



Architectural Identities: Japan

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Architectural identities and their projection and interpretation can be viewed as multi-layered and multi-faceted occurrences. **The study and interpretation of identities in architecture is infinitely complex and multifaceted, for which the investigation of the Japanese identity(-ies) and its spatial manifestations is a most elucidating venture.** Every identity embodies a part of the cultural denotation system, simultaneously representing the social life and categories of social politics (Ignjatović, 2007).

Identity is constructed with specific cultural contents and symbols, but always in relation to a specific context. Sociological theories, among other postulations, insist on identity as a process, rather than a condition, emphasizing the importance of collective self-identification and identification of others through the system of culture as a “grammar of social life” (Golubović, 1999).

When it comes to examining the case of Japan (including the spatial realm), it is constructed through its differentiation from Others, who are alternately understood as inferior or superior to Japan. There are various ways of relating to difference, including comparison and integration. The notion of the duality of the scholastically upheld concept of *Nihonjinron* (the question of Japan(ese)-ness) argues that there is *Nihonjinron* by Japanese and *Nihonjinron* by foreigners (Befu, 2001). In a broader sense, cultural identity is argued as being socially and ideologically constructed rather than belonging to some kind of independent, authentic, or arbitrary culture (Koković, 2002). While discussing the mechanisms of propagation of the *Nihonjinron* ideology, Yoshino (1999) noted how:

“[...] ideological manipulations may have occurred between certain sections of the population”.

Although the conclusion is that: "Cultural nationalism in contemporary nationalism cannot adequately be explained in terms of ideological manipulations alone" (ibid), **it is important to question the roles of architects in the disseminations of the narratives of cultural nationalism** (e.g. Isozaki, 2006).

The link between architecture and ideology is situated in the attempt to identify relation between the ideological positions, values, social practices, and architectural concepts that materialize and represent them through the specific architectural space, ideology, and representation (Vasiljević Tomić et al. 2013).

This thematic issue of the SAJ focuses on the relationship between architectural design and the theory of (Japanese) identity(-ies). An additional goal is to review and examine theoretical and practical aspects utilized in construction and/or confirmation of a desired identity within the broader context of contemporary architectural practice. The question remains: How does architecture, within practice and theory, interpret and conceptualize tangible spaces of identity (with or without ideological implications)?

The contributing authors are encouraged to interpret these issues and inspire future scholastic research in an age where it is increasingly important to raise (self-) awareness of the use of identities, particularly in the field of architecture and the built environment.

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