Illustrating Japan: Architecture of Tokyo vs. Kyoto

Contrast of East vs. West as Seen Through the Architecture of Japan’s Yin-Yang Cities

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Abstract

In this proposal, I am requesting funding for an Honors Summer Research Grant to study the contrast between east and west in Japan, seen through the architecture of highly-traditional, eastern Kyoto, and westernized, modern Tokyo. Due to Japan’s isolation, it contains highly unique eastern architecture (Figgins). After the destruction of Japan during World War II, western influence took hold in many of Japan’s cities during reconstruction. This is prevalent in Tokyo, which features highly-westernized, modern buildings. However, several cities maintain eastern-style, traditional architecture. Kyoto is a highly traditional, eastern-style city, containing buildings such as traditional temples (New World Encyclopedia). Western influence has not only shifted the look of these cities, but the culture as well. To investigate this contrast between east and west, I plan to travel to Japan to visit ten architectural monuments in Tokyo and Kyoto, and conduct several interviews with both Japanese citizens and architectural scholars. I aim to understand how western occupation has affected this once-isolated eastern culture. Once I have conducted my research, I plan to create and publish an adult coloring book that features drawings of each monument, along with excerpts explaining the cultural impact each has on Japan.
**Background and Related Work**

The history of the island of Japan is filled with long periods of isolation, during which a highly unique eastern culture was developed. This can especially be seen through the architecture of Japan’s more traditional cities. The buildings are often horizontal, featuring heavy tile roofs, timber frames, and individualized elements that highly reflect Buddhist values. Many have called these buildings truly beautiful and unique (New World Encyclopedia). Up until World War II, the majority of Japan’s architecture complied to this eastern style. This quintessential version of tradition Japan can still be seen through the city of Kyoto. Possessing over 1600 eastern temples, Kyoto is the sacred destination of Buddhist pilgrimage (Tanaka). Kyoto’s highly eastern influence is highlighted by its western counterpart city, Tokyo. Many have called these the two “ying-yang” cities of Japan. During World War II, many of the major Japanese cities were bombed and destroyed, leading to a western occupation of Japan, during which many Japanese cities were rebuilt under western influence. This is most notably seen in Japan’s capital city of Tokyo, for the once timber buildings were replaced with steel-framed modern structures (New World Encyclopedia). As western culture grew within Tokyo, the religious and cultural aspects came into play as well. While the highly-western Catholic religion is now present throughout Tokyo, it is rarely seen within the Buddhist-dominated city of Kyoto (Tanaka).

While it is clear that there are vast differences between the cities of Tokyo and Kyoto, one may wonder how this can be seen visually in Japan. According to an article on how humans interpret buildings, architecture is perhaps the most prominent way to study the cultural changes a society has gone through (Whyte). When studying the buildings in an older city, such as Kyoto, one can gain a sense of the ancient traditions that have been at play there for generations. Upon
visiting a more modern city, such as Tokyo, one can easily pick out architectural features that stem from outside cultural influence in an ever-changing environment. For this reason, if I hope to understand how western expansion has affected a once-isolated eastern culture such as Japan, I must study and understand its architecture.

**Methods**

If I am to understand how western occupation has altered Japan since World War II, I must travel to both Tokyo and Kyoto to study the architecture of these yin-yang cities firsthand. Based on literary research I have conducted, I have selected five architectural monuments in Tokyo, and five architectural monuments in Kyoto to visit and study.

Before and during my stay in Japan, I also plan to conduct several interviews of both Japanese citizens and architectural scholars. One of these interviews will be conducted with my own father, Kurt Kerns, who lived in Japan for several months while attending architecture school. He studied with several notable Japanese architects including the well-renowned Tadao Ando.
The buildings I plan to visit in Tokyo include:

*The Nakagin Capsule Tower*


According to an article by National Geographic, this building was designed by Kisho Kurokawa, an architect that was highly influenced by the highly western concept of an evolving city. Many have compared the building to a stack of laundry machines (Ming). I have chosen this building as one to visit in Tokyo, for the design concept behind it reflects the highly westernized concept of residency in a futuristic city.

*Tadao Ando’s “Church of the Light”*

![Tadao Ando’s “Church of the Light”](https://www.designingbuildings.co.uk/wiki/File:Nakagin-capsule-tower1.jpg)
According to an article by Brenda Nyawara, Ando intended the “Church of the Light” to focus on minimalist aesthetics, featuring massive concrete walls that appear quite geometric (Nyawara). I have chosen this building for both its Christian influence in an Eastern country, and its highly modern design.

The Mode-Gakuen Spiral Towers

https://mymodernmet.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/archive/AE1ORgQqiaL8XnnaGNFE_1082021379.jpeg

In an article from My Modern Met, it is explained that this set of three Spiral Towers were built by the architectural group Nikken Sekkei for three different schools, symbolizing the students “rising to the sky then departing to the real world.” (Kim). I have chosen this monument for its modern design and cultural connotations.
According to an article on Tokyo’s strongest architecture, the Ao Aoyama Building’s most notable aspect of the building is its odd, wedge shape. The building currently functions as a commercial rental complex (Architecture Tokyo). I have chosen this building because I would like to include a modern building in Tokyo that is not necessarily a monument, but is simply a place where everyday people will be shopping.
According to an article by Andrea Giannotti, St. Mary’s Cathedral is a building that does not seem to fit into any time or age. The odd shape and rarely-utilized materials instantly make the church stand out (Giannotti). I have chosen this building because I would like to further observe how Catholicism has been active in Japan after WWII.

The buildings I plan to visit in Kyoto include:

*The Golden Temple*
According to the Temple’s website, The Golden Temple is one of the most famous traditional temples in Japan. The building was originally constructed in 1397 and still stands today, covered in a leaf gold coating (Real Japanese Gardens). I have chosen this building mostly for its strong historical significance.

_Fushimi Inari-Taisha_

[Image: https://i.redd.it/y2iwpj2d7ory.jpg]

According to an article by John Asano, many consider Fushimi Inari-Taisha to be the most important shrine in all of Kyoto. The monument features notable vermilion _torii_ shrine gates. Thousands of these wind all the way up to sacred Mount Inari. The Shrine itself was founded in 711, making it one of the oldest landmarks in all of Kyoto. (Asano). I have chosen to visit this monument for both its historical significance in traditional Japan, and its unique physical attributes.
Yasaka Shrine

According to an article on the historical context of Kyoto’s Yasaka Shrine, the Shrine itself combines elements of Shinto and Buddhism, and still maintains the traditional features that were included 1,200 years ago (Guide to Japan). I have chosen this building for its highly Eastern influence.

Kiyomizu-Dera

According to an article on Asian Historical Architecture, the Kiyomizu-Dera Temple is a notable Buddhist temple in Kyoto that was founded in 798. The temple is shrouded in both
religious and mythical belief (Asian Historical Architecture). I have chosen this temple for its immense cultural influence and stunning structure.

*Arashiyama*

![Arashiyama Bamboo Grove](https://i.ytimg.com/vi/YQRRvFt4Ork/maxresdefault.jpg)

According to an article from Inside Kyoto, Arashiyama’s Bamboo Grove is one of the most notable places in all of Japan. The temples of Arashiyama were built in harmony with the nature around them, an architectural technique used in many Buddhist shrines (Inside Kyoto). I have chosen this monument for its architectural involvement with nature.

**Expected Results**

There are several results that I expect after I finish conducting my research in Japan. Though I cannot fully predict what the architecture of Japan will tell me about the contrast between East and West, I expect to find a major difference between the structures in Tokyo and Kyoto. Though I am currently aware that the architecture in Tokyo and Kyoto are quite different, I am interested to see how the architecture of each city reflects the culture of the people living there as well.

After conducting research in Japan, I plan to share my findings with a broader audience by creating and publishing a piece that is both artistic and literary: an adult coloring book. At the
start of my Sophomore year at Loyola Marymount University, I began working as a paid illustrator for Tsehai Publishers. This independent, academic press, is based out of Loyola Marymount University, and produces various literary works with the goal of spreading knowledge of diversity. I am currently working with several other illustrators to create an educational coloring book of notable Ethiopian political figures. As an experienced visual artist with an understanding of what it takes to both illustrate and publish a coloring book, I feel that I will be highly successful in this endeavor. That being said, in publishing an adult coloring book on Japanese architecture in Tokyo and Kyoto, I can help others to explore Japanese architecture and culture from the comfort of their homes, in a manner that is both educational and creative.

Conclusions

It is quite surprising how much one can learn about the culture of a place by simply observing its architecture. Many consider the architectural monuments throughout Japan to be some of the most beautiful, yet historically significant buildings in the world. So, what can the architecture of Tokyo and Kyoto tell us about the contrast between east and west in Japan? If I am granted funds to travel to Japan this summer, I plan to answer this question the best I can. Rather than keep this research to myself, I aim to share my findings through the artistic means of an adult coloring book.
Predicted Budget

Trip Dates: May 19th - June 2nd, Summer 2019

Flights: Round Trip LAX–Tokyo: $841

Train: Round Trip Tokyo–Kyoto: $231.92

Ground Transportation: $300

Hotel Costs:

Hilton Tokyo: $1,421 for 7 nights

Hotel Monterey Kyoto: $402 for 6 nights

Food Costs: $280

TOTAL: $3,475.92
Works Cited


Ming, Ye, and Noritaka Minami. “Pictures Reveal Life Inside Tiny Futuristic Cubes.” *National Geographic*, National Geographic, 24 Oct. 2017,


