



HAL
open science

Principles of Monumentality in the Environmental Tradition: A Study of Maekawa Kunio and Tange Kenzō's Architectural Discourses

Benoît Jacquet

► **To cite this version:**

Benoît Jacquet. Principles of Monumentality in the Environmental Tradition: A Study of Maekawa Kunio and Tange Kenzō's Architectural Discourses. *Gakujutsu kōen kōgai-shū*, 2006, F-2, pp.499-500. halshs-02332908

HAL Id: halshs-02332908

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-02332908>

Submitted on 28 Oct 2019

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

PRINCIPLES OF MONUMENTALITY IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL TRADITION.

Study of Maekawa Kunio and Tange Kenzô's Architectural Discourse.

正会員

○Benoît JACQUET*

Maekawa Kunio	Nishida Kitarô	Tange Kenzô
Environment	Discourse	Monumentality

1. Purpose of the study

Tange was confronted with Monumentality (*kinenhisei*) and Traditionality (*dentôsei*) in the competition for the "Planning of the Memorial of the Construction of the Greater East-Asia Co Prosperity Sphere" (Daitô Memorial) in 1942. This project introduced a new conception of monumentality based both on Japanese environmental culture, and on a modern planning of the territorial scales.

The purpose of this study is to show that the principles of Tange's Monumentality are based in the specificity of the Japanese relation with the environment, and linked to his intention of designing a modern urban scheme. Considering that the reflection of Tange Kenzô was also part of the spirit of his epoch, and taking into account the influence of his master Maekawa Kunio at the beginning of his career, the reference to Maekawa's writings gives some clues to get a fuller understanding of Tange's thought. In this perspective, Maekawa's essay on Tradition and Creation – concepts that are the milestones of Tange's principles of Monumentality – appears like a fundamental theory for Tange's intention to create a modern architecture based on Japanese culture. The link between Maekawa's way of thinking and the philosophy of Nishida Kitarô makes it possible to draw some connection between philosophy and architecture, and understanding the originality of Monumentality in Japanese architecture.

The purpose of the author is to present the fundamental elements (in relation to nature, tradition and creation, in the environmental sphere) that partake of the conception and definition process of this Monumentality.

2. Maekawa Kunio's conception of Tradition and Creation

In the issue of December 1942 of *Kenchiku Zasshi*, Maekawa Kunio, member of the jury for Daitô Memorial competition of the Architectural Institute, wrote a comment about the judgment of the competition and a personal essay named: "Note – About the Tradition and the Creation of Architecture" (Maekawa, 1942.12). As studied in a previous paper, Tange Kenzô had introduced the concepts of Tradition and Creation in his "Homage to Michelangelo", and it is important to see what was the idea of Maekawa on the same concepts. Published during the debate on architecture of the Daitô, this essay was related to Daitô's political issue but it constitutes, above all, a reflection on the relation between contemporary architecture and Japanese culture. In his essay, Maekawa considers that (architectural) culture is an expression of (architectural) tradition, which was itself born from an interpretation of the forms that are inside nature.

The analysis of this essay reveals that Maekawa Kunio's way of thinking was influenced by the ideas of the Nishida

Kitarô, about foundations of Japanese culture. The comparison between his writings and Nishida's – particularly *The Problem of Japanese Culture* – shows that Maekawa tried to apply Nishida's problematic to a new definition of Japanese architectural culture. According to Maekawa, the identity of architectural culture is given by the specificity of his relation to environment, through the concepts of Tradition and Creation. As shown in the following analysis, Tradition and Creation are working at the transformation of the environment.

3. Form as a unifying expression of environment

In his philosophical essay on the origin of Tradition and Creation, Maekawa was influenced by Nishida's concepts of "contradictory unification", "nature" (*shizen*), and to aphorisms such as:

"From the thing that is created to the thing that creates, form is defining form itself" (Nishida, 1940)

Maekawa wrote:

"If we assert that culture is the creative expression of the vital force of humanity we must understand that nature is a "thing that is created" and that it is impossible to conceive culture without thinking about "form". This "form" forms a contradictory unity with environment. More than a dynamic and harmonic concept, this form is a "changing form", a "living form" that gives birth to an environmental tradition." (Maekawa, 1942.12)

According to Maekawa, man created culture by giving a form to nature. Thinking about culture is to consider the "form" emerging from the transformation of nature. This form influences culture by living and changing inside the environment, it is part of environment, so that it creates an environmental culture.

In this text, Maekawa refers to Nishida's concept of "contradictory unification", according to which things that are apparently contradictories – such as nature and culture; man ("subject") and environment –, are in a unifying process. This unification appears when things enter in relation one with the other. For example, when man creates forms from nature, he produces a culture that becomes part of nature, and this creation shapes the environment that influences him back. The form created by man forms the environment where man is living; Maekawa named it "environmental tradition", which is changing by itself.

Maekawa explained how this tradition is created from nature and transmitted through creation:

"What gives birth to the form of architecture?"

At the beginning of humanity, man started to build a shelter to protect himself from rain, wind and snow, and the idea of this

structure was suggested to him by something in nature. (...) Culture appeared as the technological response that man gave to the call of nature. The grotto that he excavated and the hut that he built ended in becoming a part of nature, when this “second nature” called man again, he built the second grotto and the second hut. It is this primitive way of transmission of creation that perpetuated the primitive tradition.” (Maekawa, 1942.12)

This interpretation of Maekawa helps to understand the relation between man and its environment. He explained that, in the process of living inside nature, and the necessity to protect from the conditions of the climate, man transforms nature; he asserted that the first forms created by man were encountered, “suggested by something”, in nature itself. The form created as a response to the conditions of the climate became a “second nature”, which became a new reference for the creation of forms. Tradition appeared when the form of nature took the form of a second nature. The second nature unifies with nature to become a subjective nature (a man-made nature) that incorporates man and communicates with him. Maekawa called the passage from one nature to another one the primitive process of creation.

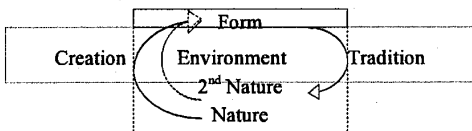
As Nishida wrote:

“Creating things does not mean moving or changing the world from the exterior. We are born in a historical and social world, we create things with the technique and by creating we create ourselves.” (Nishida, 1940).

Technique, and, by extension, Architecture, is the mean to create and perpetuate tradition, and to finally unify man and his environment.

“Technique unifies man and nature, subject and environment.” (Nishida, 1940)

4. “Contradictory unification” of Tradition and Creation



Creation and Tradition in the Environment:

Inside the Environment, Form is created from Nature [by Creation] and Form becomes a 2nd Nature [by Tradition]; Then, Form is created from Nature and/or 2nd Nature, and the 2nd Nature is constantly transforming.

According to Maekawa, Man has created Culture, and Form from an interpretation of Nature. It is the fundamental principle of Creation that creates Form. Then, from the created Form (Nishida: “the thing that is created”) a Second Nature is formed and gives form to new forms (Nishida: “the thing that creates”). It is by Tradition that Form becomes the 2nd Nature, and constitutes an expressive environment for the Creation of Form.

Tradition and Creation are working together in this cyclic process of “self-formation” of the world, so that, as Nishida explained it, man and his environment are unifying and interacting constantly.

“In the process of self-formation of the historical world, the subject determines the environment and the environment determines the subject: man creates the environment and the

environment creates man” (Nishida, 1940)

Maekawa found in Nishida’s concept of “contradictory unification” an answer to the conciliation of the contradictory elements of Tradition and Creation; this contradictory unification of Tradition and Creation is at the basis of Tange’s Monumentality.

“The creation of form is the contradictory unification between objectivity and subjectivity, it is the dynamic unification between the interior nature of man and the exterior world, it is, in other words, the unification of the contrary elements of expressive environment and fundamental principle.” (Maekawa, 1942.12)

According to Maekawa, the environment is the Tradition, as the whole of already created forms, and the fundamental principle, that forms the things that do not yet have an image, is the Creation. The past Tradition and the future Creation are born and unifying in the same milieu (the “historical present”), thus:

“In a word, tradition is in fact a creative tradition and creation is a creation based on tradition.” (idem)

In conclusion of his essay, Maekawa repeats the necessity to take into account the totality of the concept of environment for the creation of architectural forms:

“I think that the most important is to think about “form” as a phenomenon that confronts the whole environment and not only as an abstraction of a specific fragment of the environment.” (Maekawa, 1942.12)

The form that confronts the “whole environment” is working as a unification of nature and culture, tradition and creation, and it does not only refer to one single aspect of them. Interpreting Maekawa’s discourse, the form of architecture cannot rely only on tradition or creation and it must be rooted in and concerned in environmental issues, such as, for instance, territorial planning.

Future development

The author aims to show that Maekawa Kunio’s conception of the Environmental tradition will be applied by Tange Kenzō as a principle of Monumentality in the Environmental Planning of his entry for the Daitōa Memorial.

References

- BERQUE Augustin (1982). *Le sauvage et l'artifice*. Paris: Gallimard.
- LEFEBVRE Henri (1974). *La production de l'espace*. 4th edition, Paris: Anthropos, 2000.
- JACQUET Benoît (2006). “Principles of Latent Monumentality in Tange Kenzō’s concepts of Tradition and Creation. *Journal of Architecture, Planning and Env. Engineering*, No 601, March 2006.
- 丹下健三「Michelangelo頌—LeCorbusier論への序説」『現代建築』1939年12月刊。
- 丹下健三「忠霊神域計画主旨」『建築雑誌』1942年12月号。
- 前川國男「大東亜共栄圏に於ける建築的建設に対する会員の要望（投稿及回答）」『建築雑誌』1942年9月号。
- 前川國男「第十六建築会展覧会：競技設計審査評」『建築雑誌』1942年12月号。
- 前川國男「覚え書き—建築の伝統と創造について」『建築雑誌』1942年12月号。
- 西田幾多郎「日本文化の問題」岩波書店、1940年刊。