at the ancient Fushimi Inari Shrine (711) in Kyoto. These gates lead the people to the shrine, the object of worship, and also function as an important transition between the sacred and profane spaces. Likewise, one is led to the teahouse by way of “roji (path),” the boundary, and a path to the “other world” symbolized by the teahouse. These approach sequences give a gradual heightening of the religious spirit.

In the case of his Church on the Water (1985-88) in Hokkaido, unlike

traditional Christian churches, here the cross stands outside the chapel. The building is a reinforced concrete structure that has a chapel with a glass wall facing an enormous cross rising from a man-made lake with forest and mountains in the background. To experience God in this natural setting, perhaps, it to experience the encounter with one's own spirit. The church engenders images of symbolic power through extremely simple means; above all through an ambiguous three-dimensional use of the cross motif clustered about the four sides of a glazed belvedere so as to suggest the four quarters of an archaic world. This reminds one of the traditional "churen-nawa (rope)" tied onto four posts, implying the enclosed space to be a sanctuary. This concept is similar to the effect of the white pebbles that surround shrines to imply where the gods reside.

Perishability in Japanese aesthetics is probably the feature most alien to Western sensibilities, where permanence is so valued. While Ando pays respect to the enduring materials of concrete, glass and steel, he incorporates this Japanese fondness for decay into the details of his architecture. In the Western world, men have built huge stone monuments precisely so that their memory will not perish with their earthly existence. A Westerner traveling in Japan in the late 1800s, Lafcadio Hearn<sup>(38)</sup> (1850-1904), reflected on the differences between Japan and the West in his work *Kokoro (Heart, 1896)* : "*generally speaking, we construct for endurance, the Japanese for impermanency.*"<sup>(39)</sup> In traditional Japan, signs of age and wear were valued since they show a long chain of human hands. The flaws and age spots give the work a more human quality and a certain character. The Japanese fondness for cherry blossoms is connected with this aesthetic. Numerous Japanese poets have lamented the cherry blossoms remaining on the trees for the briefest time. Traditional Japanese architecture has used natural materials such as wood, grass and paper—materials that decay over time. The inhabitant, in dialogue with these materials, lives and ages together with the house. Ando, while confining himself to durable materials in constructing his works, has employed perishable materials in the interior of his architecture to integrate this traditional Japanese aesthetic. This feature

can be seen already in the Row House of Sumiyoshi. The floor, doors and installed furniture which the inhabitants physically come in contact with are created by natural materials: the Japanese *gensho-seki* (stone) is adopted in creating the floor, the doors and furniture are all made of oak. Ando has said:

When I built the Row House of Sumiyoshi, I thought of using natural materials inside the house...as years pass by, the perishable materials would change its appearances...I contemplated how the inhabitant and the house could live and age together.<sup>(40)</sup>

This idea is also present in his Church of Light (1987-89), a small Christian chapel in Osaka, where in contrast to the outer concrete box, the floor and chairs are created of wood. This distinctly departs from the idea of employing enduring materials such as aluminum or plastic. The impermanence of life and nature is to remind one of the preciousness of being.

The overall strategy Ando seeks is to personalize Modernism with the simple but potent aesthetic consciousness unique to Japan. What appears on the surface is geometric abstraction, but by purifying form to its limit he strives to express his ideas—to sensitize the contemporary Japanese to the traditional spirituality they once possessed. Within apparently simple substance and form exists meaningfulness of Japanese regional features, history, anthropological traits, and most of all, spirituality. Ando's endeavor to synthesize tradition with Modernism seems to have worked when we see how successfully he folded the Japanese spirit into western-shaped architecture.

## Conclusion

In its course of westernization since the Meiji era, and its transformation into a modern and international society, Japan has unfortunately

lost many of its traditional values and aesthetics. In Japan, modernization was essentially westernization. Architecture is one of the significant fields that have modernized, applying universal materials and advanced technology. Today, the cities in Japan all appear similar, being crowded with identical looking buildings without the distinctive features they once possessed. Japanese architecture has gone through changes, not within its momentum, but mostly from foreign stimulation. The history of the reception of Western culture has also been the history of confusion and struggle between Japan and the West or tradition and Modernism. Controversies over how traditional architecture should be carried on—whether the “form” or the “spirit” should be given priority—in the westernized society have taken place over and over during the past century. Ando’s suspension between tradition and Modernism constitutes a particular condition that the West, so far, has yet to experience. Like other Japanese of his generation and even before him, he has been forced to seek for a resolution to this schism through a synthesis of archaic Japanese values and Eurocentric forms.

While Ando remains indebted to the legacy of the European Modernism movement, his architecture is distinct from the superficial universalism of the International Style. Modernism, in the West, evolved out of man’s cumulative involvement with history and morality, and towards the end of the movement, came to be identified with economic rationalism. Postmodernism, with its seemingly diverse developments, interpreted and resolved the problems of Modernism in a single sweeping motion and created buildings without the essential power they need to stand on their own. Although the impact of Modernism has declined, Ando believes that its essential functions remain valid in contemporary society. Based on this assumption, he applies Modern vocabulary and technology to his architecture, overlaid with contextual elements such as regional identity and aesthetics. In this sense, he rather echoes a developmental concept of Regionalism and parts company with the tenets of classic Modernism.

In his search to re-establish the individual that Modernism originally

intended to achieve, Ando looked into his own culture, the traditional aesthetics of Japan. He has written:

I want to readopt Modernism, which has supposedly been dead, and thrust it in a new direction. One of the strategies I seek is to personalize Modernism with the simple but potent aesthetic consciousness unique to Japan.<sup>(41)</sup>

Traditional Japanese aesthetics distinctly differs from that of its Western counterpart. The former is based upon man's ambiguous sensibilities that cannot be explained simply by logic, and the latter, is based upon man's reason. Ando, being influenced by both Japan and the West, is determined to reconcile the two by placing traditional Japanese aesthetics into Western architecture. Japanese aesthetics have evolved out of the environment, ethic, religion, and daily life of Japan. The constant interaction with nature, the subtle variations of light and shade in living spaces, the natural materials employed to build houses, the reductive concept influenced of Zen Buddhism, the symbolic and suggestive devices employed in gardens and shrines—all of these have molded the spirituality peculiar to Japan. Ando writes:

My desire is to create in a simple concrete box rich in spiritual abundance...Although I have learned much from traditional Japanese architecture, what I create in reality is contemporary architecture influenced substantially from Modernism.<sup>(42)</sup>

Disciplining himself within the concrete rules of geometry and universal materials, Ando's goal is to express the ambiguous spirituality of Japanese culture.

In addition to Ando's conviction about the spiritual capacity of architecture, his belief in its critical potential for the revitalization of society and life is evident in his works. As the so-called information society continues

to develop, the spiritual aspects that cannot be replaced by digitalization is apt to be left out from the creation of architecture. The world is becoming ever more homogenized and people are driven by an overflow of information and excessive desire. The Row House in Sumiyoshi clearly rejected contemporary society's hunger for convenience at the expense of spiritual richness. Ando's emphasis on nature and human sensibilities in his architecture warns the modern man to rethink what truly is essential to life. Ando has said: "*In making a critique of society, using only words is not enough. As an architect, one must express his opinions in physical form.*"<sup>(43)</sup> Ando's works can be considered as a silent protest against the path civilization has taken in Japan.

In order to convey his ideas, Ando creates a dialogue between two confrontational elements and concepts so that the occupant feels with his body and senses the fundamental aspects of humanity. Through photographic information, one can only perceive the form of architecture. To actually feel the "spirit" of architecture is only realized by direct experience. Ando's works only come to life through physical and sensuous experience; that is to say, experience is Ando's architecture's *raison d'être*. He conceives his buildings more as sensitizing devices than as functional shelters. His works define that his creative intent is centered on dialogue with human sensibilities:

My approach to the person who will use these spaces amounts to acting as an intermediary in a deep dialogue between him and architecture, because my spaces transcend theory and appeal to the deepest spiritual levels. In other words, my spaces relate to fundamental aspects of humanity.<sup>(44)</sup>

Through the examination of Ando's works and the ideas behind them, one realizes that his drive to re-establish the individual is connected to his goal of reviving traditional spirituality—both of which focus on humanity. Despite the current architectural trend towards creating architecture that



“indirectly” implies regional peculiarity, the universal aspect of Ando’s anthropocentric approach is what seems to attract the international audience. Ando has written:

I have often asked myself why Westerners should show interest in my work...In all likelihood, the Western perception of the problem it is facing, and my own perception, have something in common. Perhaps my work provides some stimulus to those who are searching for possible new relationships among human beings, civilization, culture and nature.<sup>(45)</sup>

A talented artist, whether consciously or unconsciously, seems to be able to seize the moment and foresee the future. Acclaimed works reflect the thoughts and issues of the era, and therefore stimulate society. As Ando has speculated, many of the experiential aspects of his architecture transcend cultural differences. The goal of Ando’s architecture—to re-establish the individual, to look into one’s own identity, to reach the depth of spirituality, to reawaken human sensibilities, to reveal what is important in life—is probably what attracts people in this global, digital world. Ando, as a member of the *après-guerre* generation, was able to objectively examine both the achievements of Modernism as well as Japan’s reception of Western architecture. He saw the possibility of regaining the humanistic aspects of architecture that were lost because of function-oriented economic priorities. Ando’s approach is not to withdraw into the past, but to transcend transformations and move into the future. His attempt to synthesize Japan and the West is also a challenge to reawaken a deeper sense of what it means to exist in our contemporary society.

## Notes

- (1) Bruno Taut, *Fundamental of Japanese Architecture*, (Tokyo: The Society for International Cultural Relations, 1936), 13.
- (2) Modernism in architecture was an attempt to create a non-historical architecture of functionalism in which new sense of space would be created with the help of modern materials.
- (3) *Yale Bulletin and Calendar*, Vol. 30, Number 5, October 5, 2001.
- (4) Paul Ricoeur is widely regarded as the foremost living phenomenologist. His writings cover a wide range of topic, from history of philosophy, literacy criticism, aesthetics to metaphysics, etc.
- (5) Paul Ricoeur, *History of Truth*, quoted in Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for and Architecture of Resistance," Foster, Hal ed. *The Anti-Aesthetic—Essays on Postmodern culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), 16.
- (6) Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and other Bauhaus leaders migrated to the United States when the Nazis rose to power. The term "International Style" was applied to the American Form of Bauhaus architecture. While Bauhaus architecture had been concerned with the social aspects of design, the International Style became a symbol of capitalism.
- (7) Taut, *ibid.*, 10.
- (8) The controversy began with an essay written by Tange and Kawazoe that appeared on an architectural magazine *Shinkenchiku*, January 1955. The title of the essay was "How Modernism Should be Interpreted in Contemporary Japan—The Mission to Create Tradition."
- (9) Tadao Ando, *Kenchiku wo Kataru* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1999), 11.
- (10) *Ibid.*, 49.
- (11) *Ibid.*, 28.
- (12) Ando, "A Wedge in Circumstances," *Tadao Ando—Buildings, Projects, Writings* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1984), 134.
- (13) Kenneth Frampton is a Modern Architecture historian. He has written extensive critiques on Ando.
- (14) Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism; Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," *The Anti-Aesthetic—Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), 21.
- (15) Ando, *Kenchiku wo Kataru*, 42.
- (16) *Ibid.*, 41.
- (17) Ando, "How to Deal with the Hopelessly Stagnant State of Modern Architecture,"

- Tadao Ando: The Yale Studio & Current Works* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1989), 22.
- (18) Ando, "From Self-Enclosed Modern Architecture Towards Universality," *Tadao Ando—Buildings, Projects, Writings* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1984), 139.
  - (19) Ando, *Kenchiku wo Kataru*, 140.
  - (20) *Ibid.*, 62.
  - (21) Donald Keene is a scholar of Japanese literature and drama.
  - (22) Ando, "In Dialogue with Geometry: The Creation of Landscape," *GA Architect 12—TADAO ANDO 1988-1993* (Tokyo: A.D.A. Edita Tokyo, 1993), 25.
  - (23) Junichiro Tanizaki is a novelist whose works dealt with the tensions between the traditional and the modern culture of Japan. His nostalgic love for the traditions and remnants of the past is expressed in this essay.
  - (24) Junichiro Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows* translated by Thomas J. Harper and Edward G. Seidensticker (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1977), 18.
  - (25) Kiyoshi Takeyama is an architect and architectural critic. He has written numerous essays and articles on architecture and urban design.
  - (26) Takeyama, "Tadao Ando: Heir to a Tradition," *Perspecta 20: The Yale Architectural Journal* (Boston: MIT Press, 1983), 169.
  - (27) "Ando Tadao: Dento to Gendai Kenchiku," Interview with Ando Tadao, *Taiyo*, October 1995 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1995), 38.
  - (28) Ando, *Kenchiku wo Kataru*, 50.
  - (29) Ando, "From Self-Enclosed Modern Architecture Towards Universality," 142.
  - (30) Shuji Takashina is an art historian. Director general of the National Museum of Art and professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo.
  - (31) Shuji Takashina, ed. "Tokyo: Creative Chaos," *Japan Echo*, Vol. XIV (Tokyo: Japan Echo, 1987), 5.
  - (32) Zeami Motokiyo or Kanze Motokiyo was a Japanese actor, playwright, and drama theorist. According to Zeami, "ma" is that which is found in the transition between one gesture and the other that the actor evokes during his role.
  - (33) Ando, in *Ce que le terrain nous raconte Architecture, Movement et Continue*, no. 250, April 1987, 46, quoted in *GA Architect 8—TADAO ANDO 1972-1987* (Tokyo: A.D.A. Edita Tokyo, 1987), 23.
  - (34) Riichi Miyake, "The Square in the Sky," in *Tadao Ando, Rokko Housing* (Milan: Edizioni Electa, 1986), 8-9.
  - (35) Riichi Miyake is a scholar of architectural history, history of urban and industrial design.
  - (36) Ando, *Kenchiku wo Kataru*, 80.
  - (37) Kiyoshi Takeyama, *op. cit.*, 168.
  - (38) Lafcadio Hearn played an important role in introducing Japanese culture to the rest

- of the world via the medium of literature. He came to Japan in the middle of the Meiji period, eventually adopting the name Yakumo Koizumi.
- (39) Lafcadio Hearn, *Kokoro* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1970), 56.
  - (40) "Ando Tadao: Dento to Gendai Kenchiku," 42.
  - (41) Ando, "How to Deal with the Hopelessly Stagnant State of Modern Architecture," 21.
  - (42) Ando, *Kenchiku wo Kataru*, 68.
  - (43) Ando, Interview with Tom Henegan, Osaka, January 1993. *GA Architect* 12, 22.
  - (44) Ando, "A Wedge in Circumstances," 134.
  - (45) Ando, *Space Design*, September 1989 (Tokyo: Kashima Shuppankai, 1989), 35.

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- tional Publications, 1980.
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