

Fumihiko Maki **1987 Laureate Kenzo Tange** Essay

Remarks on Kenzo Tange

by Fumihiko Maki

After 300 years of virtual isolation under the Tokugawa Shogunate, Japan embarked on a remarkable process of modernization with the Meiji Restoration. This process not only transformed the visible aspects of the country, but wrought a profound change in the Japanese psyche. Until then, a sense of the past had always been implicit in the Japanese notion of the present. The acceptance of modernization added a new temporal dimension. The here and now came to be colored by the anticipation of tomorrow.

For the last 120 years, a time marked by continual and radical change, Japanese architects have attempted to chart the future, each in his own way. The Japanese architect who has given expression to a personal vision of the future with the greatest confidence and power of persuasion is undoubtedly Kenzo Tange.

For the Japanese of the early Meiji Era, the West was the future made manifest, but this has not been the case for Tange. An ability to distill the very essence of the modern spirit is wedded to a deep understanding of traditional Japanese culture, and these two aspects of his character are already evident in the early masterpieces such as the Hiroshima Peace Center and the Kagawa Prefectural Government Office.

The National Gymnasium for the Tokyo Olympics of 1964 was a magnificent product of twentieth century structural technology, as well as a bold and original conception of space. It is one of the landmarks of modern architectural history and assured the highest international reputation for Tange.

In the twenty-odd years since then, Tange has been active on five continents and has realized numerous major projects. Now in his eighth decade, he remains, astonishingly, one of the most productive architects in the world. The secret of his energy and youthful spirit is surely the confidence and hope with which he always regards the future. The new Tokyo City Hall Complex, soon to undergo construction, will no doubt be a splendid addition to an already illustrious oeuvre and serve as an apt symbol for the modernization of Japan.

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