

On the Coexistence of Japanese Design Tradition and Modern Tolerance

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Abstract

In the short period of time after the war, Japan has reached a relatively mature stage of design development and has developed its own cultural characteristics of internationalization and nationalism. On the basis of absorbing the essence of Western civilization, Japan has fused its local culture with it, forming a unique cultural feeling. This cultural feeling has been accompanied by the development of Japanese design in the modern field, and it is a source of great admiration and curiosity to researchers that traditional culture has not been neglected while developing modern design in Japan. At the same time, the relationship between the two is mutually reinforcing, and they develop together to form a diverse and inclusive cultural system.

Keywords

Design; Japanese Culture; Tradition and Modernity.

1. Background of the Development of Design in Japan after the War

It is said that when Konosuke Matsushita returned to Japan from his study tour of the European and American markets, the first thing he said after stepping off the plane was, "The age of design is coming." This was a frank and direct statement made by an entrepreneur with a high sense of development, who saw the development prospects of design. Only when the economy has developed to a certain level and the society has developed to a certain level can an adequate life be achieved. This statement by Konosuke Matsushita also opened a new period of modern development for Japanese design.

With the support of the United States, Japan gradually became a strong economy, and the sustained economic recovery after the war provided the foundation for the development of design and the opportunity for Japanese design to gain a foothold in the international market. In the early days of post-World War II Japan, in order to nurture a new culture of life, it greedily absorbed the living culture of Europe and the United States, swallowing it first regardless of whether it could be digested or not, in order to promote the rapid maturation of the people's living consciousness in a short period of time. Therefore, in the early stage of Japanese design development, borrowing was the main way of development and learning.

Japan's post-war design development is inseparable from its rapid post-war economic growth and its emergence as a major manufacturing country. The Japanese government and companies cooperated to establish a sound and developed domestic market, which contributed to the maturation of Japanese design. The government's strong support for design and the high importance that companies attach to design are important reasons for the development of Japanese design. After Konosuke Matsushita visited the United States, he actively promoted the development of Japanese industrial design and was the first to establish an industrial design department in his company. After that, various industries set up design departments within their own companies one after another, actively improving product design and gradually bringing Japanese products to the world.

2. Characteristics of the Development of Traditional Japanese Design

The traditional Japanese aesthetic tradition focuses on details and nature, and the overall style is mainly simple and plain, with an emphasis on the spiritual meaning of aesthetics. Tradition is the driving force of pioneering and developing human life. Modernity and tradition, a pair of mutually contradictory categories, while Japan's modern design is among the world's design powerhouses with its unique national characteristics. Japan's unique geographical conditions and long history have given birth to a distinctive Japanese culture. Cherry blossoms, kimono, haiku and samurai, sake and Shintoism constitute two aspects of traditional Japan - the chrysanthemum and the sword. In Japan there are the famous three ways, namely the Japanese folkways of tea, flower arrangement and calligraphy. When it comes to calligraphy, I believe many people would think it is an art unique to China. In fact, calligraphy is not only prevalent in Japan, but is also one of the ways people cultivate their spirituality. The traditional Shinto beliefs of the Japanese make Japanese traditional art particularly clean and neat, while the Japanese belief in Buddhism has led to a frugal and simple aesthetic that is not complete and non-routine, and a spirit of introversion, self-control and self-cultivation. Japanese folk art, prints and ukiyo-e mainly depict people's daily lives, landscapes, and dramas. In Asian and world art, it has been influential for more than 300 years, with many European masters, from Classical to Impressionist, being inspired by this style of painting.

For more than 1,000 years, Japan absorbed a great deal of Chinese Tang culture, and after the collapse of the Tokugawa regime in 1868 and the beginning of the Meiji Restoration, Japan entered a period of "civilization and enlightenment. During this period, Japan introduced Western civilization in the same way that it had accepted Chinese culture in its entirety before the 11th century, and achieved great results, laying the foundation for the construction of a modern nation. The formation and development of any culture is influenced by many factors. National and foreign history, as well as Buddhism, Confucianism, and even Christianity have all played a role in Japanese culture, and Japan, while always changing, has never really departed from its oldest indigenous cultural roots.

Traditional Japanese art has been influenced by Shinto beliefs and exhibits a reverence for nature and purity and simplicity. The Japanese belief in Buddhist Zen Buddhism has shaped the Japanese people's simplicity and love of non-integrity, non-routine aesthetics, and spirituality that promotes introversion, self-control and self-cultivation.

3. Development Characteristics of Japanese Modern Design

Under the influence of modernism, Japanese designers began to think about how to form a design idea with their own characteristics. The original practice of many Japanese designers to copy the European and American modernism as it is did not work well in the land with strong Japanese culture. This prompted them to reflect on what kind of things are "Japanese". This question has been repeatedly raised in the recent history of Japanese design. Since the Meiji Restoration, Western objects and ideas have often been compared with Japanese originals, and this has become a very special phenomenon in Japanese culture.

This was a feature of the early borrowing stage in the history of Japanese design development, so that Chinese and Korean influences can be seen in traditional Japanese design, and American, German and Italian influences can be seen in modern Japanese design. In this stage of development, Japanese design gradually switched from the initial stage of blindly following Western styles to finding its true self from imitation after the war, gradually escaping from the level of confusion and bewilderment, and gaining international recognition for its special characteristics of modern and traditional dual tracks. The reason for these two aspects of Japanese design is the duality of Japanese modern culture, which refers to (1) the coexistence

of East and West in Japanese culture, and (2) the coexistence of pomp and simplicity in Japan's deep-rooted traditional culture.

A very important characteristic of Japanese design is its dual system of traditional and modern, one that is more national, traditional, warm, and historical; this type of design is mainly for the Japanese domestic market, and to a large extent is not only commodity design, but also one of the components of culture. Japanese traditional design has developed on the basis of Japanese national culture, and has been refined over time to a high level of simplicity and refinement, and has developed its own particular national aesthetic standards. The other kind is modern, developed and international. The use of imported technology, for export, was a very important center and purpose of the development of Japanese modern design. Internally, the development of Japanese modern design significantly improved the standard of living of the Japanese people after the war, providing a new Western-style, modernized way of life; externally, it greatly promoted Japan's export trade, establishing a solid foundation for the export of Japanese products, and sweeping away the image of pre-war Japan as a country of poor quality and backward design.

Japanese designers also played an important role in the development of Japanese design, and the Japan Advertising Artists Club, established in 1951 by designers such as Yusaku Kamekura and Fumio Yamana, aimed to raise the level of Japanese design and discover new generations of designers. It has enabled designers such as Kazumitsu Tanaka, Shigeo Fukuda and Yasuhira Sugiura to shine. By looking at the works of these designers, we can feel that Japan is no less global and modern in design than European design. However, at the same time, when enjoying the works, it is also clear that Japanese designers still inadvertently reveal some Japanese style in their works. The generation of designers who grew up in the traditional Japanese education began to have a lack of confidence in Japanese culture after the defeat of the war, and began to accept Western culture wholesale, but different from "Dadaism" and "fetishism", they began to adopt a similar "eclectic" approach to learning Western design, which eventually led to different effects of Japanese design in the domestic and international markets, catering to the tastes of consumers in different regions while retaining their own fine characteristics.

The post-World War II designers carried a certain sense of inferiority and disapproval of the original Japanese indigenous style. At that time, Japanese architects represented by Kenzo Tange tried to break through the Japanese style, and they all tried to avoid the direct use of Japanese elements in their designs, so the characteristics of Japanese architecture at that time were to try their best to hide Japanese elements, but despite this, there were still many excellent buildings reflecting the Japanese own architectural design style.

Few countries in the world have been able to retain their original cultural heritage intact while modernizing and developing, and even continue to promote their national traditional designs. Since Japan began to develop its design after World War II, its traditional design has largely not been eroded by modernization. This has a lot to do with the government's attention and support to traditional design.

4. Japanese Culture in Which Tradition and Modernity Coexist

When studying Japanese culture, we find that both religion and art and design are uncommonly diverse and tolerant in Japan, and that various cultures can develop peacefully and coexist in a pluralistic manner. Rather than a fierce friction between tradition and modernity, the two are promoted and integrated through a dual system.

The Edo period was a very unique time a hundred years ago. More than a thousand years of cultural accumulation and three hundred years of lockdown created a purely Japanese Edo culture. The Meiji Restoration, however, allowed people to be baptized by Western culture at

once, and this conversion brought about a strong cultural impact. In such a process of great cultural change, the Japanese people showed an amazing ability to accumulate information and learn. When Japanese culture merged with American culture after the Second World War, the Japanese gradually gained a new perception of the world after experiencing the pain of many cultural fractures since the recent times. The Japanese always seem to put themselves on the edge of the world, which is not an inferiority complex, but a habitual way to put themselves in a humble position to think about things, thus maintaining a more prudent world view.

This series of peculiar Japanese cultural phenomena seems to somehow make sense if explained from the perspective of geography. If you rotate the map ninety degrees, within the map of Asia, there is nothing below Japan, and behind it is a deep Pacific Ocean, a position where all cultural information can be received. Japan has always been in such a position. It would be realistic to say that this is the edge, but there are very few places in the world that have such a "cool" pattern. This unique way of looking at Japan can also explain the simplicity of the imagery that is prized in Japanese culture, which is unique in Asia in terms of having a little something in an empty space. Japanese design is very different from the rest of Asia in that it is simple and uncomplicated. Japanese culture is a melting pot, and after accepting many cultures wholesale, it brings chaos, but when Japanese culture blends them, it forms the most thorough simplicity. First of all, it returns to zero and discards all. Japan's aesthetic consciousness was also formed by balancing all cultural senses, as the unique cultural sensibility of its unique geographical location, combined with the complex relationship between Japan and the world generated in recent times, have together created the Japan of today.

To sum up, Japan's design development after the end of World War II has embodied an international sense while retaining traditional elements. The special temperament of Japanese design is inextricably linked to national conditions, a choice made by history and the spirit of the Japanese nation itself. Japan is also a country that has experienced setbacks, and after understanding its design history, we need to absorb its experience for reflection and provide powerful reference for exploring and developing our own design.

China and Japan are close neighbors across the sea, and the two countries are inextricably linked in art and culture. In the field of design, we can look at Japan as a mirror, see the stage we are in now from Japan at that time, treat design as an important and indispensable component of the country, study design with care, and subconsciously raise the people's attention to design and art, and take design as a way of life.

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