ABSTRACT

The intention of this paper is to critically examine the paradox of "how to become modern and to return to your sources" and analyze the validity of the symbiosis of Universalism and Regionalism in this context. Special attention is given to relating the issue to the Southeast Asian context. The first part of this paper analyses the theoretical framework and arguments of the issue and the second part uses a case study to critically analyze the notion of symbiosis of Universalism and Regionalism in a built example.

Modernism especially in its manifestation of the 'The International Style' transcended all cultural and geographical boundaries and has largely excluded the local concerns for cultural identity and environmental considerations. It can no longer fulfil the needs of an information society that the world is now transforming into one that emphasizes the added value and identity of the products. Post-modernism that sets out as a cynical reaction against Modernism is generally trapped in the use of historical signs and images in a trendy, popularist manner.

With the distantiation of time and space in the contemporary society brought about by the modern communication and transportation technology, the world is entering into a pluralistic global situation where different parts of the world are linked closely and mutually influence each other. This phenomenon of globalisation is inevitable in order to keep in touch with the latest ideas and technology available in the global scene.

Globalisation established a pool of global collective knowledge and experience to be applied in any local situation and thus has a homogenization effect to disregard the cultural and climatic peculiarity of a place. At the same time, it also accentuates heterogeneity by arousing an awareness of difference as much as an awareness of common identity.

The search for a unique local identity has prompted Regionalist thinking through sensitively responding to the local cultural, climatic and contextual conditions. This is particularly strong in the non-western countries as a step to assert self-identity against global Western dominance. The confidence for this action has been gained through the increase of economic power and the mastering of latest information and technology in these countries.

A strong identity can be attained through reference to local cultural heritage in architecture. The reference should not be taken as merely appropriating indigenous images and symbolism in a sentimental Vernacularism. Instead, it is by extracting lasting humane and artistic values in tradition and incorporating them with new elements of technology and development.
One possible approach to achieve this is the symbiosis of Universalism and Regionalism. This is done by bringing in local or regional cultural elements to coexist in symbiosis with the universal architectural order. The diversity of cultural and methodological references from both regional and universal sources can actually enhance the multivalence of architecture to better respond to the pluralistic global society of today.

In the second part of the paper, an architectural example — The Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art by Kisho Kurokawa, is selected to illustrate the application of the notion of symbiosis of Universalism and Regionalism in an actual built-example. The building is critically analyzed, at both the conceptual and architectural levels, based on the issues discussed in this paper. Evaluation would be made on how successful it is in achieving the symbiosis of Universalism and Regionalism.