

The Possibilities of A Monument in 21st century Tokyo: Towers and the City

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「空虚な中心」と呼ばれてきた都市東京で、あたかも1980年代以降の経済的不況の代償として、今世紀に入って以降、記念碑的性格を持つ建造物の建設が続いている。それまでは都市の無意識、あるいは自然発生的なものを探究する試みが目立っており、これは江戸東京博物館の設立・建設にまで至った。本論ではまず21世紀東京での記念碑的建築にまつわる現象を数例検討し、その意味を読み解く。第一に東京駅の建設当初の姿への復元、第二に三菱一号館のレプリカ再現とその美術館への転用、第三に政治と予算とは別の建築的側面から新国立競技場に向けての二つのコンペ案を取りあげた。最後に、中川大地の議論にそって東京スカイツリーの建設に関する意味をふりかえり、記念建造物に求められがちな国家像とは切り離された新たな意義を見出す。

Abstracts:

Tokyo, the city with an “empty center” (Roland Barthes), is restoring some monuments and monumental buildings in this century as if they were in compensation for its economical decline since 1980s, after pursuing and preserving the vernacular, and building a huge museum that houses it. This paper introduces some phenomenon in this city that reflects a desire for monuments and their meanings: a recovery of the original state of Tokyo Station building, a replication of Mitsubishi Ichigokan office building and its immediate conversion to a museum, and a turmoil around two competitions of the new National Olympic Stadium, apart from the political and financial problems. Finally Tokyo Skytree, in particular, suggest another possibility of monuments, according to Nakagawa Daichi. We will take a look into his book and analyse the two-fold “publicness” that he associated with the tower so as to seek for another possibility of a monument in this city.

1. Is Tokyo a City of Emptiness?

Roland Barthes makes a famous comment in his *L'Empire des Signes* in 1970 that the existence of Tokyo's centre “is not meant to radiate any kind of power, but to offer its own empty centre to all urban movement as a form of support, by forcing perpetual traffic detours”¹.

We can point two aspects out from this passage, despite his other comments on Japanese culture. First, this was a typical opinion that describes the built environment in Japan as using less materials of wood and paper, by contrast with Western massive stone-built ones. For example, in 1944 a Japanese architectural critic Hamaguchi Ryuichi identified the character of architecture in Japan as spatial, lightweight, and action-based, while Western as massive and material-based. Obviously, his argument contains a Japanese specific interest in wartime: the defense of Modernist architecture by Tange Kenzo and Maekawa Kunio against the contemporary pseudo-national style, called as “Teikan-shiki”

[the style to crown the empire] or of “Japanese taste”; and the theoretical current of overcoming the Modernisation, largely from the Western

countries, among Japanese critical circle. In spite of these circumstances, the basis of Japanese self-awareness on their architecture went on to the Postwar era. Architectural historians and critics in Japan relatively avoided discussing and embodying the massive monumentality between the 1950s and the 1970s. Jordan Sand argues in his book in 2013, *Tokyo Vernacular*, that Tokyoites have tended to notice the vernacular rather than the abstract symbolic forms. For examples, walking around the street to find funny objects like “the stairs for stairs’ sake” and “the doors for nothing”; preservation movements of everyday scenery in brownish working-class neighbourhoods that avoided being redeveloped in the economic bubble; and the opening of the gigantic Edo-Tokyo Museum in 1993 that focuses urban people’s life and its environments consisting of objects and buildings — all of these occurred since the middle of the 1980s. Sand found two factors of these postwar phenomenon. The first is the dominance of the postwar generations that tend to ignore national symbols, and the second is the sporadic total destructions caused by the 1923 Earthquake, the

¹ Barthes, Roland, éd. Eric Marty. *Œuvres complètes*, tome III 1968-1971, Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 2002, p.374.

1945 bombing, and the frequent “scrap-and-build” during and after the postwar economic miracle, a tendency to replace old buildings by new ones, instead of reforming or renovating them: Tokyo people could not find an old symbol of the city other than nationalistic ones which have reminded them of the wartime.

The second and more important aspect picked up from Barthes is that the source of Tokyo's urban movement were the empty center of the city that creates a perpetual movement of detour around the centre. If the flows of its circulations weaken, another source of powers might be required instead. Deyan Sudjic mentioned, in his book *The Edifice Complex*, the similarity among Tokyo, Beijing, and Moscow that centre voids as an anchor of an authoritarian power of their national politics and administrations. In terms of Barthes' theory, however, we would rather distinguish Tokyo's emptiness from those of the others. Reconstructed in the 1950s and especially after the death of Mao Zedong, Tiananmen Square has been the centre of human and material collisions among an increasing number of monuments and monumental buildings. Military marching held in the Red Square in Moscow was the focus of the Western journalism in the time of the Cold War, and this square, too, are filled with historical and political monuments. Compared with these two capitals, Tokyo has lacked a symbolic square filled with massive monuments or movements. Tokyo's physical centre of city planning was the tenant of the previous Shogunate and is that of the current Emperors for this one-and-a-half century. The Imperial Household situates their palaces in the woods of the former Edo Castle where none of the public can enter in. Imperial Palace Plaza is located in the southeast front of the palace. A researcher of politics Hara Takeshi illustrates that the Japanese Imperial Army, the occupation forces of the Allies, and surprisingly the Japanese Communist Party had several parades or assemblies in this plaza before, during, and after the World War II. But their monuments were built temporarily and tore down after each and every ceremony: they all have kept the square a whole void. Back to the viewpoint that Barthes offered, why Tokyo was able to maintain the Palace and its Plaza without constructing massive permanent monuments seems that Tokyo had an abundant rotating movement around there. People in Tokyo can rotate around the void of the Palace, and can go through the void of the Plaza, but they cannot see a built structure that points a centre.

We attempt here to attribute the reason for the recent successive constructions of monumental architecture in Tokyo to the lack of this movement after its economic decline. It has experienced an economical stagnation and sparse movements of human, material and informational beings for over two decades unlike Beijing or Moscow. It seems requiring another monumental object that should have a nationwide influence since the beginning of the 21st century.

II. Revival of Monumental Buildings

Tokyo Station was originally completed in 1914 as the final and paramount station in this capital that had already held several terminals of national railways, especially for the use of the Imperial Family. The first user of this station was the triumphant general of the Japanese Army in order to report himself to the Emperor at the Palace: he had acquired the German Navy's settlement in China taking advantage of World War I. After the half destruction by the air raids in 1945, this building has remained as a temporary restoration for over 60 years. This period of time was twice longer than the time the perfectly original building had survived. But a railway company JR East completed its restoration to the brick-built original in 2012 before its centennial, and they planned to complete the construction of a football-field-sized square and two traffic circles in the Palace Front by 2017. Japan started to manufacture red bricks after the Meiji Restoration differently from China and Korea which had produced bricks for a long time. Red bricks had been the expression of advanced techniques that the government and the Western countries held, though 1891 Mino-Owari earthquake and decisively 1923 Great Kanto earthquake spread a speculation that brick mass-wall structure was not effective. National authorities for disaster prevention turned to promote reinforced concrete and red bricks was left behind as a sign of a special period of westernisation in Japan.

Between the station and the Palace is Marunouchi business district: its landowner Mitsubishi Corporation completed a reproduction of brick-built Mitsubichi Ichigokan Building as a new museum in 2009. The original was Japan's first office building designed by Josiah Conder completed in 1894, and demolished without warning in the land price's soaring in 1968. After 40 years had passed since a typical Modernist office building was built, they decided to replace it with a monument of the Modernisation or Westernisation in Meiji era. This reproduction

was thoroughgoing from the moulding of the bricks, the walls to the office rooms. In short, they reproduced an old-fashioned office building perfectly and converted it immediately to a museum, opened to the public. Marunouchi has been exclusively a business district for a long time, but they added an orthodoxy to canonise this area through the foundation of a cultural facility dressed with the Victorian style.

In 2012, a government-affiliated sports organisation in charge of National Olympic Stadium in Tokyo determined to held an international competition to construct a new and larger stadium. The site was assigned to a stadium in 1924 and the existing building was completed for the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo. The process of the decision not to extend the old one but to replace it with a new one has not been clear yet. But even if Tokyo had lost the 2020 Olympic Games, they could retain the 2019 Rugby World Cup in Japan, and insist on the need of a larger stadium. According to the competition that restricted its participation to those who had experienced such a big stadium or had won a worldwide architectural prize, Zaha Hadid was chosen to the winner against Japanese SANAA, Toyo Ito, and Australian Philip Cox. Although there seems no explicit complains directly after the competition, a renowned Japanese architect Maki Fumihiko began to criticise the bigness to its surroundings and the significance to the society and history of Tokyo and Japan, compared to the amount of construction cost and in terms of shrinking population. Maki had designed the Tokyo Gymnasium which is next to the site of the National Stadium and sunk half into the ground. The height of the stadium building in Hadid's proposal compared to the surrounding woods in the outer garden of Meiji Shrine, where deifies Emperor Meiji, was also a problem that the adversary against Hadid and the patronage politics pointed out. Some concerned about the big construction scheme itself, that the organisation had presented in advance of the competition, in the midst of Tokyo's wealthy western half. Once Maki took a clear stand against her stadium, lots of architects, journalists, and the citizens began to raise the protest. The organisation opened the minimised design of the stadium, a milder brew of Hadid, to the public,

but increasing labour costs after the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami delayed both of the demolition of the old one and the decision to start construction of Hadid's proposal. The old stadium was totally torn down in May 2015 and, when the organisation would have to place an order for the members of the new stadium in July, the Abe Administration decided to scrap Hadid's proposal. They held a competition again and Kuma Kengo won by his proposal in which stadium will be clad in wooden louver, which allegedly represent a Japaneseness. Certainly, Japanese national and regional governments began in this century to promote the technology for the large-scale wooden structures and to encourage the participants of their architectural competitions to use local timber in order to maintain the forest industry. The expression of the tradition could take the other materials: the surface of reinforced concrete exposed to the wooden moulds was a typical expression of the tradition at Tange Kenzo's Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum; and the deep trenches of rammed earth below the white cubes of Aomori Museum of Art realised by Aoki Jun reflect the nearby ruins of 4000-6000 years ago. However wooden louvers have extended around Tokyo by Kuma, for example the exterior design of a complex of the LVMH group One Omotesando and the Nezu Museum, and the interior design of the Suntory Museum which resides in a low level of a high-rise business tower which itself clad glass curtain-walls. Wooden louvers became fashionable in the capital in search of its origin.

A guidebook for Tokyo architecture introduces that "attitudes toward time in contemporary Tokyo" has been shifted to "mythologized past rather than projections of a glorified future"². The former two examples discussed above reflect a nostalgia for the good old days of imperial modern, winning concessions and taking part in the Great Powers in the world through the World War I, or the times western technology was admired for modernising this country. The station building preceded "departure from the postwar regime" of temporary restoration for over 60 years. The newly-built museum building pursued the originality of brick mass-wall structure, with a seismic base isolation, which communicates a professed historical resource without an accumulation of the

² Worrall, Julian, Erez G. Solomon, and Joshua Lieberman. *21st Century Tokyo : a Guide to Contemporary Architecture*. Tokyo and New York: Kodansha International, 2010.

times. The latter example reflects a nostalgia for the good old days of rapid economical growth and rejoining international community through playing host to worldwide events after the World War II. The stadium should be a manifestation of Tokyo as a global city with a global architect first, and was changed to be a representation of Japanese culture after an uncertain decision-making process and an irresponsible organisation.

III. Rise and Fall and Rerise of Towers

Finally we investigate a 634-meter-high television tower Tokyo Skytree, opened in 2012. The motivation of raising a higher tower than the existing 333-meter-high Tokyo Tower was simply technical and political. When the government prepared to change terrestrial broadcasting to be digitalised from 1997, Tokyo Tower turned out to be insufficient in its coverage. The government intended to convert the vacant frequency band so as to promote mobile communications, though abandoning the satellite broadcasting was criticised as patronage politics of licensed industry. The government sought for the site of a new tower in Tokyo and several sites were proposed. Finally Tobu Railway Company succeeded in inviting it in March 2006 in order to turn the tourists' attraction to the eastern half of Tokyo, the blue-collar and vernacular side of the city fitted for an ordinary life. They have to pursue another means of survival except railway services in Japan's underpopulation.

The national journalism praised the tower as a fruit of Japanese technological capability, but this comment was also found in the judgement to adopt Zaha Hadid's design as the new National Stadium. Ando Tadao was one of two supervisors of the design of this tower and was the chief judge in the competition of the National Stadium in this connection. The tower's design is said to be modelled on the carving of the Japanese sword and to be shaped mainly by a sculptor and the former president of Tokyo University of the Arts Sumikawa Kiichi, but the limitation of the site, originally a freight station, seems the focal determinant of this shape. The long and narrow form of the site conformed the basis of the tower to the maximum triangle. The function of observation decks and the resistance to wind required its horizontal sections above the middle of the tower to be the shape of circle. This gradual

change of the shape of the sections make the curves on the sides of the tower like warping of Japanese swords. Its structure consists of the 375-meter-high main post made with reinforced concrete and a 165-meter-long steel-pipe crowning on the top. It has been compared to the stupa of Horyuji temple built in the 7-8 century, but according to the construction company's announce, this analogy, too, is an accidental result when they considered its resistance against earthquakes³. The mechanism that has realised the durability of the stupa in Horyuji is not clarified yet. In spite of the various explanations or analogy, the shape of the tower was simply technical and economical. Moreover, the names of the designer are hiding behind the anonymity of the company, Nikken Sekkei, Japan's biggest architecture firm, or behind the name of an architect and an artist who only had supervised the design. There is no room for a Romanticism of the artistic creativity.

A writer Nakagawa Daichi, living near the site of the tower, asserts that it has a two-fold "publicness": one is that of the tower itself, and another is that of a shopping mall. Obviously, the tower seems a genuine product of capitalism also for him. He simply points out a slight possibility of the tower as a public monument.

The former is derived from the curved form of the tower and its involving narratives that are irrelevant to the practical functions. He asserts that the towers consisting of straight beams or tension wires from the Eiffel Tower to the Tokyo Tower indicate the modern functional and rational society and this indication itself is an aspect of "publicness". And the curving shape of Tokyo Sky Tree and the Canton Tower in China, the rugged shapes of Burj Khalifa in Dubai, Taipei 101 in Taiwan, and The Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur reflect the regionalism after the modernism matured, declined and was diversified into different modern societies. After the emergence of Burj Khalifa in particular, the towers cannot enhance the national prestige in terms of the height. This would be partly a reason why Japanese journalism praised the technological achievement of the Skytree, but Nakagawa does not take this way. According to him, if Japanese towers from the Ryoukaku in Asakusa, Tokyo which stood in 1890 until its collapse in Great Kanto earthquake, to the Tokyo

³ Hiratsuka Kei and Takagi Mie, *Tokyo Skytree no Kagaku [The Science of Tokyo Skytree]*, Tokyo: SoftBank Creative, 2012, p.26.

Tower have succeeded to Japanese “publicness”, it is because they assumed vernacular aspects contrary to the external conditions that gave birth to the towers. Ryoukaku was built from red bricks over a wooden frame to be an icon of Japanese westernisation and its popularity was gained through holding several shows, for example beauty contests of geisha girls. The Tokyo Tower was said to be built from the steel partly melted from the tanks of the US Army used in the Korean War, that represented an americanised unfamiliar Japan. According to Nakagawa, its popularity was recovered when a rumour was brought about. The rumour said that when a couple could see the illumination of the tower put off, their relationship would last forever. Nakagawa knows well that Tokyo Skytree has also an external *raison-d'être* through a political and administrative confusion, but if people in Tokyo add a vernacular meaning to this tower, it regains the decreased number of visitors after its opening and possesses a kind of “publicness”. He also suggested that the anonymity of the designer means the new society without unnecessary authorities.

The latter of the tower’s “publicness” derives from an involved shopping mall under the tower that will support in turn the financial management of this tower and Tobu Railway. Although the consumption society is thought to prevail all over the world with its homogeneous spaces of the shopping malls destructing regional traditions, landscapes, and communities, Nakagawa argues that the refinement of shopping mall might take over the existing communities. It has a weak boundary that enables the pedestrian traffic to go through the site of the tower. So the prosperity of its shopping mall may extend to the surrounding district and around eastern Tokyo, although he admits that the rents of this mall are too expensive for a local retailer to be a tenant. His “publicness” in this point is a possibility of meeting each other by chance. He believes in the strength of the communities Eastern Tokyo involves, and shows an optimistic view that a shopping mall in the eastern half of Tokyo, a place of genuine indigenous continuity through the eras of Edo and Tokyo, does not tend to be a fictional one, which means, for example, the shopping malls in airport buildings or theme parks prepared for those who want the simplified Japanese or Western features. Tokyo Sky Tree can reside a new type of shopping malls that will show a realistic feature of Tokyo someday, he says. Nakagawa has also joined a local circle that admitted the tower into their neighbourhood and made some requests

to the authorities and the railway company. The story of their circle is beautiful and indicates some possibility of the vernacular tissue of neighbourhood and communities that tended to be weakened in the modernised Tokyo.

Thus Nakagawa finds the possibility of ordinary people’s monuments through regarding the existing tower as anti-modern, and through extending the presence of a shopping mall into the reliable communities. It may be a reaction against the miserable Tohoku earthquake and tsunami and its lumbering recovery. Although this two-fold “publicness” that he attributes to Tokyo Skytree remains a possibility, it suggests another dimension of monuments and monumental buildings in this city which lacks a massive monument and has been requested a national one by the government or some people. Monuments in Tokyo reflect the two-fold character of the city: a national, once an imperial capital of Japan and a global city which resides local people existing everywhere. Even though Japanese capitalism will promote the former mask of the city and the tower follow it, we can detect a tiny theoretical possibility to make another frontier inside the city.

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