Architronic

WITHOUT MODERNITY:
Japan's Challenging Modernization

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Are Westernization and modernization interrelated? Is it possible for modernization to occur without modernity being present? The derivation of the latter pair of words suggests a close relationship, and for much of the twentieth century Westernization has been treated as an implicit factor in any modernization. (Ref.1) I would argue, though, that this is not the case - that modernity is a construct which has certain attributes that are associated with Western culture but that are not necessary for modernization. Japan's industrialization, with its rapid shift from a politically isolated and feudal nation to the second largest economy in the world, demonstrates that neither Westernization nor modernity is necessary for modernization. It also suggests that modernization does not seem to foster the eventual development of modernity, even where the two are treated as complementary.

Modernity refers to a set of related attributes that resulted from the Industrial Revolution and its social and economic ramifications. Because the Industrial Revolution was the result of technological advances, in modernity scientific and rational thought are valued and economic efficiencies are promoted. This emphasis on rational thought and abstraction means that conscious states are considered more important than subconscious states; aesthetic or intuitive ways of thinking are considered peripheral to development. Modernity is also tied to Christianity through the Weberian proposition that Calivinism promoted hard work and capital accumulation. This is not to claim that modern nations are Christian (although many of Japan's modernizers were also encouraged by American supporters to embrace Christianity) but only that Christianity was to have established a set of values which fostered modernity. In fact, under modernity, tradition is rejected in favor of progress; development away from all traditions, including religion, is treated positively. Additionally, although this point will not be addressed here, the political and economic shifts which accompanied the Industrial Revolution and led to democracy or the privileging of the individual were implicit in modernity.

Modernization refers to technological advancement and so, on its surface, would seem to imply parallel developments to those seen during the Industrial Revolution in the West, especially as these technological developments generally lead to economic expansion and political change. A state of modernization can be said to exist when the country in question has arrived at a point comparable to the technological development of other leading nations - but it does not imply a cultural or political condition. Where industrialization is learned, rather than developed internally, many of the cultural attributes originally necessary in the Industrial Revolution do not emerge, or are freely adapted.

Using this set of definitions, it can be argued that modernization and modernity, while they appear to be a tautology, can be isolated. Ironically, Japan proves this point through a complete disregard for many of the key concepts of modernity. The country did, however, deliberately set out to both modernize and Westernize. That it has successfully modernized, while having been unsuccessful in its attempts to Westernize, demonstrates where these issues diverge.

While most of basic points of modernity simply do not apply to Japanese culture, the crucial differences in the field of architecture are probably the privileging of subconscious over rational thought and the

acceptance of tradition in general, particularly religious traditions. As John Clammer states in an extensive discussion of the topic of modernity in Japan, "The concrete rather than the abstract, mundane detail rather than grand theory, the acceptance of the convergent and the fleeting rather than the permanent and the eternal... can be seen immediately in Japanese poetry, painting, architecture and even modern town planning." (Ref.2) Moreover, the metanarrative of Christianity does not exist in a country where fewer than two percent of the population is Christian; in its place is a regard for nature - although, as in the West, this may be honored more in the breach. But a close look at the architecture of Japan will make clear that many of the other traditions of Japanese architecture continue to be esteemed and are consciously referred to in the theoretic foundations of any of major architect. (Ref.3) In contrast to Modernist architects from the West, architects in Japan may move com (fortably between a contemporary palette and explicit references to earlier styles. (Ref.4)

In contrast with the issue of modernity, the integration of Westernization and modernization has a long history in Japan. So, as C.E. Black points out, while it would be preposterous to refer to the earliest modernization of England and France as "Westernization," the two terms are commonly linked in discussions of Japan. (Ref.5) During the mid-nineteenth century modernization of Japan, referred to in the traditional calendar as the Meiji Era, leaders accepted that industrialization and Westernization were reciprocal and that both were necessary for development. (Ref.6) In addition to actively promoting telegraph, lighthouse, and railroad construction, for example, the government also used Western buildings and institutions to advance its modernization program. Japan employed Western engineers to build the nation's infrastructure and Western architects to design offices, banks, universities, and schools; these specialists were collectively referred to as *oyatoi*. (Ref.7) In more isolated areas, where Western architects were not present, indigenous carpenters attempted to reproduce the finishes and spatial characteristics of Western architecture, particularly in the construction of government offices and primary schools. (Ref.8)

The use of new forms of architecture in support of introduced institutions was widespread. In the period between 1869 and 1882, Japan established navy, telegraph, and postal systems based on the British forms of these institutions; an army, private schools, and police and judicial systems based on French typologies; and banking and agricultural college systems based on those found in the United States. (Ref.9) These new civic and cultural institutions naturally required that they be housed in compatible structures; as such building types had already evolved with the institutions, the Japanese were quick to encourage *oyatoi* and their Japanese counterparts to utilize established typologies. The foreign architects and engineers produced barns, vocational classrooms, post offices, and railroad stations - to name only a few of the introduced building types - based upon their experiences at home.

This construction program, which affected every community in the country, fostered major cultural shifts in that the conventional ways of inhabiting a space by sitting on the floor were no longer appropriate in these buildings. The Japanese - members of the elite in particular, as they were being schooled in Western-style buildings, visiting or working from Western-style governmental offices, and attending formal events in Western clubs and reception rooms - found that the architecture demanded they use Western furniture and dress in Western clothes and shoes. (Ref.10) In fact, the government went so far as to pass an edit which required that all public servants wear Western clothing and children in schools wear uniforms styled in a Western manner. Furthermore, as part of Japan's "modernization" drive, The emperor also promoted Western customs such as eating meat and ballroom dancing, and academics seriously advocated the abandonment of the Japanese writing system in favor of the alphabet. Japanese leaders embraced this behavior as demonstrating that the country was achieving civilization by the standards of the international community.

Cultural features of Western countries were advocated as a necessary part of the modernization process because Japan's leaders accepted the idea that there was a single model for modernization, and that the successfully-industrialized countries of Europe and North America represented this model. Western countries reinforced these assumptions by judging Japan's progress based on cultural changes as well as on political and economic terms; it was suggested that only by achieving Western standards in all spheres would Japan be able to operate internationally as an equal to the nations of the West. In this regard, both sides were influenced by a primary tenet of modernity, the universality of any successful approach. This belief was not confined to the nineteenth century. Although Japan began to reject as inappropriate the wholesale adoption of Western customs as early as the end of the Meiji period in 1912, foreign academics studying Japan, referred to as the Modernization School, still argued for a universal model as late as the 1970s. (Ref.11)

To say, though, that the West is present in Japan is not necessarily to claim that Japan has Westernized. As one example, the early introduction of foreign architecture during the Meiji period has clearly altered Japanese construction practices. Western materials were rapidly adopted; first brick, and later concrete, were understood to offer a solution to the frequent and catastrophic fires which had plagued Japan's cities. However, even buildings designed by *oyatoi* were not entirely Western in their design and execution: roofs were often fabricated of local materials for reasons of economy, and the internal structure of most "Western" buildings was still very much a result of Japanese construction practices. The wall, with its Western appearance and its Japanese internal structure, offers a useful analogy for many other areas of Japanese culture. As Jean-Pierre Lehmann noted in an insightful book on outside interpretations of Japan, "There is considerable doubt and diversity of opinion among scholars today regarding the depth of Western penetration in Japan; in other words, while admitting changes on the surface, one may ask to what extent these changes were profoundly implanted..." (Ref.12)

The blending of traditional fabrication practices and Western materials technologies is in fact still evident today. Japanese carpentry, for instance, tended to rely on moment-resistant joints with prefabricated connections, allowing for rapid assembly on site. Now Japanese steel construction, using an introduced material, follows the same strategy. The structures of most urban buildings are assembled in a matter of days, using two- to three-story components with prefabricated moment-resistant joints, unlike site-based steel construction seen in the United States. The construction of a contemporary steel building at first appears to be Western because traditional Japanese spatial forms and materials are not evident and materials developed in the West are used. However, it is more accurate to say that Japanese practice advanced by creating a hybrid based on the materials technologies from the West and conventional construction practices. As in other areas of industrial and technological development, Japan already had an established and successful set of practices, but materials - or in other cases, technologies - which were first developed in the West were found to be more suitable the nation's needs.

Therefore, while the West was emulated widely and freely, only selected aspects of Western culture were adopted. Previously unknown machines or materials need not be rediscovered; as Kenneth Pyle wrote in *The Making of Modern Japan*, "The steam engine did not have to be invented a second time." (Ref.13) The cultural context which initially supported the Industrial Revolution in the West was also not necessary to this modernization; instead development could be managed by selecting those elements which appeared most useful. The adaptation of new systems might result in changes through the acceptance of Western elements, but did not immediately prevent Japanese conventions from being maintained in an adapted form.

To assume that these adoptions signal a shift towards

the originating culture is a mistake as the utilization of new institutions and new technologies does not necessarily indicate acceptance of the original cultural framework in which these systems developed. (Ref.14) While at first glance Japan has very clearly incorporated many of the trappings of Western society, the continuing differences in Japanese forms are worth noting. The evolution of the railroad station in Japan, first introduced as part of Japan's modernization drive, has resulted in something quite different from the transportation centers of the West. Because private rail companies have actively developed the areas around their own stations, building department stores at central locations and housing communities in suburban areas, these areas have emerged as the focal points in Japan's urban life.

For a long time, these differences were ascribed simply to a modernization/Westernization which was still incomplete. However, it is no longer appropriate to assume that further Westernization will occur as a result of increased economic or technological advances. After all, in economic terms Japan has surpassed many of the countries that were its original models. Instead, as one of the few nations to successfully initiate industrialization in the nineteenth century, Japan offers provocative evidence that modernization can be had on terms which are not those established by the original modernizers.

REFERENCES

Ref.1: See for example Black, C.E. The Dynamics of Modernization: *A Study of Comparative History*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

Ref.2: Clammer, John. *Difference and Modernity: Social Theory and Contemporary Japanese Society*. (London: Kegan Paul International, 1995), 65.

Ref.3: Architects tend to refer to different points, though. Isozaki, for instance, has emphasized Japanese spatial characteristics in his writings on *Ma*, Maki writes on village organization and the *oku*, and Kurokawa focuses on the culture of play and on *wabi*, theaesthetic of poverty which influenced tea.

Ref.4: Some projects which stand out as being unusual for architects working in a Modernist vein include the tea houses designed by Kurokawa Kisho, the neo-Renaissance work of Isozaki, and the use of traditional detailing, particularly in the stone, of Maki's Kyoto Museum of Contemporary Art.

Ref.5: Black, 6.

Ref.6: The Meiji Era extended from 1868 through 1912, and is still commonly considered as the most active period of Japan's industrial development. It is not, however, considered to be the beginning of Japan's modern age, which many academics today date to the early Tokugawa Shogunate, in the beginning of the 17th century.

Ref.7: These projects are covered exhaustively in Finn, Dallas. *Meiji Revisited: the Sites of Victorian Japan*. (New York: Weatherhill Inc., 1995).

Ref.8: This point was made by Dr. Fujimori Terunobu in his book *Nihon no Kindai Kenchiku. Volume 1: Bakufu* Meiji* . (Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho, 1993).

Ref.9: Pyle, Kenneth B. *The Making of Modern Japan*. (Lexington, Massachusetts, D.C. Heath & Co., 2nd edition, 1996), 79.

Ref.10: This point is made in Yoshida Mitsukuni, et al., eds. *The Hybrid Culture: What Happened When East and West Met*. (Tokyo: Cosmo Public Relations Corp., 1984), 64.

Ref.11: Williams, David. *Japan: Beyond the End of History*. (London: Routledge, 1994), xvi. Kurokawa Kisho argues that Japanese architects saw modernization and Westernization as equivalent as late as the period following the postwar occupation by American forces. See Kurokawa Kisho. *New Wave Japanese Architecture*. (London, Academy Editions, 1993), 7-8.

Ref.12: Lehmann, Jean-Pierre. *The Image of Japan: From Feudal Isolation to World Power*. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978), 24.

Ref.13: Pyle, 104.

Ref.14: See, for example Tobin, Joseph, ed. *Remade in Japan: Everyday Life and Consumer Taste in a Changing Society*. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1992).

In addition to those books listed in the footnotes, useful references for readers who are interested in further exploring the general topic of modernization and Westernization in Japan include:

Gluck, Carol. *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

Jansen, Marius B. *Changing Japanese Attitudes Towards Modernization.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

Marius Jansen, ed. *The Emergence of Meiji Japan*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.) This book is made up of selections from Chapter 5 of the *Cambridge History of Japan.*

Kuwabara Takeo. *Japan and Western Civilization.* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1983).

Smith, Thomas C. *Native Sources of Japanese Industrialization*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

Totman, Conrad. *Early Modern Japan*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). A further reference for readers who are interested in exploring the topic of Meiji architecture:

Stewart, David. *The Making of a Modern Japanese Architecture: 1868 to the Present*. (Tokyo: Kodansha International Press, 1987.)