Reconsideration of the World Design Conference 1960 in Tokyo and the World Industrial Design Conference 1973 in Kyoto

Transformation of design theory

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Abstract: This paper focuses on two international conferences that were held in Tokyo and Kyoto in 1960 and 1973, respectively. Through reevaluation of these conferences, the changes in design theory are discussed. In the 1960s, Japanese designers worked under the influence of the World Design Conference (WoDeCo). As represented in the conference theme "Our Century: The Total Image—What Designers can Contribute to the Human Environment of the Coming Age" [1], majority of the Japanese participants were conscious of the designer's social function and the WoDeCo opened various aspects and enlightened modernism. In contrast to the WoDeCo, the theme of the World Industrial Design Conference 1973 in Kyoto (ICSID '73 Kyoto) was "Soul and Material Things," which focused on the problems of design activities in a rapidly changing world driven by concomitant growth in the industry. According to this conference's keynote speech by Jean Baudrillard, "Design between Political Economy and Symbolic Exchange" addressed "the death of objects." Therefore, the ICSID marked the end of modern design's role in providing the meaning and function of materials. By comparing these two conferences, we can clearly observe and describe the transformation in the design field from modernism to postmodernism.

Keywords: WoDeCo, ICSID '73 Kyoto, metabolism, industrial design, design critic, postmodern.

1. Introduction

This study clarifies the transformation of design theory during the latter half of the 20th century in Japan. The World Design Conference (*Sekai Dezain Kaigi*; hereafter, WoDeCo) was held in 1960, which was the first international postwar conference in Japan. Approximately 13 years after the WoDeCo occurred, the Japan Industrial Designers' Association (JIDA) invited the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID) [2] to hold the world Industrial Design Conference in Kyoto (*Sekai Indasutoriaru Dezain Kaigi*; hereafter, ICSID '73 Kyoto). How have these two conferences affected Japanese designers and design fields? At the time of the WoDeCo, progressive architects formed the "Metabolism" group and proposed their plan for new urbanism. Meanwhile, graphic designers were considering a new design for the traditional Japanese idea of *Kata* (model, pattern, or style) and *Katachi* (form, shape). Therefore, this paper first examines the contents of the two conferences and their influences on Japanese designers and then compares these conferences to reveal the transformation in the design field from modernism to postmodernism.

2. The World Design Conference 1960 in Tokyo

2.1 Internationalization/Enlightenment

Due to the economic growth after World War II, activities in both the production and export industries had increased dramatically in Japan [3]. However, the highly competitive environment in such a rapidly growing situation that sometimes imitated foreign designs by Japanese industries caused international friction [4]. To resolve this particular issue, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), presently known as the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), had revised the "Design Protection Law" as preventive measures against the imitation of designs. The Japan Patent Office (a part of MITI) established the Good Design Products Selection System (commonly known as the G Mark) in 1957 to improve the quality of products in general. Support for the WoDeCo came from MITI, the Patent Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO). In Tokyo, the years of 1959 and 1961 were designated as "design years" and a total of 18 design exhibitions were held in a number of department store galleries. These actions provided the general public with the opportunity to learn about design and the concept of design esthetics.

WoDeCo was held for six days from the May 11–16, 1960. A total of 84 foreign designers from 26 countries, including 143 Japanese designers, participated in the conference [5]. (Figure.1-2)



(Figure 1) Poster of the WoDeCo Photo courtesy of the Takashi Asada Archive Tohoku University of Art & Design Library



(Figure 2) Conference application form, program and schedule Photo courtesy of the Takashi Asada Archive, Tohoku University of Art & Design Library

The theme of the event was "Our Century: the Total Image—What Designers Can Contribute to the Human Environment of the Coming Age." The conference focused on the future image of the modern world, which was an ambitious goal that reflected on the problems of designers such as being involved in mass production and consumption, and the estrangement of solid design from commercializable design. The conference was composed of three seminar sessions: 1) Personality; 2) Practicability; and 3) Possibility. Each of these sessions were subdivided into three panels: 1) individuality, regionality, and universality; 2) environment, production, and communication; and 3) society, technology, and philosophy, with an additional seminar on design education. (Figure 3)



(Figure 3) Sankei Kaikan Kokusai hall Photo courtesy of the Takashi Asada Archive, Tohoku University of Art & Design Library



(Figure 4) Herbert and Joella Bayer in the WoDeCo Photo courtesy of the Takashi Asada Archive, Tohoku University of Art & Design Library

Herbert Bayer presented a memorial lecture in the form of the reply to the question posed in the conference's title: "How can designers contribute to the society in the future?" (Figure 4) In his focus on the designer's mission, Bayer stated that "it is the divergence between *good design*, and *design which sells*, which must be terminated and must make a way of synthesis. This is one of the important tasks of the immediate future" [6]. This may be rephrased in such a way that "There is a divergence in the design outputs extending two extremes. One end is produced as the attainment of their ideal motivation from their genuine desire from creativity. The other end is the products which attention of industry people because of their attractiveness to massive consumers." This statement reveals a hint of the movement that was more extensively discussed in the eventual ICSID '73 Kyoto. Educator Thomas Maldonado also expressed his expectation stating that "the gap between theory and practice of visual communication can only be overcome in the future if the designer will decide to fulfill his task with the aid of the methods and knowledge of the science of communication" [7]. Based on their speeches, it appears that the designers' mission of idealistic design might be threatened in the future.

However, the evaluation of the conference differed among design fields since not all of the participants were satisfied with the event. Such dissatisfaction was especially expressed by participants in the crafts session since there was no discussion on the problems concerning crafts [8]. The other group, the JIDA (founded in 1952), expressed its nonparticipation as an organization but allowed individual members to participate if they desired. In this case, the main reason for their nonparticipation was discontent with the architects who had a readership in the conference [9]. Among the members of JIDA, industrial designer Kenji Ekuan (who served as the chair of ICSID '73 Kyoto) participated in the event. Focusing on the issue of nonparticipation, Ekuan stated:

Since JIDA boycotted the conference, both the *kogei* community and the established design community ended up not being able to participate. This meant that all of the rules of the older generation and the *kogei* community simply did not take part in the conference—they had simply vanished. Therefore, even though *kogei* was a wonderfully well-developed area with a long precedent, WoDeCo was a turning point for the industrial design field in Japan to experience the continuing dominant discourse. [10]

2.2 In pursuit of Japanese original design

In the conferences, Japanese participants proposed their original ideas for design. Three proposals, particularly, were important as they were based on the original idea perspective: 1) "Japonica Style" by industrial designer Isamu Kenmochi; 2) "Kata" and "Katachi" by graphic designer Yusaku Kamekura; and 3) "Metabolism" by critic Noboru Kawazoe. The proposals by Kenmochi and Kamekura specifically focused on confronting tradition when creating new universal designs.

Kenmochi, who was the head of the Design Department at the Industrial Arts Institute, despised inferior products such as "Japonica" and had advocated superior items of "Japanese Modern" with "modern feeling" since 1952 [11]. Kenmochi's famous phrase "critiques of Japonica" occurred against the background of Japanese exports with bad "exotic" tastes: "When two different cultures (especially life-techniques) come together, in the initial stages, it is the most visual (to the eyes) aspects which were absorbed in a mistaken way and exert a merely superficial influence" [12].

Graphic designer Kamekura proposed the Japanese traditional philosophy of *Katachi* (form/shape) for thinking of tradition and creation. According to Kamekura, "one of the problems which have been imposed upon us Japanese designer is the problem of tradition. Tradition is a burden for the designer, but one which he cannot reject. We have the duty to take our tradition apart, and then put it together again in a new way" [13]. The thinking of *Katachi* for design had a significant impact on a young graphic designer named Kiyoshi Awazu. This can be seen in his articles *Katachi no Fushigi* (Wonder of Katachi), *Katachi no Kokoro* (Soul of Katachi), *Katachi no Imi* (Meaning of Katachi), *Katachi to Rizumu* (Katachi and Rhythm), and others [14]. Although Kamekura proposed the idea of *Katachi* in the conference, the majority of graphic designers were impacted by the idea of "visual communication" presented in the lecture by Tomas Maldonado. In the panel discussion, Takeji Imaizumi stressed to "let us endeavor to establish the principle of visual communication" [15] and Awazu explained his theory *Shikaku Dentatsu Ron Josetsu* (Introduction theory of visual communication) [16]. However, since the 1920s, this idea of visual communication had been established by modernists such as George Kepes and Otto Neurath. Therefore, this idea was not entirely a new one.

The influence of the WoDeCo raised the necessity for an increased understanding of design esthetics particular to Japan. In addition, the WoDeCo also sought to raise awareness regarding international design organizations for the public as well as for individual designers [17]. As a result, a nationwide organization was established and the first meeting of the Japanese Student's Federation of Design occurred in 1964 at Kyoto [18]. Furthermore, the first industrial design conference was held on the September 28 and 29, five years after the WoDeCo in Tokyo.

What did the WoDeCo provide to the participants of the conference? We can state that the original design theory based on Japanese traditional culture was established at that particular event among the Japanese participants. In this regard, "Metabolism" was advocated by architectural critic Noboru Kawazoe and architects Kiyonori Kikutake, Fumihiko Maki, and Kisho Kurokawa. Although "Metabolism" was considered as an avantgarde of Japanese urban architecture, it gained significant attention by designers especially after the publication of "Project Japan" by Rem Koolhaas, and the 2011 exhibition "Metabolism: The City of the Future" at the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo.

In 1959, a year before the WoDeCo was held, Kawazoe Noboru, an editor of the journal *Shinkenchiku* (New Architecture) and several young architects formed a group to contribute toward the planned design conference.

Kawazoe, in search of some new ideas and keywords redefined *Sinchintaisha*, which means "all rigidity was dissolved, all fixity dissipated, all particularity that had been regarded as eternal became transient, whole of nature shown as moving in eternal flux and cyclic course." Then, they asked graphic designer Awazu Kiyoshi to create the symbol and they published their book *Metabolism/1960: the proposals for new urbanism*.

In the first page of the book, they proposed the following for new urbanism:

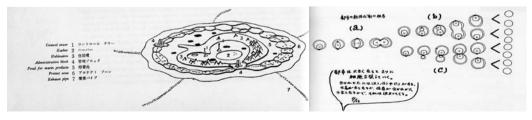
We regard human society as a vital process — a continuous development from atom to nebula. The reason why we use such a biological word, the metabolism, is that, we believe, design and technology should be a denotation of human vitality. We are not going to accept the metabolism as a natural historical process, but we are trying to encourage active metabolic development of our society through our proposals. [19]

Kawazoe stressed his idea of "Material and Man" in the book as follows:

The universe is constantly engaged in creation. Nebulae are born one after another from a tiny atom to the greatest nebula, every piece of matter is a dynamic body ever changing and developing. We are all included in the process. Life, the highest among the things made from matter, is the one which is most concerned with metabolism. Our constructive age or tomorrow, or say today, will be the age of high metabolism. Order is generated from chaos, and chaos from order. Extinction is creation at the same time. We can see the duality of the process not only now but in the history of the past. In the coming age, however, this process must be practiced systematically and rapidly, especially in cities where civilization and culture are centralized. This is where tomorrow's city planning starts.

This idea was representative of the crisis of nuclear war, which was considered to be a significant threat during the period of the "Cold War." Kawazoe expressed his original design philosophy of "triangular structure" in "Metabolism," which included three elements: *nature*, *a human being*, and *society* at each apex. We try to draw a line connecting nature and a human being, connecting humans and society. *Tools* are made to overcome contradiction between nature and human beings, *Language* connects human beings and society, and *Environment* is situated between nature and society. These elements have become the three major domains of industrial design (*Tools*), communication design (*Language*), and environmental design (*Environment*).

Kikutake took Kawazoe's philosophy into account when he proposed his well-known plans "Tower Shape Community," "Ocean City," (Figure 5) and "Movable house." Kurokawa also realized the "Metabolism" idea in his tower-shaped "Capsule House" presented at the Expo '70.



(Figure 5) Kiyonori Kikutake, Ocean City Plan. Photo reproduced from METABOLISM/1960, pp.24-25

Between the WoDeCo and the ICSID '73, two significant events were held in the two largest cities of Japan: the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo and the 1970 World Exposition in Osaka. Due to these events, majority of the designers and artists were involved in numerous national projects. The next section discusses the influences of these events on the design world and society [20].

3. Toward postmodern theory

3.1. Crisis in the 1960s design

As we consider the reasoning for the occurrence of ICSID in Kyoto, we need to note the crises of designers under social circumstances. One of the actions was the appearance of design criticism in journalism [21]. The quarterly journal *Design Hihyo* (The Design Review), published in November 1966, included a special edition titled "Design standing at the crossroads." The editors of the journal included graphic designer Kiyoshi Awazu, industrial designer Shinya Izumi, architect Hiroshi Hara, and critics Noboru Kawazoe and Ichiro Haryu. In the first issue, the editorial board expressed the following sentiment in "The greetings at the publication of *Design Hihyo*":

Postwar design is finishing at last now. It is going to sleep and to dream by losing reality. Construction, design, and the fatal points have been lost in all the creation fields and it is experiencing complete lack of criticism of the soul. We present Design Hihyo to be a place of the 'positive human being' who is prepared to take risks. [22]

Additional articles discussed design and Japanese social situations and their critical perspective could be seen in the titles such as "Good bye Good Design" by Shinya Izumi, "Which place the complementary architecture is going to?" (Gendai kenchiku doko e yuku) by Hiroshi Hara, "The basis of movement cannot be pregnant—To the Committee of Japan Advertising Artists Club" (Funinshinn no undo botai --- Nissenbi chuo iinkai dono) by Kiyoshi Awazu, and "Osaka Expo '70 and the Japan—U.S. Security Treaty—system and subject—designers responsibility" (Banpaku to Anpo --- Soshiki to Shutai --- Dezaina no Yakuwari) by Ichiro Haryu. Their criticisms assumed an anti-establishment attitude and focused on the G-mark system, modern architecture, Japan Advertising Artists club, and the Osaka Expo. By publishing these articles and designed materials, designing and design systems had become one of the most important elements of society and mass culture in the late 1960s.

By the end of the 1960s, Japanese industrial designers were facing a new problem, which was a result of industrial designers producing various types of convenient goods of life to promote economic efficiency. Such products had begun to lack the idea of a relationship between humanity in the society and design. Many new mass-produced items called "styling design" included attractive colors and forms to attract a wider audience. A "new" line of products such as subcompact cars, small portable televisions, and half-size cameras were available in the market. However, they were primarily remakes of products designed in the 1950s without a fundamental change or a progressive novel idea [23].

Designers had become worried about numerous problems induced by the growth of the market. Among them was the recurring problem of remake, which dated back to the 1950s. There were even more serious problems such as extensive pursuit of profits, mind control of the masses (especially toward consumption), unnecessary

waste of natural resources, and serious industrial pollution [24]. Under such situations, the ICSID organized a conference in 1973 in which the theme "Soul and Materials" reflected the problems of design for a changing world. This conference appropriately included the Metabolist concept "Material and Man" by Kawazoe.

3.2. ICSID '73 Kyoto

The World Industrial Design Conference (ICSID) was held on October 11–13, 1973 at the Kyoto International Conference Center. A total of 2,245 people attended the conference including seven keynote speakers, 124 panelists, and 448 foreign participants [25]. (Figure 6) According to the event organizer:

It is the soul of human that determines the creation of the material world. It mediates human and his world in a fundamental way and governs the way he encounters it. ...It seems that what is needed now is the awareness of the unity and the continuity of all beings in this world. And the way to realize it would be, not just to think about it, but, to cope with the problems of today boldly and unhesitatingly. [26]

Therefore, the organizer presented four components: *Nature, the Individual* (man), *Community*, and *Culture*, and constructed four group discussions. Each of these four sections focused on the other three components to determine the responsibility of design in the modern world [27].



(Figure 6) The poster of ICSID '73 Kyoto designed by Yusaku Kamekura

The contents that we should pay particular attention to in this conference include the ones presented in the keynote speeches [28]. "Soul and Material Things" by social anthropologist Tadao Umezawa made an impression on the audience, even though those from abroad could not understand the speech. In addition, Umezawa's speech "Gods Exist in All Things" based on traditional Japanese culture of "animism," confused the audience from abroad since their idea of God differed completely from those in European countries [29]. In this regard, novelist Sakyo Komatsu explained to the foreign audience that the Japanese basic idea of "Japanese was not opposed with material" [30]. This contested argument showed the difference in spiritual beliefs between the Japanese and European people.

"Age of Crisis" by biochemist Frederic Vester indicated that the "myth of growth" was brought about by the pollution of the environment and the "consumption of energy." He emphasized that we should establish recycling systems by biological and cybernetic technology, and designers should work to resolve this issue. Based on the current perspective, his argument was considered to be progressive for advanced countries. The special lecture "Design between Political Economy and Symbolic Exchange" by sociologist Jean Baudrillard shocked Japanese designers. Baudrillard indicated that "use value follows in exchange value" and "the death of object" was a contradiction of present-day design. He also stressed that "design products *sign* and *signification* of the objects" and that we retain "*parole*—real symbolic value" [31]. As seen in these talks, the subjects discussed in this conference were more oriented toward philosophical, mental, and spiritual aspects with particular attention on the human mind rather than economic growth and science, which was the focus of the WoDeCo.

The idea of postmodern design theory introduced by the two speakers to the industrial designers enabled them to begin constructing a new model of designs for society under the conditions of limited natural resources. The importance of the conference for the attendants, especially for the Japanese designers, was that it made them more conscious of the effects of industrial design on industrial society and national prosperity.

Actually, the Oil Crisis in October 1973 greatly affected the economy and industry in Japan and industrial design had to change direction. As a result, "throwaway furniture" or "short cycle products" could no longer be developed since society did not support the idea of "consumer is a virtue" and they required "concept" instead of functionality or practicality in design. By the end of the 1970s, such concept requirements resulted in innovative products such as the "Walkman" by Sony Corporation.

In addition, we may state that at this event, industrial design had crossed into the post-European era and since the conference was held in Asia, some designers from the USSR, South Africa, Mexico, Brazil, and Taiwan contributed. The conference also enabled designers to think about designing from a world-wide perspective since the contributors from the developing countries discussed the relationship between both the developed and developing countries. This was one of the most important outcomes of the ICSID '73 Kyoto.

As stated earlier, the locations of the WoDeCo and ICSID were Tokyo and Kyoto, respectively. The choice of locations may be both an excellent contrast and symbolic since the former location is a symbol of growing economy and industry in Japan and the latter is a symbol of traditional Japanese life.

The aforementioned contents focused on the key presentations and discussions at the two conferences to clarify the differences between them and to show the changes in the social conditions of Japan during that time period. The transitional change, triggered by the change in the economy and technology (and science), can be expressed as the movement from economy to human life, materials to mind, efficiency to humanity, and growth to sustainability of global life. It is historically true that the changes in design and art are induced by changes in society. However, this interaction was previously indirect and the influence of changes of society (including economy and technology) is currently becoming stronger and straight forward. Growth of technology in transportation and communication have changed international relations and changes of society may become more synchronized than ever because of the rapid transfer of human beings, information and pertinent matters in the movement toward a more uniform society. However, there are many barriers that inhibit such a uniform world because of numerous religious and territorial issues. The questions that must now be considered are "How can designers adapt to these changes and have their designs contribute toward humanity?" and "Can designs contribute in such a way that it does not increase pollution and waste as well as exhaust natural resources?"

4. Conclusions

This study examined in detail the key presentations and discussions made at the WoDeCo and ICSID '73 Kyoto. By comparing the two conferences, the transformation of the design field from modernism to postmodernism is clearly revealed. The Japanese design movement had been in pursuit for more authentic Japanese designs following that "the turning points in the process of internationalization and growth for industrial society Japan" should occur. In other words, this movement is from economy to human life, materials to mind, efficiency to humanity, and growth to sustainability. However, the question "How can designers adapt to these changes and create designs that contribute toward humanity?" still remains.

5. Notes and Citations

- [1] It can be rephrased that "Our Century: Total Image--- How can Designers contribute toward Society in the Future?"
- [2] International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID) was organized in London in June 1957 by representatives from 10 countries. When the organizer meeting was held, JIDA was affiliated with the ICSID.
- [3] During 1960, the Ikeda Cabinet established the "Income Doubling Program." For 10 years, the Japanese government promoted land development, and by 1970, Japan's Gross National Product (GNP) exceeded 73 trillion yen, which was 4.6 times the size of Japan's GNP in 1960.
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- [6] Peter Smithson. (1960) *Image of our century*, Design, Council of Industrial Design, no.143, London, November, pp.76–77.
- [7] Ibid.
- [8] Tatsumi Kato. (1960) What did we get from world design conference in Japan? Industrial Art News, vol. 28, no.8, pp. 38–39.
- [9] Eiichi Izuhara. (1989) Design Movement in Japan: History of Industrial design, Perikan-sha, p.221.
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- [15] Takeji Imaizumi. (1961) *Design as communication*, World Design Conference Organization ed. op.cit., pp.152–153.

- [16] Kiyoshi Awazu. (1966) op.cit., pp. 63-75.
- [17] Ayako Iwata. (2009) *Japanese Industrial Design in the Internationalization Process and the World Design Conference*, Bulletin of Japanese Society for the Science of Design, vol.56, no.4, pp.31–40. *The report of the World Design Conference*, Dezain, Bijutsu Shuppan-sha, 1965, 2, no.78, pp. 2–9.
- [18] Report from The first meeting of Japan Student's Federation of Design, Kyoto, Dezain, Bijutsu Shuppan-sha no.60, 1964, pp.45–49.
- [19] "Metabolism/1960: the proposals for new urbanism," 1960, pp.1–2.
- [20] In recent years, a considerable number of studies have focused on these events. Regarding the Expo '70, see, *Expo '70 and Japanese Art: Dissonant Voices, Review of Japanese Culture and Society*, Josai International Center for the Promotion of Art and Science, Josai University, vol.23, 2011.
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- [23] Eiichi Izuhara. (1989) op. cit., p. 211.
- [24] "The significance and effects of ICSID '73, Soul and Material Things; The report of ICSID '73 Kyoto" (Hito no kokoro to mono no sekai; Sekai Indasutorial Dezain Kaigi Gijiroku) Hozan-sha, 1975, p.14.
- [25] The list of keynote speakers and panelists are printed in the book as follows; *Soul and Material Things; The report of ICSID '73 Kyoto (Hito no kokoro to mono no sekai; Sekai Indasutorial Dezain Kaigi Gijiroku, Bessatsu) Supplement,* 1975.
- [26] Soul and Material Things; The report of ICSID '73 Kyoto, op. cit., p.29 (in Japanese) and p.41 (in English).
- [27] Amaury Saint-Giles. (1973) *Industrial Design Conference Opens*, Mainichi Daily News, Thursday, October 11, pp.12–14.
- [28] The conference included four notable speeches: "The spirit of tea in everyday life" by Sen Soushitsu; "The age of crisis" by Frederic Vester; "Coupling man to his environment" by Bernard Muller-Thym; and "Design between political economy and symbolic exchange" by Jean Baudrillard.
- [29] Soul and Material Things; The report of ICSID '73 Kyoto, op. cit., p.246.
- [30] Ibid., p.246.
- [31] The entire text of his lecture, translated into Japanese, appeared in the journal *Kogei Nyusu* (*Industrial Art News*), vol.41, no.3/4 1974. This is the reason why his theory had become widely known.