

Shedding the Light on “Japan’s Monozukuri”

It is not the strongest of the companies that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.

Do you know what word the ancient Greeks employed before “literature” was ever written in a dictionary?

The answer is “*Techné*,” meaning “to produce by letting appear.” As such, fables like Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* ‘produced’ strong cultural and social realities which allow today’s Liberal Arts practitioners a peek in the Hellenics’ culture. To classify emerging genres of *techné*, “*poiesis*” (or to make) was added to the vocabulary but its definition remained closely intertwined with that of its predecessor. In Plato’s dialogue ‘*Phaedrus*,’ *poiesis* is defined as that which “*shines bright... and resplends*.”

And that is how, more than 2300 years ago, the cultural junction between literature and light, truth and visibility, understanding and perceiving, was born.

During the centuries that followed, light became a cultural symbol for goodness, beauty and life. In religious writings, God used it to abolish darkness and create our world: “*God said ‘let there be light,’ and there was light.*” (Genesis 1:3).

Millenniums later, Shakespeare’s Romeo uses light to depict the emotion he feels as he discovers the grave of his only love, Juliet. “*A grave? O, no, a lantern, slaughtered youth, For here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes This vaults a feasting presence full of light.*”

From churches to theaters, light has carried cultural, social and biological assumptions that mold our understanding of the world. More than a mere source of visibility, illumination has been proven to have a direct effect on our emotions. Unsurprisingly so, light has grown into a central theme in the fields of architecture, design, photography and more importantly, liberal arts.

In his academic keynote speech presentation at the University of California, Berkeley, in November 2018, Mr. Goro Terumichi discussed the historical relationship between natural lighting and the architecture of Kyoto’s temples and shrines. “Just as each person has his or her own background, each city has its



Photo Nacasa and Partners Inc.
Library of over 12,000 books at ModuleX’s Global Head Office, designed by Mr. Kengo Kuma.

own unique culture and history. Light in the city environments is associated with various important aspects of such background to which there is no generally correct or absolute answer.”

Mr. Goro Terumichi, group C.E.O. of ModuleX Inc., a global corporate group specialized in providing professional technical lighting solutions, has taken on the ambitious mission to transform mere light into ‘lighting,’ therefore bringing a cultural and social impact that enriches society. “While visibility has an obvious function, light can be a media through which people find their own enjoyment. Like the sound becoming

music, light has the capability to intensively inspire human emotion in order to enhance our life,” he states.

Similar to the relationship between culture and light, the group C.E.O. of the Tokyo-based professional lighting company believes that Japanese “Monozukuri,” or the art of “making things,” is solely derived from the country’s historical, social and cultural background. “Developed in the post-war Japan through trial and error, Japan’s ‘Monozukuri’ was born from a fundamental awareness which saw people voluntarily come up with their own development and production methods. ‘Monozukuri’ was strongly influenced by the “his-



Photo Takashi Shigemoto

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torical background” and “economic background” (the “Backdrop”) of the country.”

During Japan’s economic recession, or the so-called “lost decades,” which denominate the years of stagnation between 1991 and 2010, large Japanese corporations (for instance, in the electronic field) began losing market share to competitors from neighboring countries. Today, many experts argue that the success of emerging countries’ manufacturers was due to their ability to “copy” traditional Japanese ‘Monozukuri.’ However, Mr. Terumichi advocates that ‘Monozukuri’ exists only in the context of the ‘Backdrop’ that have constantly inspired the appropriate production concepts. Since different countries have developed with their own ‘Backdrop’ and in pursuit of their own respective objectives, the interpretation of Mr. Terumichi claims that Japan’s “Monozukuri” and those of its neighboring countries cannot be compared as they are the result of different stages and eras of development. “Herein lies a major misunderstanding,” he adds.

As certain large corporations from Japan have yet to recover from their economic downfall,

many manufacturers have aggressively relocated their factories to countries with lower labor cost. “To recover from the burst of the bubble economy, many Japanese corporations over-prioritized profit margins through cost reductions without reviewing the importance of manufacturing domestically,” he advances.

In the field of Development Economics, the “first-mover’s advantage” states that the firsts to enter a market have opportunities to grab a technological and pricing lead. By exporting their production facilities overseas, manufacturers without their country’s unique characteristics could consequently lose this competitive edge. In “The Origin of Species,” Charles Robert Darwin advocates that “*it is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the one most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.*” Instead of over-prioritizing on easy profit margin, Mr. Terumichi insists that Japanese manufacturers must primarily reconsider their country’s Backdrop to deliver next-generational value. “I believe that a ‘Monozukuri’ which expresses the characteristics of Japan’s next-generation affluences, with the matured culture of a developed country, has an essentially significant opportunity to demonstrate the Japanese approach to the global market, and will create a new horizon that gives Japan the first-mover’s advantage,” he says. With this in mind, Mr. Terumichi mentions that the “Made by Japan” must leverage on its three core advantages: superior Japanese aesthetics backed by the country’s unique Backdrop; integration of technologies supported by the matured culture; and fields employing big data utilization.

The philosophy of Mr. Terumichi

is present in ModuleX’s unique approach to its market of predilection. With the recent rise of LEDs, certain lighting devices have transformed into simple “semiconductor items”. In a market which has steadily grown emotionless, ModuleX has made it its mission to stimulate human emotions. “Our lighting solutions are carefully planned by understanding the significance and background of the various buildings, places and cities we serve,” he explains.

To deliver natural human emotions, the Tokyo-based company has developed a proprietary environment-adapting technology known as “ModuleX Controls.” ModuleX Controls is a combination of hardware devices, environmental design and advanced controlling technology that comprehensively adapts lighting to blend in with a given environment. Through its unique hardware technology and design technique, the company is able to reproduce natural lighting effects. “ModuleX is not only a manufacturer that produces and sells lighting devices; it is also a company that provides a variety of added values that enhance the impact of lighting on human emotion.”

By virtues of its advanced engineering expertise, the lighting fixtures of ModuleX enjoy a high degree of modularity, which have been multi-awarded from the world. As the head of lighting design, hardware engineering and group management, Mr. Terumichi’s creations are composed of interchangeable components that allow its products to adjust to various demands simultaneously. By producing a process of selection in which customers choose non-interchangeable solutions, ModuleX offers its clients tailor-made solutions.



Japanese aesthetic sense of natural light in Kyoto. Photo Goro Terumichi

From Tokyo’s highest branded hotel bars to corporate offices, residences and luxurious fashion stores, the prestige of ModuleX’s client base is only matched by its diversity. To cater for such a disparate audience, the company has combined its engineering modularity with a unique organizational structure where design, production and after-sales are closely related. “We are strategically adopting a management method that is difficult to achieve for larger companies; realizing completely different types of design-ins in both development and production within a single proposal, as well as added value.” By keeping both design and production geographically adja-

cent, ModuleX has shortened the communication gap between its divisions and can incorporate its client’s demands from the early stages of development.

To preserve its integrated management method, the company has maintained its production facilities in Japan, largely disregarding the strategy to secure higher profit margins through factory relocation. “We have been focusing on the challenge of creating added-values through which we can receive distinctive appreciation from the market. We call our brand ‘ModuleX made in Tokyo’ to symbolize this concept.” And perhaps, also to symbolize the journey ‘Monozukuri’ must take to rediscover its light.



Japanese aesthetic sense of natural light in Kyoto. Photo Goro Terumichi

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