Introduction

The term "Kenchiku" (Architecture in Japanese) was coined and popularized by the architectural historian and architect Chuta Ito as a translation for the Western concept of "Architecture." This was done to assert that architecture encompasses a broader scope—including scholarship, art, and a mode of thinking—going beyond mere construction techniques or engineering ("Zoka," the term used previously for building houses). At the root of architectural education lies the fundamental question, "What is space?", and architecture has consistently reflected the history of how humanity has defined and transformed its own sense of "humanity."

Architecture is deeply intertwined with human activities and life, as seen in the transition from nomadic to settled living. Its practice is a grand concept involving nearly every conceivable genre, including geography, politics, religion, and philosophy. This article aims to present key buildings, architects, theories, and ideological backgrounds (religion, philosophy, politics) that have driven architectural history as guiding indicators, so that readers may use this information not merely as a digest of knowledge, but as fuel to accelerate their own thinking about architecture and human existence itself.

Chapter 1: Architectural History

Ancient Architecture: The Power of Civilization and the Expression of Reason

Ancient Architecture spans the period from the earliest dwellings around 10,000 BCE to the fall of the Roman Empire around the 5th century CE, symbolizing the power and advanced technology of the Four Great Civilizations—Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome. In Egypt, massive stone tombs and temples (Pyramids) were constructed to signify the Pharaoh's power, while in Greece, beauty based on geometric order and human reason was pursued in marble temples (Parthenon) that emphasized proportion and harmony. In Japan, Buddhist architecture like Horyu-ji Temple developed from earlier forms such as pit-dwelling structures and raised-floor granaries predating the arrival of Buddhism.

Particularly in Ancient Rome, in addition to stone and brick, Roman concrete was invented, leading to the dramatic development of structural technologies like the arch, vault, and dome. This enabled the construction of highly public buildings like the Colosseum and aqueducts, as well as the Pantheon, which combined grandeur with practicality, embodying Roman society's order and pragmatism. The architecture of this era established the classical elements that would become the standard for later Western architecture.

Medieval Architecture: Religious Authority and Structural Innovation

Medieval Architecture developed against the backdrop of Christian dominance and feudalism, characterized by churches symbolizing religious authority and fortified castles focused on defense. In the West, there was a shift from the heavy and defensive Romanesque style (Pisa Cathedral) to the Gothic style starting in the mid-12th century, which pursued light and verticality to the extreme. Innovative techniques

like the pointed arch, rib vault, and flying buttress distributed wall loads, allowing for the insertion of massive stained-glass windows that filled the church interiors with "divine light."

Meanwhile, in Japan during the Kamakura and Muromachi periods, the rise of the warrior class led to the development of defense-focused mountain castles (yamashiro). In religious architecture, new styles like Daibutsuyō and Zenshūyō were introduced from Song Dynasty China and fused with the traditional Japanese style (Wayō). Furthermore, in residential architecture, the Shoin-zukuri style, featuring elements like tatami mats and tokonoma alcoves, evolved, and the Teahouse architecture style, based on the spirit of wabi-sabi influenced by Sen no Rikyū, established simple, austere spaces. The Middle Ages in both East and West saw dramatic technical innovation while reflecting changes in society.

Early Modern Architecture: The Display of Absolutism and the Establishment of Japanese Residential Style

Early Modern Architecture in the West saw the development of Renaissance and Baroque styles, aiming for a return to classical antiquity and the display of power by absolute monarchs. The Renaissance style (e.g., La Rotonda) pursued a human-centered, rational beauty characterized by harmony, symmetry, and balance. The subsequent Baroque style (Versailles Palace), influenced by Absolutism and the Counter-Reformation, featured dynamic curves, lavish ornamentation, and dramatic lighting effects, leading to the construction of magnificent palaces for royalty and nobility.

Japan's Early Modern period (Azuchi-Momoyama and Edo periods) was marked by the completion of the Early Modern Castle (e.g., Himeji Castle keep) as a symbol of authority following national unification. Concurrently, Shoin-zukuri reached its perfected form in residential architecture, and the Sukiya-zukuri style (e.g., Katsura Imperial Villa), incorporating elements of teahouses, developed, establishing the foundation of modern Japanese-style homes. The era of peace also fostered the growth of mausoleum architecture like Nikko Toshogu Shrine and urban townhouses (machiya) adapted to local characteristics for common people.

Modern Architecture (Modernism): The Shift to Function and Rationality

Modern Architecture (Modernism) was an international movement that swept the globe from the late 19th century to the end of World War II, advocating a break with past styles. Its core principles were the Three Great Principles—Functionality, Rationality, and Economy—alongside new materials from the Industrial Revolution: steel, glass, and reinforced concrete. With the slogan "Form follows function," it sought to strip away ornamentation and directly express structural logic.

Le Corbusier's "Five Points of Architecture" (pilotis, roof gardens, free plan, free façade, horizontal windows) became established as a design guideline premised on reinforced concrete construction. The "Three Masters"—Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, and Frank Lloyd Wright—embodied this ideal, with Germany's Bauhaus playing a crucial role in disseminating Modernism globally as the "International Style," through an education that thoroughly integrated "art and industry" with "functionalism."

Contemporary Architecture: Diverse Thought and Global Challenges

Contemporary Architecture (post-1945) is an era where an extremely diverse range of ideas and styles emerged, inheriting and deepening Modernism's functionalism while also critiquing its monotony and inhumanity. Postmodernism, emerging in the late 1960s, initiated a reassessment of history, regionalism, and ornamentation—elements excluded by Modernism—under the motto, "Less is a bore."

Subsequently, Deconstructivism (e.g., Frank O. Gehry) emerged, intentionally "deconstructing" stability and homogeneity. Furthermore, contemporary architecture is now dominated by a phenomenological approach that emphasizes texture and the specificity of place (Peter Zumthor), and styles focused on sustainability and coexistence with nature (Kengo Kuma, SANAA). Japanese architects hold significant influence in the international scene by reinterpreting traditional elements in a contemporary context.

Chapter 2: Architecture Today

Urban Design: Shifting to Sustainability and Smart Cities

Contemporary Urban Design is shifting its focus from mere aesthetics and scale to solving global issues. Noteworthy trends include Regenerative Urbanism (actively improving and regenerating the environment and society), Walkable Cities (pedestrian-centric, comfortable environments), the integration of Smart City Technology (AI/IoT utilization), and Biophilic Design (the active introduction of natural elements).
Future smart city projects like Saudi Arabia's "The Line," aiming for zero-carbon emissions, ultra-high-density habitation, and complete technological integration, are central to global discussions. Planned cities like Singapore and projects like Japan's FUKUOKA Smart EAST integrate the latest technology into infrastructure to enhance life convenience and energy efficiency. Simultaneously, projects like Seoul's "Seoullo 7017" that transform existing urban infrastructure into human-centered public spaces are also highly valued.

Contemporary Architects: Coexistence with Nature and Social Contribution

Leading contemporary architects pursue themes such as "sustainability," "coexistence with nature," and "human-centered spaces." Junya Ishigami views architecture as part of the entire landscape and environment, creating poetic spaces where nature and artifice melt together. SANAA (Kazuyo Sejima + Ryue Nishizawa) uses glass and curves to blur the architectural boundary, giving rise to light and democratic spaces where inside and outside gently connect.
Kengo Kuma advocates "Losing Architecture," widely deploying buildings internationally that use natural materials like wood and bamboo, existing humbly by blending into the environment. Shigeru Ban focuses on humanitarian contributions, especially disaster relief housing, through an innovative structural system utilizing inexpensive, recyclable materials like paper tubes and containers. These architects express an ethical stance toward society and the environment through their work, presenting new possibilities for the future of space, beyond just technique and aesthetics.

Architectural Theory: Modernism's Limits and Critique of the City

Contemporary architectural theory has evolved through challenging the limits of Modernism and offering sharp critiques of society and the city. The 1960s saw two pioneering theoretical movements: Britain's Archigram and Japan's Metabolism. Archigram proposed a future-oriented utopia using concepts like the "Plug-in City" and "Walking City," viewing architecture not as a fixed object but as a constantly changing, moving system.
Meanwhile, Metabolism (Kisho Kurokawa, Kiyonori Kikutake, etc.) advocated the idea of the "City as a Life Form," arguing that cities and buildings should be organic entities undergoing metabolism (renewal). Their concept—where interchangeable units connect and detach from a core structure (infrastructure) to adapt to change—was a precursor to sustainability and prefabrication concepts. Today, Rem Koolhaas continues this line of theoretical inquiry, analyzing the irrationality of the contemporary metropolis and the impact of globalization through concepts like "Bigness" and the "Generic City," exploring the relationship between architecture, capitalism, and political reality.

Chapter 3: Thought and Architecture

Religion and Architecture: Embodiment of Faith and Worldview

Religious architecture physically embodies the core faith, governing system, and worldview of each religion. Shinto architecture emphasizes purity, simplicity, and harmony with nature, reflecting the ideal of eternal life and the maintenance of purity symbolized by the Shikinen Sengū (periodic rebuilding) of Ise Grand Shrine. Christian architecture, as seen in the Gothic style, visually expressed transcendent reverence and salvation for the singular God through verticality and the expression of light via stained glass. Islamic architecture, which prohibits idolatry, abstractly expresses Allah's infinity and universality through unending patterns such as arabesques and geometric motifs. The architecture of Hårga in the film Midsommar, through the destruction of its sacrificial temple, represents their dogma of "death and rebirth" and "settlement and renewal" by the architectural act itself, serving as an extreme example of how architecture functionally embodies religious dogma.

Philosophy and Architecture: Expression of Reason, Ethics, and Spirit

The relationship between philosophy and architecture reflects the structure of human reason and existence. Ancient Vitruvius proposed the three principles that architecture must satisfy—firmness, commodity, and delight (utility, durability, beauty)—establishing architecture as the act of constructing social order and reason on Earth. Hegel positioned architecture as the earliest stage of art, "Symbolic Art," believing it was tasked with alluding to spiritual content, which was not yet clearly defined, through the monumental scale of the material. Conversely, Wittgenstein, through his own designed house, attempted to realize his philosophy's demand for "logical clarity" and an "ethical attitude" in architectural space by eliminating ornamentation and pursuing the logic of function and structure. His architecture was an expression of pure logic, strictly defining the boundaries of living space just as language defines the boundaries of the world.

Politics and Architecture: Manifestation of Ideology and Power

Architecture is a medium that visually embodies the ideology, power structure, and public values of its political regime. Authoritarian architecture (Nazi, Mussolini) aims to enforce obedience on the populace by employing gigantic and intimidating scale to symbolize the diminution of the individual and the immortality of state power. In contrast, Democratic architecture emphasizes transparency through modest scale and the use of glass, fostering the values of public discourse and civic participation. Socialist architecture (e.g., Soviet Union) was guided by the ideology of the triumph of collectivism; while sometimes grand, it mass-produced uniform, standardized housing to provide classless, equal living and physically realize the communal ideal.

Conclusion

This article, "Beginning Architecture," compiles the frameworks of thought that one should know before learning the basics of architecture. While architecture, as a vast field of scholarship and a mode of thinking,

cannot be summarized in a single text, the keywords introduced here are "fragments" of that mode of thinking.

Readers are encouraged not to treat the knowledge gained here merely as information, but to analyze and contemplate the spaces around them—homes, schools, etc.—by associating them with social systems and ideologies, such as the lifestyles projected by Shoin-zukuri or the philosophy demanded by Modernism's principles. Architecture is a mode of thinking, and the author sincerely hopes that embracing its pleasure will make the reader's architectural journey enjoyable, complex, and rich.