

THE JAPANESE HOUSE

Or, why the Western architect has difficulties to understand it.

Harmonious space and the Archetype of polar space

**The traditional Japanese dwelling and the Western concept of 'general human needs' -
a comparative view in the framework of cultural anthropology**

By Nold Egenter

Introduction

Any western architect who intends to design a house or an apartment basically will start from assumption of 'the primary human needs' of the future inhabitants. Essentially three components define our western concept of primary needs. First there are physical parameters, the measurements of the human body. Neufert has presented these aspects in great detail. Further there are physiological conditions, e.g. the need for protection of various kinds: sufficient light and air, hygiene etc. Finally, a standardised behaviour is assumed, requiring sufficient space for moving, working, eating, ablutions, leisure etc. In this context space is considered as a three dimensional, basically homogeneous and neutral condition. Depending on the given conditions, the program of walls and openings, installations and surfaces for movement, fittings and functional places designed by the architect, will be set relatively freely into this homogeneously conceived space.

Several years ago a study of the European Community concluded that the Japanese live in "rabbit cages". The study was based essentially on statistical research which showed that the average dwelling space for a family in urban agglomerations hardly amounts to 40 square meters. Great astonishment! "Why do two out of three Japanese affirm that they like their life and that in general they are content?" In view of the fact that in Europe today a corresponding family needs roughly 100 square meters - that is to say, two and a half times as much - one could ask the counter question: Do we waste space? Why does the average urban family in Japan manage with so much less dwelling surface and still feel comfortable? In such purely quantitative comparisons, it is often overlooked that spatial needs are closely related to the constructive design, and this is determined by the specific cultural tradition. To illustrate this point there is hardly any better example than that of Japan. Its architectural heritage and its dwelling culture developed under entirely different cultural and geographical conditions from those with which we are familiar.<2>

Unfortunately, there are practically no special fields or educational programs, such as 'ethnology of building' or 'architectural anthropology', at today's architectural schools. Western architectural theory is completely fixed on the Euro-Mediterranean history of art. Systematic comparison with non-European cultures could not only place in question our own basic assumptions regarding principles of design: it could also provide stimulating insights.

Japanese traditional architecture formed its essential characteristics during an evolutionary process.

Most studies of Japanese domestic architecture deal with individual house-types. In explaining the particular characteristics of Japanese house forms - e.g. the traditional type of urban middle class house - rather vague reasons are given like 'love of nature', or secondary aspects such as the danger of earthquakes or adaptation to climatic conditions are overemphasised. In fact, the houses in the Japanese Alps or Northern Japan are not essentially different from those of other regions, in spite of harsh winter conditions. Merely descriptive presentations miss the essential point. Japanese building and dwelling was essentially formed by a clearly discernible process of development.

- In spite of Chinese influence, the Japanese dwelling has always been based on the traditional wooden post-and-beam structure.
- Its spatial conditions are determined not only by practical economic needs but by cultic needs.
- The Japanese house is not just a protection and a "shelter", it is a basic element in the local community: the traditional "sociological" unit of Japan is not "the family", it is rather "ie", the house.

From these first indications it may be clear that the Japanese dwelling cannot be approached simply with sketchbook, drawing-board and camera.

The Japanese live in the traditional wooden house

In Europe the Mediterranean stone- and solid construction has broadly influenced, superseded and finally - with modern architecture - practically ousted the wooden constructions of Central and Northern Europe. By contrast, it soon becomes evident that building and dwelling in Japan - including modern cities - is still in line with its prehistoric sources: as a construction on piles, it has remained true to its historically documented, classical precursors (Fig. 1). <3>

Influences of highly developed temple architecture of Chinese origin are evident since the 8th century, particularly in the residential and palace architecture (shin- denzukuri) of the Nara and Heian periods. During Kamakura and Muromachi periods, Buddhist temple architecture became differentiated with the formation of various sects. It spread into the hinterland and thus had an impact on the popular architecture of villages and small towns (minka) as well as on the urban middle-class house and the medieval feudal palace architecture (shoin- and sukiya-tsukuri).

However, since Chinese temple architecture consisted essentially of post-and-beam structures, even the modern urban dwelling-house did not greatly diverge from its rural precursors (Fig. 2, 3). In addition, medieval feudalism was strongly rooted in the provinces. This too proved to favor the diffusion of an urban dwelling-type which remained close to rural traditions. It was not until Western architecture was imported that the villas of western-oriented elites and the large multi-family blocks of satellite cities adopted stone and solid construction - a rupture, the full impact of which can hardly be estimated. But the extent to which Japanese building is based on the wooden post-and-beam type structure is best shown in the more recent, two-storied single family housing, which has spread widely over urban areas. Prefabricated in great series, these houses look like

western brickhouses covered with roughcast. But this is only the outer appearance. Upon closer inspection, the roughcast walls of the house reveal their traditional internal wooden construction. As with the conventional type of construction and in Buddhist temple architecture, the gaps between the supporting pillars are filled with clay mixed with straw. Thus the appearance of modernity is only superficial. The construction remains true to tradition.

The plan of the house and how it is used also remain traditional. Only the kitchen and sometimes the place for eating meals are modern; the other rooms, for working, sleeping and social intercourse, remain true to tradition. The floor is covered with straw mats (tatami); the family kneels at low tables to eat and drink, and they sleep on the floor as from time immemorial. <4>

Thus living in the Japanese style broadly implies adherence to tradition, just as we would do if we dwelt in modified chalets in our central European cities. <5> The architect, as a 'creative' designer, has no part to play in the traditional housing of Japan. <6> The craftsman designs the house according to ancient traditional rules, as was the case for centuries in our mountain valleys.

But why have the Japanese clung so strongly to their conventional building and dwelling traditions? It could be said: because dwelling was intimately related to traditional customs. But what are customs? Here something plays a role which cannot be discerned on occasional visits to families and houses. The Japanese dwelling is always more or less a Shinto cult precinct and a Buddhist temple.

Spiritual as well as practical needs

Already in prehistoric and classical times the roofs of Japanese houses were obviously not just a protection against climatic influences, but were symbols too. They gave the dwelling a measure of harmony according to the Asian philosophy of life. Their shape implied a polar harmony similar to the Chinese principle of Yin-Yang (jap. *iny*[™]). The original type of the house plan also shows a division into a 'high' and elaborated dwelling and sleeping part and a 'lower' part, the 'earth-space' (doma, Fig. 4a, see also Eder 1963). The floor of the higher part is covered with boards or with tatami. The lower part is the working space and kitchen. Conventionally, the floor of the doma is only of stamped earth. Often this part is also called niwa, garden, courtyard. The plan thus implies a polar unit of contrasting categories, such as above/below, artificial/ natural, costly/ simple and, in the widest sense, heaven and earth as well.

This is not just a vague supposition. This polar division is preserved as an important feature throughout the development of the Japanese farmhouse, during which it is mainly the upper part which is differentiated (Fig. 4b, c). The intimate connection with evolved tradition provides a unifying factor within the manifold forms of the Japanese house-forms Fig. 5a, b; Fig. 6). The earthen part is usually left open towards the internal roof space and thus permitting a view of the tremendous beams of the roof-structure, which are often left roughly curved and natural (Fig. 7). Most of the ancient Shinto shrines too show similar oppositions. The closed and most sacred part is elevated on piles and is contrasted sharply with an open access part which is defined by elements like "flowing" roof styles and curved stairs (Fig. 9).

Harmonious complementarities of this kind are to be found in all Japanese homes, from the inconspicuous hut to the imposing farmhouse and on to the urban dwelling house of the well-to-

do middle classes. The spatial order of the seats is determined by the polar relation of the holy board (kamidana), the Buddhist ancestral altar (butsudan) and the cult niche (tokonoma) on one side and the access room of the house (genkan) on the other side (Fig. 10). <7> Certain spatial values are thus implied. They guide the behaviour of the dwellers (and guests) in the sense of the popular German notion >gute Kinderstube< (good upbringing). That is to say, this structure and its inherent value system is integrated into thought, language and behaviour. Felt daily in its elementary form from childhood onwards, it forms part of the individual's education and continues to be similarly effective on a broader scale throughout the whole of society (Fig. 11). <8>

- Before the construction of a house is started in many places, even today, a simple sanctuary is set up as part of a celebration called the >festival for the quietening of the earth (calming the earth; jijinsai). Four corners of a rectangle are marked by green bamboo poles, set up and fixed in the earth. The uppermost part of the poles is left natural, while the branches are removed from the lower part. A sacred rope (shimenawa) fixed to the four bamboo poles delimits an elementary sacred precinct. In its centre a sacred seat of gods (yorishiro) - in itself a primitively made type of Yin-Yang symbol - is set up and divides the field into two parts of different significance. Thus this bipartition is an advance indication of the future house- plan (Fig. 12).
- Many rural house-types show a cult pillar (daikokubashira) in the centre. It usually stands on the line of delimitation between the two differently evaluated parts of the house plan. It is dedicated to the gods of happiness, Daikoku and Ebisu. Their cult is supposed to bring wealth and happiness to the house. Usually the pillar does not bear loads. Its decorated upper part juts into the sacred space of the roof. Thus it marks one of the cult places of the house (see Fig. 12, central and upper part; for details of cult-pillar and cult see Eder 1963). <9>
- The hearth too and the place where the water comes in are still interpreted as seats of deities, particularly in rural areas (kama no kami, mizugami). They are regularly the centre of certain cult activities (Fig. 12, centre, earth part at the right and Fig. 13). For details see Eder (1963).
- The "board of the gods" (kamidana) is fixed on the borderline between roof and wall in the rear of the upper dwelling part, which is covered with boards and/or mats. This is the place where the Shinto deities dwell (Fig. 14). The most important are the house- or yardgod (yashikigami) and the protecting village deity (ujigami). A small shrine of the Ise cult (Ise shink™) is usually placed there too and, particularly in farming areas, the rice deity (inari) together with other symbols of regional or national cults. All these deities are venerated in small wooden shrines. They all have their regular cult festivals, each usually once or twice a year. Their cult-places are then decorated with cult signs according to the local tradition, or better, marked in very ancient ways - as in times before there were wooden temples and shrines. Rice, rice wine or salt are offered. The whole family gathers before the cult place in a traditionally regulated manner and partakes of a ritual meal. Depending on the circumstances, this domestic cult function can be very costly and lavish. In some regions the most beautifully furnished room (zashiki)<10> is occupied by a child considered to be holy (oji). It is treated royally and served for several weeks by its parents (Fig. 15, Okayama-region). At another place at New Year the whole village gathers in a particular house, newly determined each year (toya). All room division elements (shoji) have to be removed for this purpose; a large hall results which is dominated by the cult niche (tokonoma) of the best room (Fig. 16, getamatsuri on Kamishima).
- In all agrarian villages as well as in cities, the festival of the ancient village- or clan deity (ujigami) is the most important cult event. It is celebrated at the shrine of the district as well as in individual houses. The rites are often highly ecstatic. Such a festival displays the strong social cohesion that

exists among families and houses of a settlement that forms a traditional territorial unit (Fig. 17, 18; for further details see Egenter 1980b, 1982a).

- In rural areas the polar structure of the cult of the field- or mountain deity (ta no kami / yama no kami) plays an important role. Before the spring sowing the figure of the deity is carried from the woods above the village to the house, where it is set up in the cult niche (tokonoma) to preside over a festive banquet (Fig. 19). Finally it is carried to a particular place in the fields, from where it will protect the growing rice. In autumn the festival procedure is reversed.
- The New Year festival (o-shi) is a big festival which lasts for several days. The extended family, which nowadays lives widely scattered over the country, is united at the parental home. Before the festival the whole house is ritually cleaned. Then the cultplaces within and outside the house, particular the access gates, are decorated in a locally traditional manner (Fig. 20-22; for further descriptions of Japanese New Year festivals see Tadayoshi 1943).
- Similar customs are observed at the great Buddhist summer festival for the ancestors (o-bon) (Fig. 23).
- If somebody dies, the house where the deceased lived plays an important role. At the occasion of the first and most important ceremony for the dead person (o-s^{hiki}), the house is opened towards the street and richly decorated. An altar is erected for the deceased in front of the Buddhist-altar (butsudan). Over a period of many years ceremonies (kuy^{hiki}) are performed in front of the butsudan. They are celebrated according to a special plan after 3, 7, 13, 17, 23, 35, 49 years (nenki), last: tomuraige). All these ceremonies take place in the cult-room of the particular house in presence of the members of the family and are presided over by a Buddhist priest.
- Under the influence of Buddhism and its temple gardens, another element has developed: the Japanese garden (Fig. 24). Using characteristic arrangements of stones and plants, it defines the dwelling as a place, a durable and fixed construction, which is set in a contrasting or rather complementary relationship to the daily changes of light and atmosphere (day and night, sun and rain etc.), monthly and seasonal changes of vegetation and climate and - in general - to the dynamics of the skies, of the whole cosmos.

These brief indications of important aspects of the Japanese way of life should to some extent have clarified the contrast with conventional architectural observation, which only grasps the materially constructive and the formal. On the other hand, a consideration of important aspects of the Japanese cultural tradition, insofar as they are related to the house, permits the following comments: <12>

- Life in the traditional Japanese house is primarily structured by cultic needs not practical ones. Everyday life is an adaptation to, a profanised form of ritual concepts.
- The ritual orders spread through a relative network of interior cult places and outer access and entrance paths, between which the whole internal space of the house becomes hierarchically structured, as in a Shinto sanctuary or Buddhist temple (Fig. 11, 12). In other words, Japanese cult-architecture and dwelling constructions are - in spite of differing architectural forms - analogous in their spatial structure.
- This interpretation finds confirmation in the archaic type of signs set up during festive times at the house and at Shinto shrines. The marked or "decorated" locations are interior cult places and outer access gates (Fig. 12).
- The Shinto cult system is evidently rooted in Japanese prehistory. Its origins must be seen essentially in pre-Buddhistic agricultural rites (e.g. ta no kami/ yama no kami) and territorial village- or clan-cults (uji, ujigami).

In this context too it is evident that the Japanese type of dwelling has preserved some very ancient space concepts. Architectural research has not reported on such circumstances, because the house, as a source of cultural aspects of human life has been ignored. It was essentially considered as something which is constructed, designed, on the highest level, something conceived as art, and, in its functions created for a type of life which one always thought to know in advance. But just this tacit assumption of "general human needs" is revealed as highly questionable in the case of Japan.

An example: the access-place scheme

We have seen: from a methodologically critical standpoint it becomes evident that the merely architectural outlook produces a quite mistaken image. Or rather, it projects its own patterns on the vital reality of the Japanese house. By attributing the cultic aspect to religion this approach disregards the essential characteristics of the Japanese house: the basic way in which Japanese themselves read it, feel about and celebrate it. <13> In cultic terms the Japanese dwelling is in fact a domain which is perennially occupied anew, marked in the course of cyclic rites, made one's own place in the frame of ritual traditions (Fig. 12). Psychologically, in spite of the fragile type of construction which it materially represents, it is interpreted as a domain which provides security. This is so because, in a wider frame, it is part of a generally sanctioned Shinto value system which finds its expression in the festive demarcation, in the social obligation to unite in front of the interior cultic place and by carrying out certain cultic actions. It is a domain which is spiritually and emotionally opposed to all that is uncertain and unreliable in the dweller's life, - everything "external".<14>

Let us briefly look at the festive "decorations" or signs that characterize the house when it is prepared for a celebration. The essential locations to be marked, e.g. at the New Year's festival and also at other festive occasions, are usually the outer gate and the entrance door to the house (genkan) towards the outside and, on the other hand, the interior cultic place, in general the whole kamidana or only the symbol of a particular deity at a particular festival. Paired signs or symbols usually mark accesses while singular signs mark the sacred place within the house. This type of marking thus corresponds to a polar system which we call >access-place scheme< Fig. 25-27).

It should be noted here that the access-place scheme and, more generally, the scheme of polar harmonisation are the basic spatial and formal "planning" concepts of all Shinto shrines and Shinto rites and particularly of the earliest shrines (Fig. 9).

In his admirably broadbased architectural and anthropological study of the cultic architecture of advanced Afro-Eurasian civilisations, Dagobert Frey already in 1947 <15> studied complementary spatial organisation of access path and place (>Malmotiv< and >Wegmotiv<) and worked on similar complementary relations between movement and rest (>Schreitmotiv< and >Standmotiv<) as expressed in the sculptured figures of the said cultures. Complementary relations of this type can thus be taken as a phenomenon of general relevance in cultural anthropology, which could be termed an >architectural-anthropological archetype<.

"All architecture is the forming of space by the setting-up of a monument (>Mal<) or by the arrangement of a path." A superb statement, which throws entirely new light on architecture and

opens up new approaches for the designer! "Whether a profane building or a house of God, each house is an architectonic path, created by the possibilities and impulses of movement offered by the architectonic design, which allows the visitor to experience the succession of spatial elements from the entrance onwards. At the same time, as a physical form, it is a monument in relation to the surrounding space, a monument towards which we move, or from which we depart." However, there is no need to turn back to Stonehenge (as Frey suggests); each house, each apartment, each room within a house is structured according to this pattern, and thus defines our daily life.

Dagobert Frey related his two "motives" or schemes to Goethe and called them "primordial phenomena" of the art historians' "morphology" and interpreted them in terms of elementary sensory experiences of the body and of space. In a broader sense he sees them more in the psychological sense of a "debate between the self and the environment". "All artistic creation is an attempt to exorcise the demonic, to liberate the self... by setting up a symbol, an image of the internal experience". But Frey does not seem to have fully realised the general validity of his thesis, namely, that, in an anthropological sense, even the simplest house or dwelling always reproduces "primordial forms of human security", is always "original experience" within the present. Thus we do not need to search for Karl Jasper's "borderline situations" nor do we have to advance towards the "limits of our existence". The primordial experience is present in the midst of our daily life. Dwelling as "primordial motive", the "basic types of experience worldwide" are there for every human being. And, adapting some words of Rilke: Like art, [dwelling] "originates from the craving for safety, from the feeling of insecurity." Maybe dwelling today is taken so much for granted, that we are no longer consciously aware of its essential nature - except maybe at times of crisis. This shows the value of history: it allows us to reconstruct what has been buried and forgotten.

Conclusion

To summarize briefly: We have touched upon various complexes, which invest the phenomenon of dwelling with quite unusual qualities.

- The traditional dwelling house of Japan is not a functional or formal unit. Roof, plan, cultic places, cultic pillars and hearth are relatively independent elements, individual >buildings within the building< which have developed individually, have harmonized individually and are found together within the traditional type of the Japanese house. In short, the Japanese dwelling is an accumulation of heterogeneous but individually harmonious elements.
- The basic pattern of the traditional Japanese dwelling is not folklore "design". The forms are the result of centuries-old developments. They do not correspond to functional or rational principles of design, but rather are related to archetypal schemes rooted in anthropological dimensions, e.g. in the cyclically re-marked >access-place scheme<.
- Space is not interpreted in a homogeneous sense, but finds expression in non-homogeneous units. Sacred associations give special values to certain spatial parts. They are the focal points of ancient cultic behaviour, and are traditionally established. This cultic behaviour is closely related to basic territorial aspects of traditional agriculture.
- Dwelling in Japan does not just mean "architecture". Firstly, it shows a human dimension of spiritually impregnated behaviour. The dwelling house is also a point of social crystallization, a focus of cults performed cyclically and always in the same form. In methodological terms: in order to understand the Japanese house one has to take account of its immanent topological system of highest values, or of that which in our regions is called religion.

Europeans have difficulty in understanding these types of structural phenomena. Since the time of the enlightenment, European cultural history has developed on a rational basis. If something is considered to be rationally correct at a certain time, it will be reproduced at all levels in the sense of the new "Zeitgeist", even if - sooner or later - it proves to be wrong. This is particularly true of modern architecture and urbanism. Man is at the mercy of the arbitrariness of the designers. The archetypal remains submerged under the ever new, the latest craze.

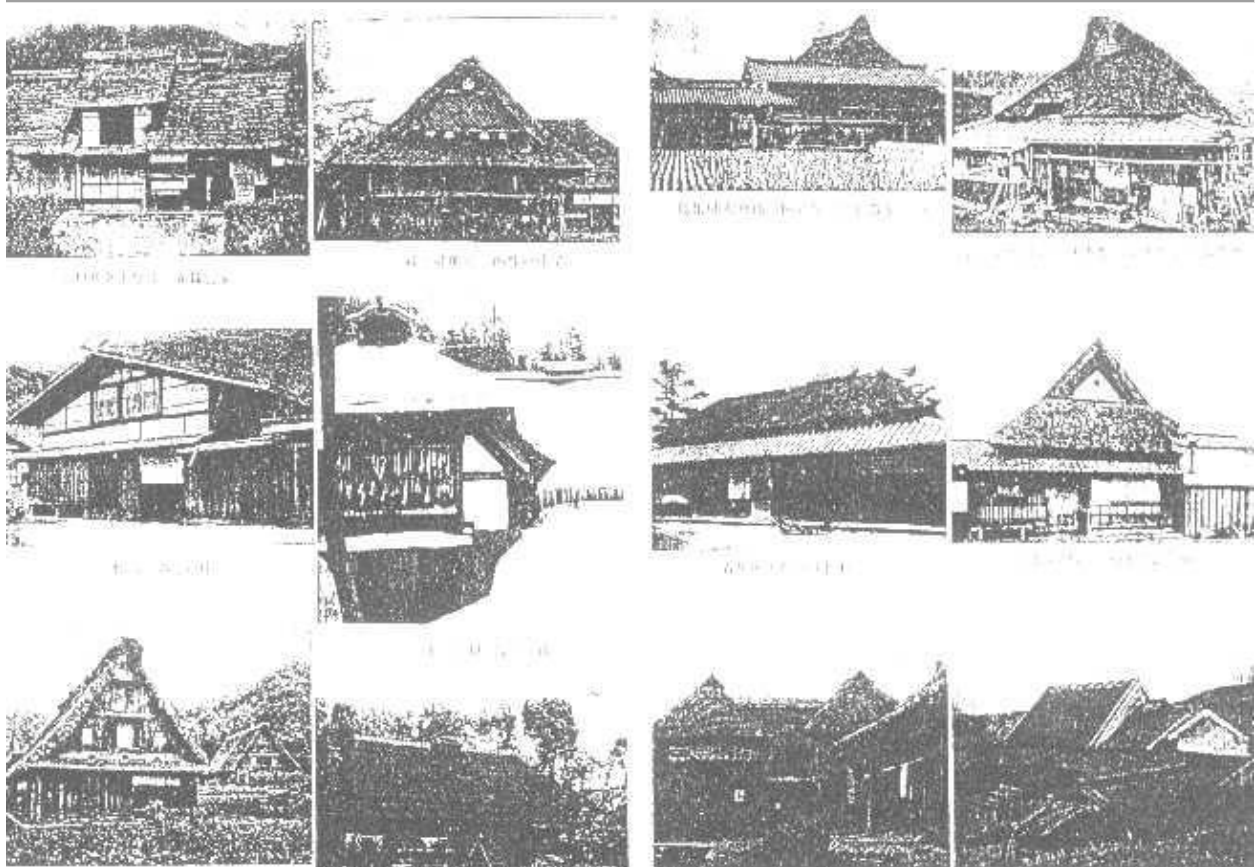
In contrast to this, the human condition in Japan is not interpreted from pluralistic or individualistic concepts of freedom based on individual ideas (*cogito ergo sum*). Japanese rather understand themselves as social beings, whose common identity stems from a common cultural history. Thus prehistoric traditions and history are always strongly preserved in Japan. What is new is interpreted as a complement to what is old and both are harmoniously combined. In Japan nobody would think of building a Shinto shrine - in analogy to the modern concrete churches - in a modernistic way, because the shrine represents something venerable and unchanging. Shinto shrines represent the continuously fixed, the primordial in the midst of profane changes. In many places they formally evoke the mysterious stimuli deriving from the tension between the present and the past. <16> Even in the most modern parts of Tokyo, Shinto shrines remain true to the archetypal design. Religion in Japan is always strongly felt as linking the past with the present and is thus strictly of an essentially conservative nature. Japan has always preserved continuity within the whirlpool of change.

It is finally clear, that it is the cultic character of the Japanese house, which has preserved the continuity of the Japanese house tradition. But cult should not be understood here in the western sense of a primary metaphysical point of view. Cult should rather be taken as a human tradition, which preserves certain orders and ways of behaviour over a long period of time. Through the many social obligations involved in cultic encounters, the individual feels socially integrated in any home where these occur. At each festive occasion, the formal element of the cult provides a respite from the routine of everyday life by a re-living of the past. <17> Socially the cultic performance relates the individual living-space of the family to the general unity of society as a whole. In a philosophical sense the organisation of the local space has spiritual qualities. Japanese life is based on a very ancient philosophy, which unites and harmonizes contradictory qualities. It embodies an ancient principle of harmony that is embedded in the spatial and social environment. The harmonious complementation of polar contradictions is a basic trait of Asian existence. Thus the Japanese dwelling house always finds itself within the nucleus of a well organised system, which exists in a state of mutual communication with the close environment, with the whole of society and finally also with heaven and earth, with the cosmos.

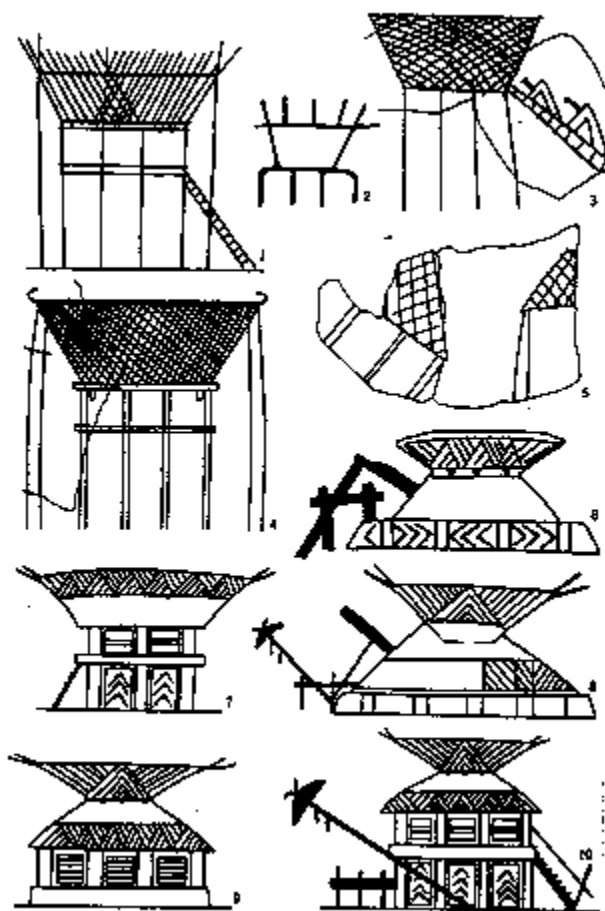
We can now understand why in Japan a dwelling that offers only little space can satisfy its inhabitants. The word comfort is used quite differently. Not in the sense of mere bodily wellbeing, but of spiritual harmony. "Need" is not just related to quantified space. One could not live just in terms of the number of square meters available. Quality is essential, not in a materialistic sense, but from the standpoint of historically or traditionally structured space, the archetype. This is what provides the feeling of personal wellbeing in Japan and also the consciousness of being part of a traditional, historically developed culture. Those who speak with Japanese about their culture, will soon realise that the word "we" and "our" is very often heard. This is essentially due to the Japanese house tradition. Maybe we became space waistors in central Europe because this complex

understanding of the home as a socially and historically, thus spiritually related, place is often lacking.

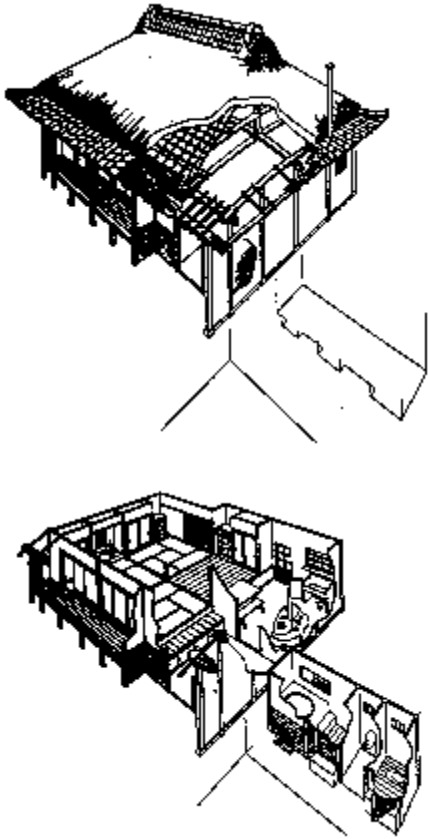
FIGURES AND FIGURE CAPTIONS



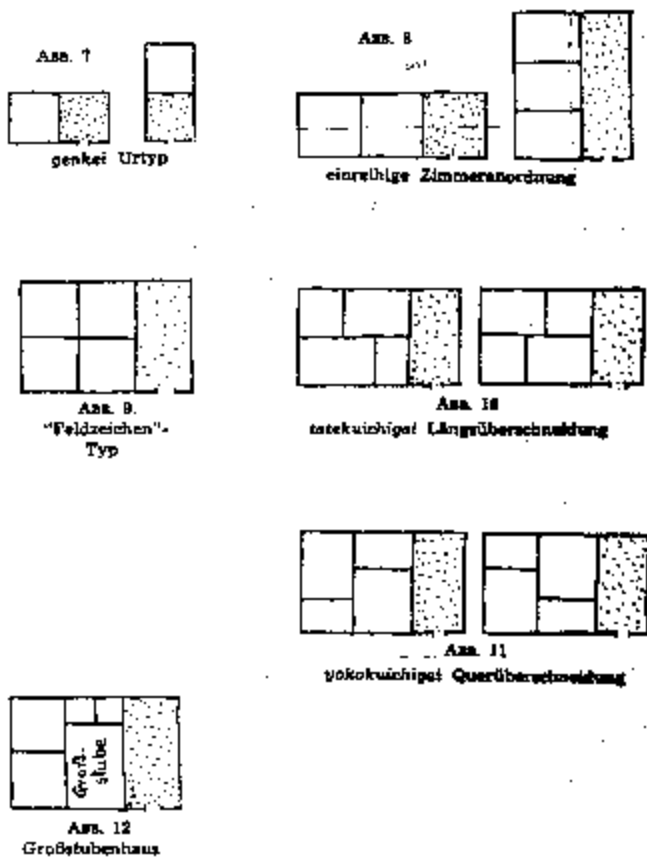
1) Some typical Japanese farmhouses (acc. to Minzokugaku jiten)



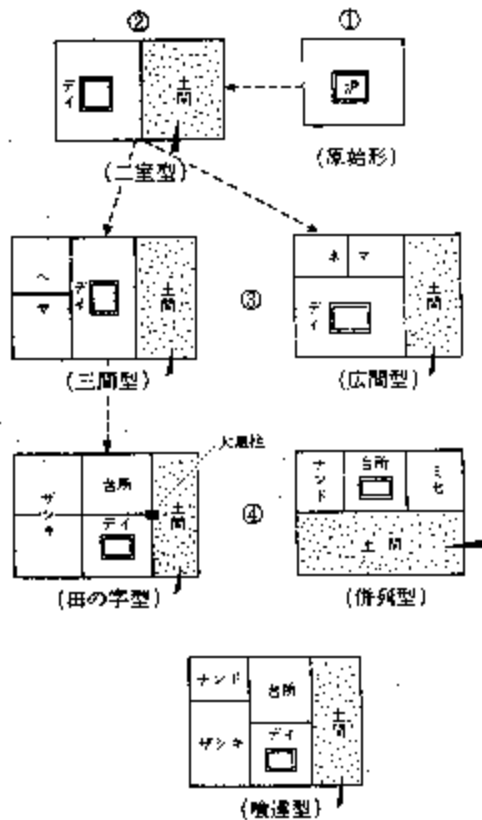
2) Illustrations of ancient types of houses and granaries based on archaeological documents (acc. to ItTM 1977)



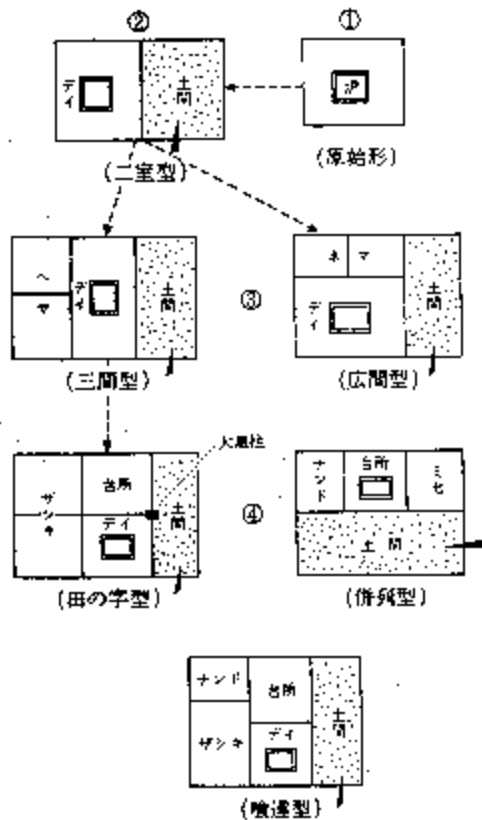
3) Perspective view of a farmhouse in Niike (Okayama Pref; acc. to Beardsley 1959). The house only differs in its dimensions from similar urban houses; with regard to its construction it is not much different either. Here too the clear division into a lower "earth-room" (doma) and a higher dwelling part is evident.



4a) Schematic representation of the development of spatial division of the Japanese farmhouse (acc. to Eder 1963). It begins with a two-part basic type with entrance on the side of eaves or gable. One type develops by enlargement, the other by greater depth. All further developments are variants of these basic types (genkei).



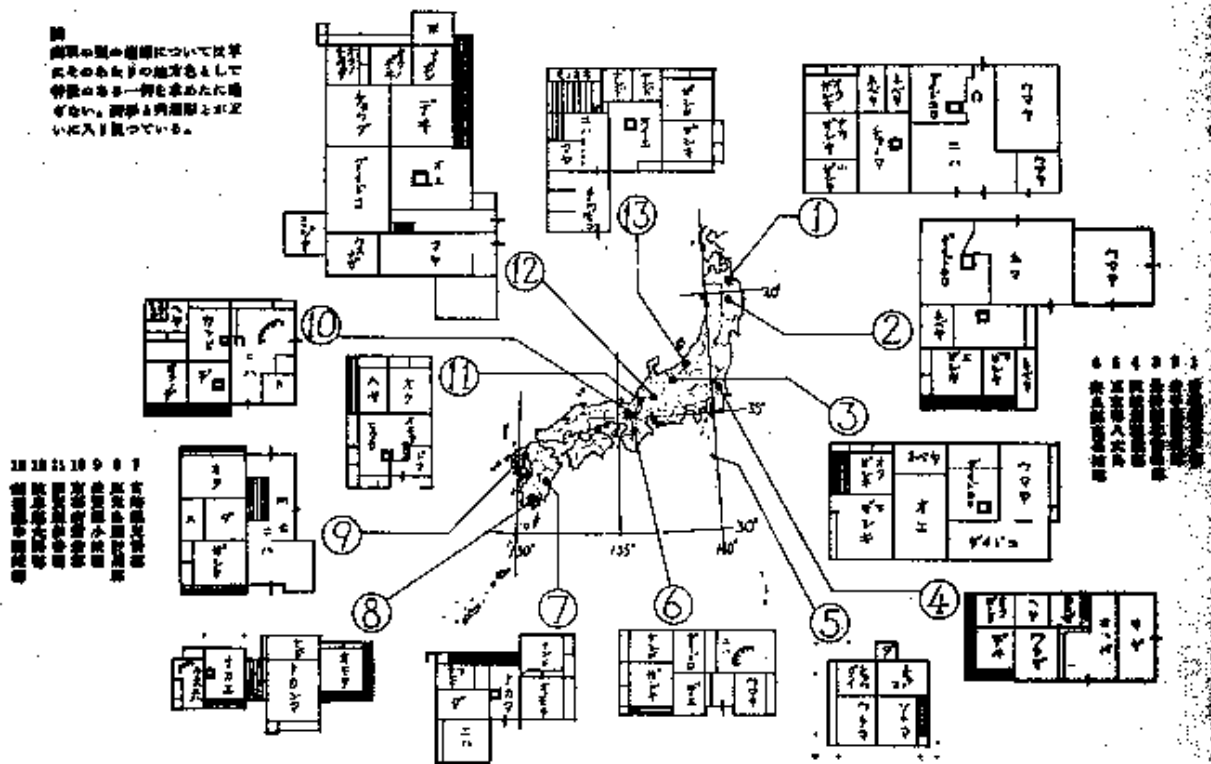
4b) Slightly different interpretation of the development of spatial division of the Japanese farmhouse from an original one-roomed "primitive type" (1) (genshikei) to the bipartite basic type (2) [note here that the "primitive" one-roomed Ainu-house is ideologically bipartite! See Egenter 1989e]. On the left side the development to the three-roomed type (sanmakata) and the four-square type (tanojigata) and its variation with interlocked rooms (kuichigaugata) is shown: the kitchen has been placed behind the hearth-room (dei) and a sacred pillar (daikokubashira) is found in this type between earthen part and higher floor of the dwelling part. On the right side the hearth-room (dei) dominates the upper part of this large-room type (3) (hiromagata). All these types have their entrance on the eaves-side. The type presented with the number (4) at right has all upper dwelling-rooms lined up in one row (heiretsukei) and the entrance is gable-sided. Note that the basic bipartition remains essentially the same through all different types.



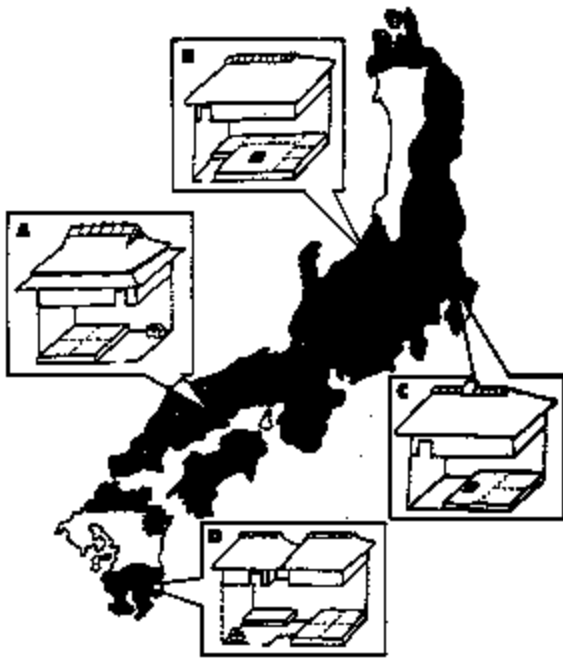
4c) Another interpretation from basically bipartitioned type (A) to variations of the three room type (B1-3) to variations of four and more rooms (C1-3) to the four squared type D and the type with six rooms (E). The numbers give the designation (function) of the rooms: 1 earth-room (doma), 2 living-room (ima), 3 kitchen (daidokoro), 4 sleeping room (nema), 5 ceremonial room (zashiki). The doma is assumed to remain practically the same; the development takes place in the upper part. The kitchen, originally undifferentiated, finds its definite place and the ceremonial part tends to become more and more important (acc. to ItTM 1969).

民家の間取り

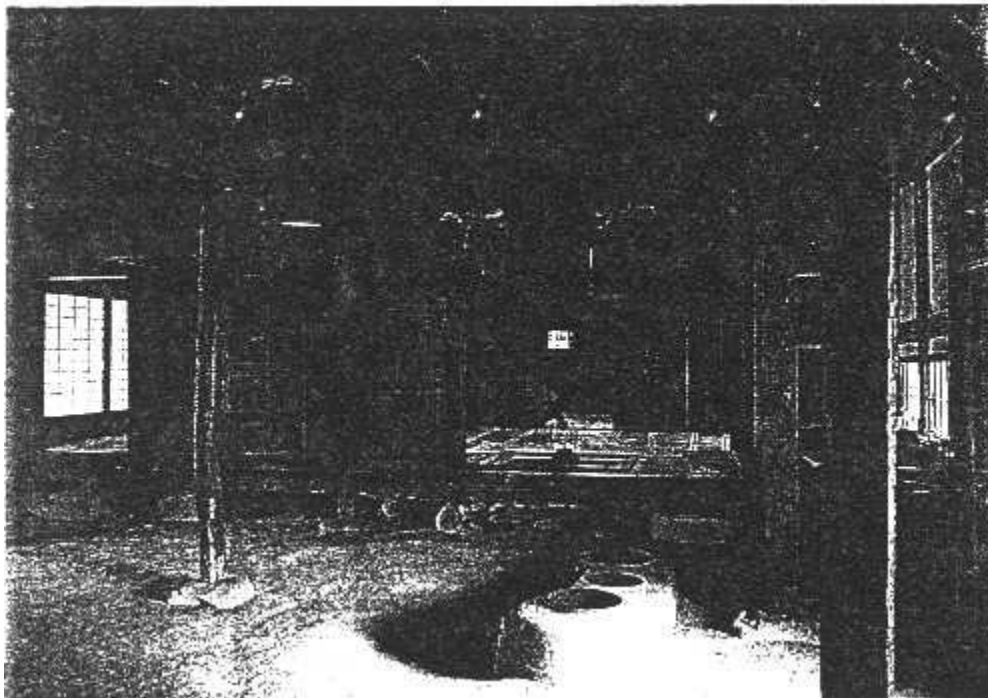
民家の間取りの通則については、そのあまりの地方色として特徴のある一例を求めたに過ぎない。図解と典型図とが正しい入り組んでいる。



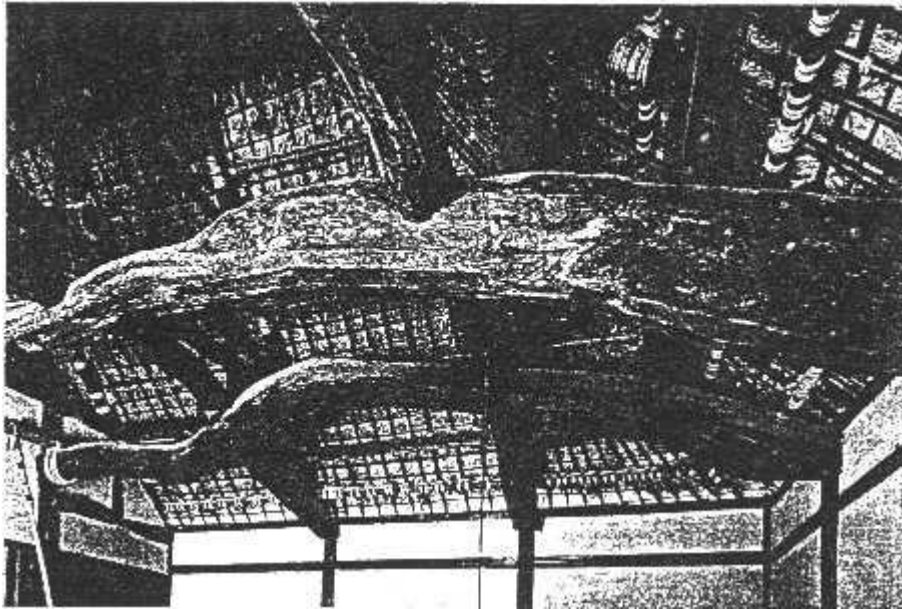
5a) Map of Japan with 13 types of farmhouse plans (Minzoku jiten). All types show a bipartition into lower earth-room (doma or niwa) and upper dwelling part with partitioned rooms (some with open living room (oe)).



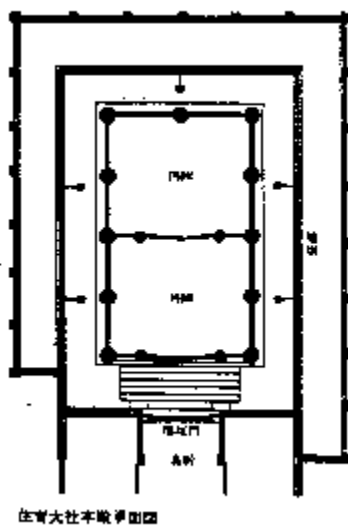
5b) Four Japanese housetypes in perspective view with main characteristics: all show lower earth-room (doma) and upper dwelling part (acc. to Beardsley 1986)



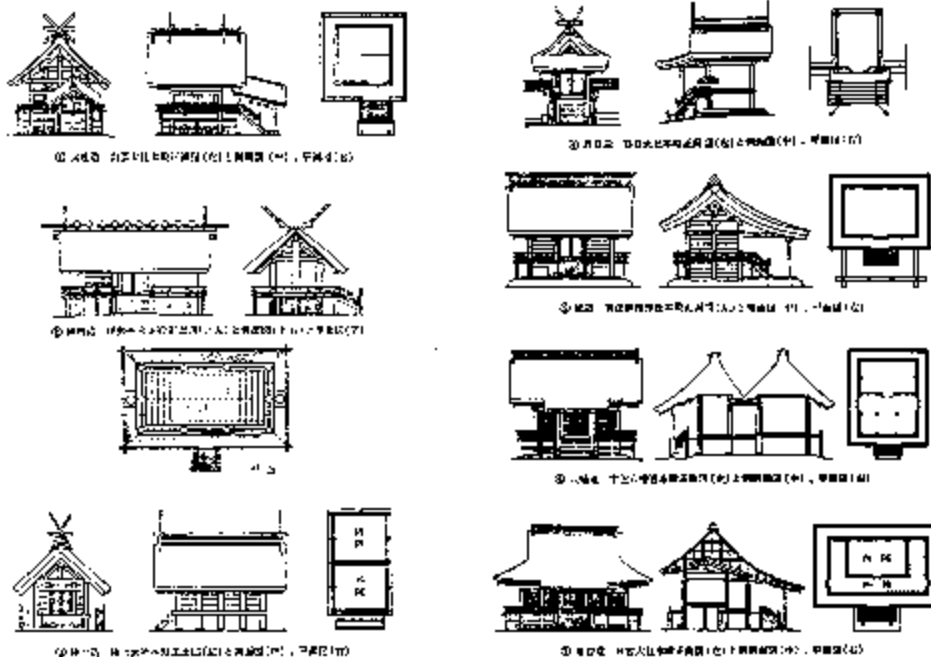
6) View from earth-room (doma) towards the upper part built on piles of an old house in Hyogo prefecture. On the left one can see into the "ceremonial room" (zashiki), on the right into the living room (ima) and, at the rear, into the sleeping room (shinshitsu) (acc. to Yoshida 1971).



7) The ancient type of doma is not closed off from the roof as in the case of the upper dwelling part. There is an unhindered view of the roof-construction, which is supported by heavy and naturally bent wooden beams. Usually these irrationally crooked beams are interpreted as stabilisation against the impacts of earthquakes, but they are certainly also an expression of ancient formal concepts, of an archetypal design, which works with polar contrasts (acc. to Yoshida 1971).



8) Plan of the main shrine of the ancient Sumiyoshi-shrine of Osaka. The internal space is bipartitioned. A thin wall secludes and unites an inner sacred part and an outer access room in polar relation. (acc. to ItTM 1977)



9) Synopsis of several types of the most ancient shrines of Japan. The styles are as follows on the right: 1. Taisha-, 2. Shinmei- and 3. Sumiyoshi-styles; on the left: 4. Kasuga-, 5. Nagare-, 6. Hachiman- and 7. Hiyoshi-styles. 1, 3, 6, and 7 show polar bipartition of the enclosed sacred space: an "interior" (rear) and exterior (front) part can be clearly distinguished. In all these cases the sacred room is a closed construction on stilts with planked upper floor showing just one frontal opening on the side of the eaves or gable. 1, 2, 5, 6, 7 all are provided with verandas surrounding the building (4 only has one on the front). All types show stairs connecting the ritual ground in front with the sacred door of the shrine, and all (except 2 and 3) show either unsupported extensions of the front roof or special accessory roofs which cover (and emphasise) the openness at the access space. They relate to the polar >place-access< concept of the whole arrangement (acc. to EntTM 1974).

NOTES

1) The expression 'polarly harmonious' implies the following. Western architects usually interpret any room of a plan more or less as a unit. Thus a spatial unit may be with regard to mood or colours, treated in the same way, eg. it is painted white. In Japan and also in the premodern west - space was perceived in terms of contrasts. Any spatial unit defined as such by the plan contains different

parts, partitioned halves, particular niches, which are planned to contrast to the rest: the polarly harmonious organisation of space plays with contrasts like upper/ lower, natural/ artificial, vague/ defined, open/ intimate, unsecured/ secured, mobile/ fixed, bright/ dark, cool/ warm, light/ heavy.

2) It would be completely wrong to regard these characteristics as an expression of Far Eastern exoticism. Japan's culture is only superficially one "in which everything is so different"; rather it can be seen as a kind of cultural conservation. For various reasons (island archipelago, 200 years of seclusion, practically no Christianisation until recently, relatively late influence of western rationalism) things have survived in Japan which disappeared long ago in our latitudes. On the other hand, those who have had the occasion to become familiar with the structure of Japanese dwellings will soon discover similar architectural "archetypes" in our own cultural domain (see Egenter 1989b, Magritte as Architecturologist).

3) Those modernists who emphasised the simple construction and furnishings of the Japanese house did not understand that this is conditioned by the contrast, to the colourful, vitally ecstatic interpretation of architectural and environmental spaces during the periods of cult festivals. Further, Japanese architecture was paradoxically considered as modern though, in fact, it is extremely conservative and true to tradition.

4) In the west too, particularly in elite and conservative households, the kitchen is usually modern, whereas living- room, drawing room and sleeping room(s) are furnished with stylish furniture and accessories. In Japan this contrast is more explicit and is related to the fact that space is not conceived homogeneously but in terms of polarity.

5) The polar or complementary concept of space in Japan is therefore a reason for the ease with which quite different cultural elements very easily can be combined. Many Japanese villages show a clear spatial distinction between what is ancient and what is new. But at the same time they are integrated into the settlement in complementary ways. Thus modern buildings are mostly planned in specific outer zones of traditional residential districts (in rural areas: modern shops, etc. along the national highways).

6) The European Renaissance ideal of the architect and artist as a profane world-creator has only recently found its way into Japanese culture, along with the recently famous names.

7) The well-known "tokonoma" is not just a room-decoration in which the Japanese "love of nature" is expressed in beautiful flower-arrangements. At rural festivals its basic character as cult-niche is still clearly evident to this today. At the time of festivals "sacred seats of the gods" (yorishiro), made of plant materials (reed, bamboo), are placed there. On the other hand, the urban middle-class type of flower-arrangement (ike-bana), shows clearly, by its designation as "life-flower" and by the strict aesthetic and cosmological rules which regulate for its design, that not just nature is involved, but rather, that it is related to the original type of Shinto art, found in the cult centre of rural Shinto-festivals (yorishiro). With some justification the tokonoma can thus be interpreted as an originally sacred place which - in some remote past - entered the domestic sphere. Its primary sacred character is preserved in the way it hierarchically structures the space in front of it.

8) In our modern neutral concept of the value of space, honorific expressions like "coming up" in Japanese for coming into the house have lost their meaning.

9) In his book on the cultural history of the Japanese farm-house, Matthias Eder deals with the traditional house in terms of the cults and rites which are still part of its essential meaning. Though his questionable outlook on religion and his dubious terminology often convey a somehow distorted view (primitive creed!), his descriptions, if interpreted objectively, without value judgements and with some understanding for the spatial and temporal conditions of prehistorical and traditional agricultural existence, his book is very valuable, because it shows the traditional Japanese house and its development in the context of its cultic meaning.

10) Zashiki, literally "seat-room". Za, seat, has a clearly ceremonial meaning, implying a seat in the seating order of a ceremony.

11) Japanese cities still show much of their original village character in their distribution of Shinto-shrines and in the related cults.

12) Here too it is important not to interpret this in terms of "Far Eastern" exoticism. Japanese folklore research has found very striking structural similarities between Japanese and European agricultural rites. The Japanese situation is ideal for the reconstruction of their meaning, mainly due to the absence of Christian influence. The relation between imported Buddhism and autochthonous Shinto seems unclear to many, but we would have a similar situation if Germanic pre-Christian local cults had been preserved until today in central and northern Europe alongside a very tolerant Christian superstructure with educated clergy, creed and liturgy based on history and a developed and refined church-architecture. Under Christian influence these local cults have totally degenerated to the level of "primitive and irrational" customs. In Japan they are still preserved as relevant local institutions rooted in prehistoric farming cultures. Even today the nucleus of these ecstatic rites would consist in the cyclic renewal of the local system of territorial demarcation. Most astonishingly such cults are not at all as primitive as the Christian history of proselytism has tried to make us believe. They are based on a traditional philosophical concept which essentially aims at the harmonisation of contrasting categories of the local environment.

13) With their preconceived methods (family as basic social unit, dominance of economy), the social sciences also overlook the ritual conditions of the Japanese dwelling, and thus remain restricted to usual everyday life. Ritual behaviour would be attributed purely to religion. But religion would interpret it metaphysically from the absolutely spiritual, showing no understanding for the practical implications of the cults. In traditional Japan the spheres of social organisation, economy, religion and esthetics are closely interwoven in the ideological and practical sense. It is we in the West who terminologically separate these spheres on the basis of our Eurocentric concept of disciplines. And, unfortunately, architectural research has not yet understood the extent to which - with building and dwelling - it holds in its hands the knot of a complex network which we call culture.

14) Similarly, territorial elements of the village such as cultivated fields, water-sources, places where water is tapped, all form part of the basic scenario of agricultural existence and are periodically marked according to ancient traditions.

15) Remarkably, this eminently important work of architectural theory was scarcely noticed.

16) Only recently have architects dared to modernise Japanese shrines.

17) The cult-festival brings into the house a kind of dramatic experience quite different from that offered by modern television: "once upon a time" in terms of traditional customs breaks into the "here and now", creating a strange irrational tension which is difficult to describe. Maybe it can best be compared to poetry, where the use of very ancient words and expressions creates strange feelings.

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