Research On Design Approach Based On Cultures Difference

Tengku Idora Ilyaneer*  Yamazaki Kazuhiko**  
1) Chiba Institute of Technology, Graduate School of Engineering  2) Chiba Institute of Technology

1. Background
Differences in cultures usually resulted in the misunderstanding and get people separated in their own culture. In this research, Japanese and Malaysian are taken to be the samples for two different cultures. Japanese and Malaysian have their own culture which are unique and different from each other. Thus, designing based on comparison of cultures can create a new design and thus narrowing the gap of differences between cultures.

2. Research Objective
This research aims to find out the differences and common points between two different cultures which in this case, between Malaysian and Japanese cultures. By understanding the common and different points between Malaysian and Japanese cultures, the connection between their culture and their lifestyle can be found.

Another purpose of this research is to create a new design that will suit in each of the cultures. After acknowledging the differences between these cultures, a new concept will be derived from the analysis made and base on the concept, design will be made.

3. Research Definition
In this research, the word “culture” is defined as the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another based on the Cultures and Organizations : Software of the Mindbook written by Geert Hofstede.

4. Research Approach
In order to perform this research, step by step approaches are to be taken accordingly to ensure the research originality. The research is started by doing observations to gain more information regarding the cultures. This observation and interviews are then filled in into work models to give a clearer view on what the respondents are thinking.

The result of the observation is then analyzed to get a clearer image on the differences and common points between the cultures. Then only the concept visualization and prototyping will be done. The concepts will be derived from the results of the observations. After the prototype is completed, an user evaluation test will be was held to ensure the prototype fulfill the research objective. Using the data and feedback collected from the evaluations, another prototype will be designed and evaluated. Based on both of the evaluations, the conclusion of this research will be done.

5. Research Observation Method

5.1. Fieldwork to the respondent house/room
Based on the ethnography method, a fieldwork to the respondent room is done to see how the respondents live their daily life. The influence of their culture in their lifestyle is also observed.

5.2. Interview the respondents
An interview was held after the fieldwork to ask some question regarding what they think about their culture and lifestyle.

6. Analyzing the Observation
In order to analyze the observation, four work models; Sequence Model, Physical Model, Artifacts Model and Cultural Model which are developed by Hugh Beyer and Karen Holtzblatt in Contextual Design book are used.

These work models are used to observe how related some objects to one’s daily life. It is also used in order to understand the different aspects of the work that matter for design. To make the common points and differences clearer, all the points taken from the observation are filled in a matrix sheets consist of two sheets. The first sheet is for the origin culture use which in this research is Malaysian.

It is filled in as the basic points that will be use as the base when comparing with the targeted culture which is Japanese culture. The second sheet is filled in based on the observations and interviews comparison with the targeted culture which is Japanese culture.

After analysing the observation, it can be concluded that Japanese and Malaysian share common points in some matters. Based on the observation, it can be say that the Japanese and Malaysian share the norm of sitting on the floor. Both cultures
need to take out their shoes before entering their houses. Next, the way of furniture being aligned in the room is basically the same. There are no fixed culture in arranging the house. It also can be said that both of the cultures prefer multi-functional furniture in order to save more spaces in the house. The variation of these multi-functional furnitures are more in Japan compared to Malaysia. Next, both of the cultures prefer nature-based products and they are both still living in a traditional way compared to the Western countries.

Meanwhile, the differences between these two cultures are concluded as in Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>Japan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heavy furniture</td>
<td>Light and practical furniture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low privacy level</td>
<td>Have a high level of privacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared for guest</td>
<td>Unprepared for guest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free routines</td>
<td>Live systematically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually having party at home</td>
<td>Usually having party outdoor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spacious home</td>
<td>Cramped/ limited home space</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Differences between Malaysian and Japanese Culture

7. Concept Visualization

While considering those common and different points between Japanese and Malaysian, some important points from the observation are taken to be the concepts for the new design. For the first concept visualization, a new style of furniture is designed. The keywords taken from observation results are practical, needs, combined elements and nature-based. The concepts of practical suggests that the new design shall have multiple uses and can be use anywhere. The concept of needs means that the design shall suit both of the country needs which in this case, the culture of sitting of the floor. For the combined elements, it suggests that the new design shall combine both of the Japanese and Malaysian elements. In this prototype, it combined the Japanese element of floor chair and Malaysian element of rattan furniture. Finally, nature-based concept which suggest the use of nature-based material.

The prototyping visualization is shown in Figure 1.

8. Prototyping (Rattan Floor Chair)

For the first prototype, a rattan floor chair is designed (Figure 2). It combines both of Japanese and Malaysia elements in the design.

material which is widely used in Malaysia. With the size of 600mmx800mmx600mm, it is more than comfortable for one to sit on it. Some other characteristics are removable cushions, washable cushions and reclining function until 180 degrees which will make it usable when taking a nap or rest. This prototype also used combination of nature colour which is light and dark brown to make the users feel nearer to the nature.

9. User Evaluation

In order to evaluate the prototype, user evaluation was made on four users which consist of two Malaysian students and two Japanese students. This evaluation objective is to find out on how far does the designed furniture suit both of the countries and how relevant the furniture is to their life. Based on the result, it can be concluded that the design of the furniture get a higher evaluation than the cultural aspect. The lack of image of another country can be say as the cause of the result.

Another user evaluation on the experience map was also done to two of the users, a Japanese and a Malaysian to find out about what they are thinking and their opinions while experiencing using this rattan floor chair.

Based on the result, it can be concluded that users are satisfied with this Rattan Floor Chair. The evaluation on the satisfaction when using the chair is high in both party. Then, it can be concluded also that the design of the chair is acceptable by both of the respondent. The evaluation on the design is the highest obtained compared to other elements. From the evaluation also, the author find out that the size of the prototype is quite big and heavy for the Japanese house, but is still acceptable. Thus, it can be say that this chair is not very suitable for a small room.

10. Summary

In conclusion, comparison between cultures can resulted in a new style of design regardless the gap of the cultures. In this research, for the first prototyping, a new style of furniture is created based on the concepts derived from the common points and differences between two cultures. It gets the approval from both of the parties that the design suits with their cultures.

For the future task, another new design will be created using the same approach thus approving the way of designing new things based on cultures comparison.

11. References

1) Cultures and Organizations : Software of the Mind by Geert Hofstede
2) Contextual Design by Karen Holtzblatt