Monistic Design : Ground Theory for New Design Paradigm

Lee, Soon-Jong / Faculty of Design, Seoul National University

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Abstract

We need to seek after new direction and order of design that puts more value on the spirits and culture of human beings in the 21st century, creating a new, all-inclusive value in which individual human being, the society and the environment can co-exist in a peaceful relationship by overcoming the materialistic, analytical, competitive, and differentiated values of traditional industrial society. The aim of this study, then, is to present a new method of design that can meet the demands of the 21st century in a civic age of information, knowledge and culture, by focusing on Monistic ideals derived from a deeply rooted Oriental philosophy. The concept of Monism is embodied by a mindset that treasures the benefit to others over rewards to the self, puts more importance on the spiritual life hidden behind physical phenomena, thinks more of what lacks than what exceeds, elevates the mind over the body, and seeks after beauty via a total harmony of balance and development that can be feasible only by combining all these elements. Ultimately, the new design principle based on the Monism consists of three basic elements: (1) identification of the subject and the object between things under the perception that all things are one (Unification); (2) the ability that helps things exist with appropriate beauty maintaining balance and stability (Harmony); and (3) the attitude of sharing to maintain sustainable vitality by filling up what lacks or is missing in a whole(Change).

1. Introduction

The design paradigm in the past industrial society can be characterized as analytical, Cartesian, linear, object-oriented, rational, and prescribed. Therefore, focus was placed on splitting the whole into different elements. However, this design paradigm has been proven to become increasingly obsolete to new types of design problems emerged in Information society of the 21st Century. Many design theorists and scholars agreed upon the emerging new design paradigm as synthetic, empiric, iterative, human-centered, emotional, and descriptive. The future will place more emphasis on harmonic and holistic aspects of design, which exists on all the roots of nature and man-made society. However, these fragmental keywords of new design paradigm will be of no use unless they are integrated together and anchored on 'ground theory'. Therefore, grand theory is required to explain the underlying principles of new design paradigm. Considering above background, on the basis of Monistic Design concept, this paper seeks for

establishing the frameworks of a new design principles and processes which can be applied for the design in the information age.

I adapted the concept of 'Monism' from long-rooted Oriental philosophy - Taoism(Dou), Buddhism, and Confucianism - and the concept of Monism has been interwoven to people's everyday life in oriental society. Monism refers to 'the primary principle behind the great harmony of humans, nature, and all things in the universe'. This meaning of Monism has been meant as 'the principle giving rise to the existence of all things'(The Dong-A Korean Dictionary. 1990) which embodies the assembly and unification of many parts in a grand whole. The key concept of Monism shows huge potential to explain whole new design phenomena in information society and to develop new design method. The aim of this study, then, is to present a new method of design that can meet the demands of the 21st century which many cites as the age of information, knowledge and culture, by focusing on wholeness and harmony of different elements. For this, I tried to reinterpret the value of design on the basis of Oriental philosophies, monistic systems of thought in particular, and transcend the analytical and material-focused viewpoints of the Western thought. Specially, underlying three sub-concepts of the philosophy of Monism, namely 'Unification', 'Harmony', and 'Change' are sought and synthesized for understanding new design paradigm and establishing new design principles. This study contents consists as following;

Firstly, paradigm shift and change of design meaning.
Secondly, oriental philosophy and Monism concept.
Thirdly, suggestion of Monistic Design principles and process.

2. Paradigm Shift and Change of Design Meaning

As a group of sociologists led by Drucker(1987)insists on the arrival of the knowledge-based society, our society is now fast moving into the information and knowledge-based society from the industrial society. In the 20th century, our industrial society focused on 'analytical thought' that is based on separation of elements, 'universal value' based on mechanical standardization, and 'materialistic value' supported by capitalism. What formed the principle values in the society were production and consumption, renovation and change, and desire and wealth, and the material-focused industrial society eventually became the cause of the exhaustion of the earth's natural resources and energy as well as the problem of environmental disruption.

Meanwhile, a common view of theorists on the future society, which is often considered as the society of information and knowledge, is that, unlike the industrial society, it will 'put a higher value on spiritual culture' based on balanced and integrated thought as well as what is beyond materials, 'the diversity of values' based on the uniqueness of local culture and 'organic combination' of such values via a network, and the 'comprehensive way of thinking' in which all the different elements of the environment are identified in an all-inclusive viewpoint towards co-existence and harmony between the human society and the environment. The human society is turning in an alarming speed into a world view which is organic, comprehensive and all-inclusive. It is a view that as the universe is a living organism where each element is linked with others forming a dynamic network, no particular element is taken from it to identify (Kafra.1989). The shift of value towards such direction is evident when we look at all kinds of phenomena that take place in a sequential order in the field of technology and culture as well as politics and economy, affecting each other.

What is, then, the new meaning of design in the context of this shift of social value system, and where should we move it to? While there can be many different answers according to the situation each of us is put to, we need to deal with it in a way suitable for coping with the new era. A

fact that is certain is that we need to seek after new direction and order of design that puts more value on the spirits and culture of human beings in the 21st century, creating a new, all-inclusive value in which individual human being, the society and the environment can co-exist in a peaceful relationship by overcoming the market-oriented, material-based production of the analytical, competitive and differentiated values in the traditional industrial society. The latest value of design shows elements of significant change moved far away from the traditional design value established in the past industrial era. In other words, it stresses 'a concept of comprehensiveness and totality rather than the analytical and partial design concept in the past era,' moving from 'simple value of the past towards more diversity,' and putting 'the greatest emphasis on co-existence and harmony between different values, getting away from the past value system based on conflict and discrimination.'

As succinctly suggested in the old maxim, "Eastern intuition ("Tao") and Western technology", people in the East have traditionally focused on securing subjective freedom of human being via intuitive power while those in the West have used their intellectual ability to develop science-based civilization to gain material wealth(Cafra 1989). Now, it is time to combine all those different elements organically - meaning that the Eastern intuition and the Western technology should compliment each other to make a whole one - to face challenges in the future more wisely. Historically, East Asian people thought, based on the all-inclusive yin and yang principle, that the value of intangible, spiritual order and harmony is more important than that of tangible materials. What is more important in the Monistic thoughts in Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism is the viewpoint of wholeness rather than the elements of separation and reduction, the change towards circulation where yin and yang achieve harmony rather than the dialectical development, and the value of unity and harmony rather than that of competition and differentiation. One can say that this traditional value system in East Asia is

better linked with the stream of values in the future society.

On the other hand, the theory of relativity, a great achievement by Einstein that made a turning point in the history of the Western mind, is a theory that got over the materialistic view of the universe in the Descartesian physics, seeing it as a whole, integrated organism. This new idea is closer than any other Western thought to the monistic Eastern view of the universe (Einstein 1921). In this context, the rediscovery of the Monistic thought of East Asia and its application to design will be able to allow us to look design in a new viewpoint and provide a starting point for a new idea for the design of the 21st century that can contribute to the whole world by eliminating the diseases the design of the industrial society.

3. Difference of Oriental and Western thoughts

There is a significant difference between the East and the West in the basic way of thinking. Therefore, the principal differences of Western and Oriental cultures have to be outlined in order to understand their specific concepts of design and beauty. In case of the West, the culture originates from the word 'to harvest' and 'to make'. Likewise, the meanings of arts (and beauty) originates from the word 'skills to make' (Oxford English Dictionary 1989). However, in the Orient, the main cultural subjects are 'heaven, earth, and human'. Also, the 'laws of nature' itself is Dou, the path to righteousness and truth, in Korea and similarly Tao in Chinese(Munro 1989).

That is, values in the laws of nature, values like existing and non-existing, ugly and beauty, virtue and evil, etc, are subject to growth and change, and form into a dynamic balance and harmony to the particular situations. Therefore, understanding these laws of nature provides the basis of understanding Oriental culture. The beauty in the Orient is a by-product originating from the exchange of feelings among humans, heaven and earth; and often reflecting the nature is

more important than the results of artificial treatments. The differences between beauty concepts in Oriental and Western cultures can be defined as following diagram;

As being shown in the above, Oriental cultures and beauty are better related to nature, philosophy, Monistic ideologies but the values in Western cultures are close to selfness, material, and division ideologies.

Culture	
Orient	West
naturalism	human centered
monism	dualism
religeous	scientific
emotional	rational
mental	material
meaning	practical
subjectism	objectism
speciality	generality
instinct,experience	analysis

Beauty	
Orient	West
live	mechanical
weak.flexible	hard.rigid
deep.calm	surface
simple	complex
frank	artificial efficiency
curve	strait
oneness with nature	break from nature
harmony	dualism
totalism	individualism

Figure 1: differences in Oriental and Western concepts of culture and beauty(Munro1989)

4. Oriental philosophy and Monism Concept

Oriental culture has been deeply influenced by 'Taoism', 'Buddhism', and 'Confucianism' among others. The basic theory of Taoism is about the 'relativity of values', which grow, change, and harmonize by the interaction of each value in the changing situation. Therefore, the essence of

Taoism does not divide each value, yin and yang, nil-existence, beauty-ugly, good-bad, etc, but see them with their wholistic relationships. These relationships of values are defined ideologically by the term Monism. The principle of "Tao" in Taoism is in the providence of nature. The law of nature is something that lacks nothing and exceeds nothing, that is, the state where everything is appropriate, the harmony of yin and yang, dynamic equilibrium and balance. The ideal and the aim of "Tao" is not to have a surplus from something but to achieve the state where nothing lacks, or is missing. It is the state without excessiveness, and in a good condition. Also, as we see in the maxim, 'Nature fills up what lacks with the remaining from what is excessive,' what comes from the concept of "Tao" is not something created as in the Western philosophy but a process of changing as often described in the view of nature. In other words, it is to discover what is bad or what is not satisfactory, to send what is old, to receive what is new, and to seek after changes to improve them.

Meanwhile, ascetic practices in Buddhism are also aimed to arrive at monistic state, or non-dualistic wholeness. Also, the true beauty in Buddhism is the liberated beauty that displays non-dualistic wholeness without discriminating the beauty and the ugly in the ordinary sense. In Confucianism, too, the root of its philosophy is the 'perfect virtue' that yearns to tread the way for 'worship of Heaven and love of Men'. The 'perfect virtue' quests for 'what is reasonable' and the 'middle way' to follow the order of Nature and avoid what is artificial. The 'middle way' in Confucianism is the way towards finding the best and right way and, thus, the normal (unchanging) principle where nothing exceeds or lacks.

All of these Oriental ideologies are based on the laws of nature, and emphasize relativity of values according to circumstances saying that we should not look at conflicting values in a dualistic way but at what are the same in essence in an monistic way. And the combination of the above stated Oriental philosophical concepts produced the key concept of Monistic thinking defined by the term "Han" in the

traditional Korean philosophy.

5. Basic Design Principles Based on the Monism Theory

If the value of design in the 20th century was based on 'conflict and discrimination', the identity of the 21st century design and culture will be found in the spirit of 'Monism and Harmony' rooted in the Oriental philosophies. By definition, Monism refers to 'harmony' or 'the primary principle of behind the great harmony of humans, nature, and all things in the universe', based on the forces of yin and yang; furthermore, the meaning of Monism can be expanded as 'the principle giving rise to the existence of all things'. Monism embodies the assembly and unification of many parts in a grand whole. The ultimate value of Monism is the very principle that governs the existence of the universe, shaping human life as well as creating all matter. Approached by a monistic philosophy, design is something that benefits others than myself, puts more importance on the life hidden behind the physical phenomena, thinks more of what lacks that is behind what exceeds, mind behind body, and nothingness behind what exists, and seeks after beauty via total balance and development that can be feasible by combining all these elements.

This monistic ideology integrates the concepts of 'Unification, Harmony and Change', the essential meaning is, 'the many in one and the one in many' simultaneously, as visually represented by Taegeuk (yin and yang) (Figure2). And, the interaction of these three elements will combine into a Monistic Design theory. The three elements of Monism are explained in more detail;

(1) Unification

Monistic ideology as unification always values the concept of comprehensiveness or wholeness by identifying different elements in a great one. In other words, the
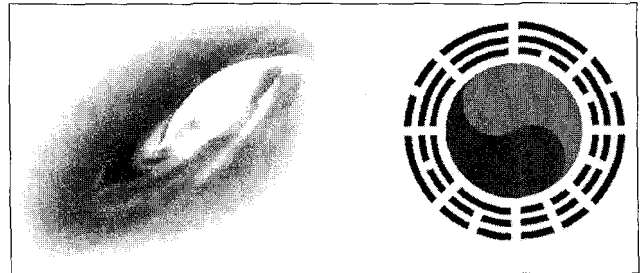
Figure 2: The galactic system shows the law of nature, while Taeguk demonstrates the harmonic balance between yin and yang.

Monism is to regard something as a great whole in its basis rather than trying to understand it by the dialectic character in which an element or a thing faces conflict between the subject and the object, the materialistic and the non-materialistic, East and West, or past and present. It divides the standard of a truth or a value into two, and puts it on one part of a circle rather than on any one end of a straight line. It may be compared with that although water and ice look different they are not different in their essence and that day and night look different but, in fact, day turns into night and night into day. The Monism is to understand the dualistic relationship of the subject and the object as a whole one, and perceive 'You' and 'I' as 'We'.

(2) Harmony

Harmony in the Monism means to achieve peaceful, pleasant and mutually-beneficial cooperation and unity between a man and other men, a thing and other thing, and what is artificial and what is natural in the position that they are all one in their fundamental state while maintaining their own unique existence. The value of existence in the Monism naturally achieves harmony within itself. The beauty of harmony in the Monism is for all individual elements to achieve 'the state of most appropriately harmonized without any excessiveness or lack' within a whole via the dynamic process of making balance. Here the 'appropriateness' means the state in which matter and mind, being and non-being, past and present, and the local and the central attain balance. The beauty of harmony is to value the

beauty of the 'middle way' through the balance and unity of being and non-being like, for example, that 'the outer existence of a pot is what is embodied into a material to use the empty space within it that is hidden from outside.'

(3) Change

In the Monism every existence does not stop at a certain predetermined stage but heads towards a higher stage, constantly changing. In the viewpoint of change, the Monism has the character of moving voluntarily and changing to make progress. It does this not by any outer forces but by the cause within itself. The maxim, 'nature is harmony', means 'coming into being of its own accord', and the principle of change strongly reflects the concept of perpetual motion. Like the law of nature that always changes to come to a perfect condition, all materials and beings follows the process of changes that always seeks after what is new via the shift between the new that is thriving and the old that is dying. Ultimately, change or what is new in the Monism is, as in the 'principle of mutual attraction and repulsion' in which what is surplus is taken to fill up what lacks, to give and take within a whole, thus causing the whole to develop progressively.

6. Monism-based Design Principles and Values in Each Design Stage

Understanding these three key concepts of Monism theory are synthesized for constructing new design principles and design process; that is the 'unification' concept can be applied as a view of observing design problems (Analysis). The 'harmony' concept can be applied as a view of evaluative checkpoint of the designed objects (Evaluation). And the 'change' concept can be applied as a view of defining more figurative solutions (Synthesis). As the result, the design based on the Monistic theory is the process of achieving beauty, understanding the subject-object as a great one undivided into two from the viewpoint of a whole rather than a part (Unification), the spirit of sharing in which one finds a part that is lacking or missing something and fills it up on the basis of love (Change), and achieving the state in which the whole is brought into balanced appropriateness, coexist, and attains vitality for mutual benefit (Harmony).

(1) Stage of Unified Thought; observation and analysis stage

The unified thought of Monism is the view with which a designer observes an object. And, the thought of unification in the Monistic design is to perceive detailed values such as 'reason' and 'energy' and 'being' and 'non-being' in the value of a great whole. This thought values the whole and the group rather than an element or an individual unlike the design of the industrial society in the past, and considers the value in the attitude focused on integration and unification by avoiding the attitude that interprets things by analysis and separation. It is also to look things in a circular way, that is, from the viewpoint that in essence all are in one great whole rather than look them by putting different values on both ends of a straight line. Also, the value of unification in the Monism is formed by meeting and gathering as well as the interaction or sympathetic communication within them. There exists an order in the interrelationship between elements within a unified one. There exists an order in the interrelationship between elements within a unified one. As an ancient maxim goes, we should recommend what is good to each other, correct errors for each other, exchange etiquette with each other, and help each other solve problems. The following values are in the unified thought of Monism;

Comprehensive thinking, Importance of a whole, Unity of the subject and the object, Meeting and communication, Immanent order
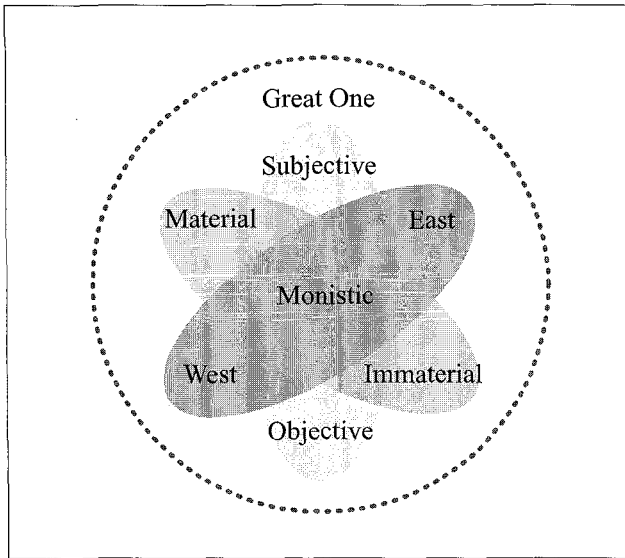
Figure 3: concept of unified though

(2) Stage of Harmonious Being; evaluation Stage

As a principle that exists to help a thing become balanced and stable with its surroundings, the concept of harmony in the Monism can be applied as a standard by which one can interpret and judge the relationship that brings in harmony between elements inhered in a whole. Harmony is the spirit that helps things become agreeable to each other on the basis of the way of nature. This is possible by the ability of perceiving things as a unified and all-inclusive being rather than an individual. That is, the design of harmony means agreement between elements, for example, the dynamic balance and complement between 'reason' and 'energy', yin and yang, disharmony and harmony, freedom and suppression, beauty and ugly, nature and civilization, and metaphysical and physical. The design of harmony is characterized by that it values the elements of cooperation and harmony by getting over those of competition and discrimination, and gives more stress on affection and communication than reason and one-sided ness. It also emphasizes balance and integration and, eventually, the state of appropriateness between the values of elements. However, the true meaning of harmony is not static or fixed

harmony but the process of new, everlasting, creation without leaning towards one side. The following values are in the harmonious thought of Monism;

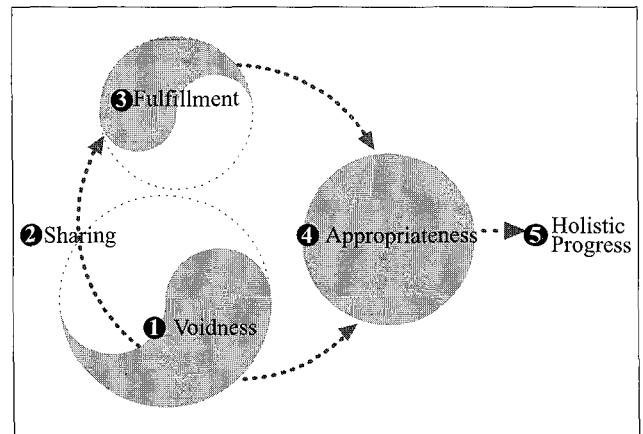Balance and integrity, Mutual coexistence, Natural way and harmony, Love and conversation, Mutual respect

Figure 4: concept of change & harmony thoughts

(3) Stage for Creation of Changes; creation stage

The attitude towards design of changes is to refrain oneself on the basis of total freedom, take care concerns of others, and provide flexible receptivity through nothingness and emptiness. It is one of the principles for creation of design. The thought of changes in the Monistic design has, as its essence, the creation of beauty based on the reduction of entropy - the efficiency of regulation, moderation, reduction and information. In order to practice it the changes of the Monism accept minimalism that affects no harm to nature as its best value. In other words, its principle of creation is complement and coexistence that are achieved by filling up what lacks with what is superfluous in one whole. It emphasizes the concept of moderation and circular improvement by getting rid of the tradition inherited from the industrial society as well as altruistic sharing rather than self-centered desire. Also, the process of thinking creation considers deduction and intuition more important than induction and reason that are the characteristics of the

industrial society in the past as well as the given situation than the fixed principle for soling problems. In short, changes and creation based on the Monism are to create a new thing by establishing a new principle by ideal, abstract and intuitive concept according to circumstances without leaning towards any fixed form, and by discovering and applying function, skill, materials, structure, proportion and form that are appropriate for circumstances and uses. The following values are in the Changing thought of Monism;

Altruism and sharing, Moderation and improvement, Omission and abstraction, Knowledge and intuition,
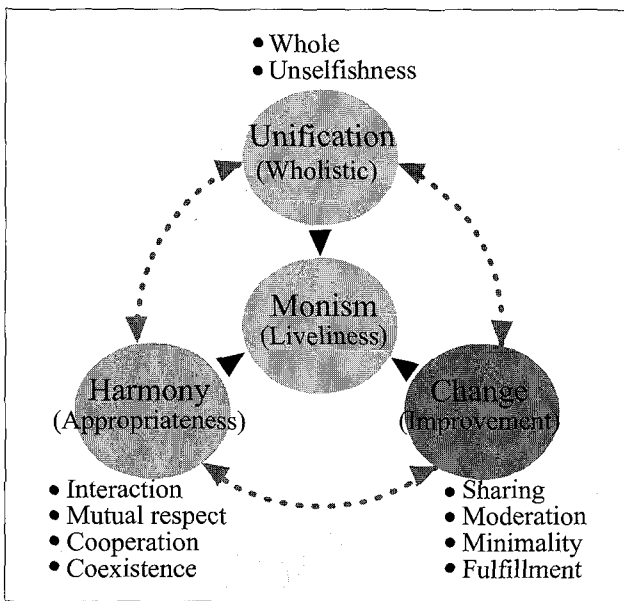

Figure 5: principle of Monistic Design

7. Conclusion

The value of design in the 21st century needs to be redefined focusing on the truthful communication between human beings and men and nature and integrated value. What is also needed is to get over the market-oriented competition and materialistic thoughts inherited from the industrial society in the past and to create various human values that seek after the coexistence of human beings with the ecology of earth. In this context, the traditional

philosophies in the East including Korea based on Monism can be profitably exploited to find out a universal and global value for the design in the future as the features such as the idea based on wholeness, emphasis on the importance of nature and inner world and particularity are in the same context with social and cultural values of the future society. The principle of this Monistic theory is the principle of yin and yang that forms Nature including every single thing she contains in her. The basic value of this philosophy moves towards interpreting contrasting elements in a monistic way and developing them into a great whole on a higher level that shows beauty and vitality.

The design principle based on the Monistic theory consists of three basic elements: (1) identification of the subject and the object between things under the perception that all things are one (Unification); (2) the ability that helps things exist with 'appropriate' beauty maintaining balance and stability (Harmony); and (3) the attitude of sharing to maintain sustainable vitality by filling up what lacks or is missing in a whole (Change).

Design Stage	Design Elements
Unification	• Wholistic & group values • Synthetic & unified methods • Circulative & monistic process
Harmony	• Cooperative & harmonious Values • Balancing & unificative methods • Intimacious & conversative process
Change	• Altruistic & sharing values • Moderative & minimal improvement methods • Deductive & intuitive process

Figure 6: Stage and elements of Monistic Design

The ultimate goal of design is human beings and the beauty of life, and the goal of the design based on the Monistic theory is to quest for life, beauty and goodness. The core of this design is integrating the values of 'Dou' and 'object', 'reason' and 'energy' into a greater design that may be called the design of Taegeuk (the absolute principle of the universe where yin and yang interact with each other).

Design for the 21st century should give a more emphasis on the design in the shape of a bowl based on the monistic standpoint and, ultimately, the 'design for perceiving the bowl'. Also, design should be focused on the more restrained inner life along with the interest in the hidden, non-materialistic, metaphysical values. For this, designers should give their mind to regulatory element of restraint and reduction along with free imagination.

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