

Mediance and sustainability in Japanese habitation

The texts which are gathered here were prepared during a co-operative research seminar of the Nichibunken which took place from April 2005 to March 2006, under the joint responsibility of Augustin BERQUE (Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales) and SUZUKI Sadami (Nichibunken)¹. The other participants were CHIBA Masatsugu (Miyagi University), HIGUCHI Tadahiko (Kyoto University), KIOKA Nobuo (Kansai University), KUWAKO Toshio (Tokyo Institute of technology), MIURA Atsushi (Culture Studies kenkyûsho), TORIUMI Motoki (Tokyo Metropolitan University), TSUCHIYA Kazuo (Tokoha Gakuen University) and YOKOHARI Makoto (Tsukuba University). This seminar was entitled *Nihon no sumai ni okeru fûdosei to jizokusei* 日本の住まいにおける風土性と持続性, which can be more or less conveniently rendered by the English title above.

In this title, « habitation » corresponds to the Japanese *sumai* 住まい, which is generally understood as both a dwelling and a mode of dwelling or living. The meaning here comprises these two acceptations, i.e. both a type of settlement and a way of life. « Mediance » translates the Japanese *fûdosei* 風土性, a concept introduced by the philosopher WATSUJI Tetsurô (1889-1960) in his famous book *Fûdo* (風土, 1935). Watsuji defined mediance as « the structural moment of human existence » (*ningen sonzai no kôzô keiki* 人間存在の構造契機). This means that human existence comprises two parts, or two aspects, dynamically correlated with each other, the first of which (called *hito* 人 by Watsuji) is individual, and the other one (called *aida* 間 or *aidagara* 間柄) is a set of relationships, both social and environmental, composing the peculiar milieu (*fûdo*) which necessarily completes the individual. In the present context, mediance can be understood as the relationship of the Japanese way of life with its environment. In this sense, it is obviously related with the problem of sustainability.

The organizing principle of the aforesaid seminar was to associate different approaches to this problem. In such a perspective, the idea of « sustainability » is not limited to the current, mainly ecological acceptance of the term. It comprises indeed this ecological or physical aspect, but it extends also to moral and aesthetical considerations. In such a way, it is correlated with the theme of a ten-year (2001-2010) comprehensive

1 Throughout this article, Japanese names are written in the Japanese order (family name first). Yet, following usage, writers are often alluded to with their pen names.

international co-operative research project, « L'habitat insoutenable / Unsustainability in human settlements », coordinated by A. Berque, in which several members of the present program have been participating, and are among the co-authors of a recent collective book, *Unsustainable city*². « Unsustainable city » means the present trend, conspicuous in all affluent societies, to an acceleration of urban sprawl into a diffuse form of urbanization extending not only to the suburbs and to the so-called « edge (or edgeless) cities », but to the whole territory. This type of urbanization not only entails an unsustainable ecological footprint, by wasting land, energy and all kinds of natural resources, but it also produces growing inequalities and segregations in the socio-spatial structure of affluent societies (this is the moral aspect of unsustainability), and, last but not least, it works havoc in the landscape, both in inner cities (disrupting the harmony of traditional townscapes, *machinami* 町並み in Japanese) and in the countryside (devastated by the uncontrolled sprawl of incongruous buildings).

The Japanese language possesses an interesting word to qualify this phenomenon: *sappûkei* 殺風景, which literally signifies « killing the landscape ». In contemporary Japanese, this word means: dreary, desolate, bleak, prosaic, bare. It originates in the Chinese *shafengjing* 殺風景, a word created by the Tang poet Li Shangyin (813-859), whose list of things *shafengjing*, and others, is said to have influenced Sei Shônagon's *Makura no sôshi* 枕草子. Extending this model, one might say that the unsustainable city is not only *sappûkei*, but *sappûdo* 殺風土: it kills the *fûdo*, i.e. it plays havoc with the milieu, or existential relationship of the Japanese society with its environment. In other words, it kills mediance (*fûdosei*). This notion has much in common with that of *fast fûdo* ファースト風土, as developed here in Miura's paper.

The general idea which led to proposing the program « Mediance and sustainability in Japanese habitation » to the Nichibunken was that this tendency to *sappûdo* is particularly conspicuous in the case of Japan, mainly due to the narrowness and extreme density of its territory, but also because, on the other hand, Japanese culture had elaborated a delicate *fûdo*, especially in the domain of habitation, as can still be appreciated in what remains of its traditional architecture and gardens. Accordingly, it seemed particularly interesting to examine how this tradition had evolved during the modern process of urbanization and urban sprawl, and if and how it may be revived after all.

The different participants have treated this question in various ways, and more or less directly, according to their disciplines and to their current interests. The present English summary will insist upon those aspects which bear a more direct relationship

2 Augustin BERQUE, Philippe BONNIN, Cynthia GHORRA-GOBIN (eds), *La Ville insoutenable*, Paris : Belin, 2006.

with the question, leaving the other aspects to the pleasure of reading the full papers in Japanese.

1. Suzuki Sadami's article, « The trap of the 'country with a rich nature' » deals with the effects of a pervasive idea, according to which Japan's natural environment is particularly generous. It starts with an evocation of the post-war years, when many aspects of the Japanese culture were systematically devaluated. This attitude gradually changed, as Japan became afterwards an affluent society, due to a long period of high economic growth, but at the same time, this growth entailed a huge amount of environmental disruption, in a blatant contradiction with the traditional view of a specifically delicate Japanese taste for nature. This posed some fundamental questions about Japanese culture: how did it really differ from the modern Western attitude, that of conquering nature? In those years, ecological ideas were penetrating into Japan. The paper recalls these ideas, e.g. Tansley's concept of ecosystem, and how they were adopted into the Japanese thought of environment and into town and country planning. Some specific accents were conspicuous in this process, in particular the theme of a profound unity with nature (as contrasting with the modern Western binary scheme opposing culture to nature), reinforced by the idea of superseding modernity, in the philosophical movement of the Kyoto school which issued in some respects from the wider trend of vitalism in the Taishô years.

2. Kuwako Toshio evaluates the « Change in housing policy and the meaning of habitation ». As the population of Japan has started to decrease, former policies have become totally inadequate. Defining a new housing policy is also an occasion to redefine the meaning of « housing » (*jûtaku* 住宅). When he was consulted about this redefinition, Kuwako proposed to think about not only housing, i.e. producing objects for inhabiting, but about the very act of « inhabiting » (*sumu* 住む).

This implies a cultural point of view. It comprises the ways of thinking, education, family relationships, etc., all embodied in the act which the verb « inhabit » represents. This verb has two aspects, an active one (the inhabiting subjects) and a passive one (the inhabited objects), which concern both time and space.

Space here has a record (*rireki* 履歴), and it is relative. During the twentieth century, habitation and work have most often been considered separately. This was particularly the case of the so-called « new towns » of the high growth era, which in fact were bedtowns. These bedtowns were too homogeneous, and they are now inhabited by old persons, to whom they are not well adapted. Inhabiting should be conceived of in the total life span,

contrary to the partial vision which dominated the last century.

Inhabiting is also, necessarily, « inhabiting with », e.g. during childhood with one's parents. It comprises all sorts of relationships with different people. For example, old people should benefit from the proximity of younger ones, including children.

Finally, inhabiting is a personal choice, entailing variegated expressions which, eventually, result in a milieu and a regime.

3. Kioka Nobuo, in his contribution « What is an original landscape? », proposes a reflection about landscape, arguing that it has been neglected by philosophy. He distinguishes three structural moments (*kôzô keiki* 構造契機): basic landscape (*kihon fûkei* 基本風景), original landscape (*genfûkei* 原風景) and expressional landscape (*hyôgenteki fûkei* 表現的風景), stratified in three levels. Basic landscape is not visible; it is silently performed, as a way of seeing the things of everyday life. Original landscape implies the narrative (*katari* 語り). It is an experience of landscape which belongs to the specific (*shu* 種類), not to the individual (*ko* 個). Expressional landscape is individual. It reinforces personal existence, distinguishing it from the group.

These three moments or levels of landscape are intertwined in space and time. Original landscape supposes a common field, in which narration can take place, precisising the respective limits of collective or individual consciousness. By doing so, it emerges from the basic landscape, together with the consciousness of « I ». In this sense, landscape is a narration; and correlatively, the milieu (*fûdo*) can also be considered as a narrative space. This view bears a close relationship with Watsuji's ethics and theory of milieu (*fûdoron* 風土論). It is in the intersubjective space of narration that we perceive our milieu. Original landscape is also a text, but with no definite author. It is anonymous, unfinished and unfinishable. Yet it is appropriated at the moment of the narration, thus leading to the dimension of expressional landscape, which is individually defined. For this, a distance must be established between the narration and reality. Yet the fact is that, in the contemporary crisis of environment, this distance may be lost, as well as the world which encompasses it, together with the narrator, the object and the place of narration; e.g. when a village is submerged under an artificial lake. As for expressional landscape, it comprises a negation of the original, collective landscape, by means of which the individual can introduce new ways of looking at the environment; but this is at the risk of disappearing, if these new ways cannot eventually fit with the original landscape. In that sense, the structure of landscape is also dialectical. Landscape is a contingent encounter between the individual and the Other.

4. Tsuchiya Kazuo entitled his contribution « The modern *sukiya* 数寄屋 type of habitation – suburban, transposed, in the countryside, after Takahashi Sôan's *Notes on tea ceremonies in the Eastern Capital* ». These constructions were the forerunners of what became the modern suburbs, then contemporary urban sprawl; hence their importance for understanding this phenomenon.

Takahashi (1861-1938) was a typical modern tea-lover, *kindai sukisha* 数寄者. His book is composed with notes which he had previously published serially in a daily newspaper, about tea ceremonies he had attended, and other related activities. These notes contain, among others, valuable descriptions of the architectural setting of the tea ceremony. Such architecture often belonged to the genre of *sukiya*, which has deeply influenced the modern Japanese house, especially in its relation to nature. Takahashi's descriptions of tea houses range from Tokyo (the « Eastern Capital ») to various locations, in the suburbs as well as in resorts near the sea, or in spas. The types of their architecture also varied accordingly. Some were ancient, some were new constructions, some other were rebuilt, with their original material, after having been transported to other places. A famous example of the last case is the Sankeien, now a public garden in Yokohama, where its owner at the time transported several famous tea houses from distant other places in Japan.

In that way, tea lovers were often also architecture lovers, and had close relationships with carpenters – as a matter of fact, some indeed were carpenters themselves. They had inherited their architectural taste from the *daimyô* of the Edo era, whom they tried to imitate. For want of sufficient land in the cities, they tended more and more to build their tea gardens and houses in the vicinity of big cities like Tokyo or Osaka, opening the way to the modern suburbs. Moreover, the type of architecture which they promoted there became an ideal for later constructions. Even their way of life, which included commuting in their private cars from the city (where they exerted their business) to their villas, is a forerunner of the contemporary phenomena of urban sprawl and automobile commuting.

5. Higuchi Tadahiko, together with Yamaguchi Keita, presents a « The duration and change of Kyoto's landscape in Sagano ». Landscape is here related with sustainability by advocating that the diversity of landscapes must be cultivated and developed as environmental assets and possibilities. But what is at stake in such a sustainability? As landscape (*keshiki* 景色) is not limited to the objective form of an environment, the method here relies on the analysis of historical, mainly written documents which reveal how the landscapes of the past were perceived.

One of the oldest of these documents relates to the mountain villa (*san'in* 山院) of Emperor Saga (r. 809-823), in a site which later became that of a Buddhist monastery, the Daikaku-ji. At the time, Sagano was known as a place of retirement and hermitage (*intonchi* 隠遁地), but it was also appreciated for enjoying a cooler summer than in the capital, Heian-kyô.

There are seven poems relating to Sagano and its vicinage in the *Kokin wakashû* (a poetic anthology compiled in 905), praising its rural character which they generally associate with autumn. The area is also alluded to in the *Genji monogatari*. In writings of the XIIth century, some scenic places (*meisho* 名所) of Sagano are already used as *utamakura* 歌枕 (epithetic toponyms conveying a poetic atmosphere), proving that the area had become an instituted landscape. In the *Shin kokin wakashû* (1205) are collected several poems of Saigyô and other poets who had practised hermitism in Sagano, associating its image with the theme of impermanence (*mujô* 無常).

At the time, mountain villas for retirement became conspicuous, together with temples of Jôdo Buddhism. As a matter of fact, the Jôdo sect considered Sagano as the closest place to the « Pure Land to the West », *Saihô Jôdo* 西方浄土, or Amidist paradise. For the same reason, tombs became numerous in the area.

Later in the Middle Ages, the cherry trees of Arashiyama became famous. This increased the popularity of the *meisho* of Sagano. Yet, when Bashô visited the area, which he writes about in his diary *Saga nikki* (1691), what he appreciated most was still, classically, the calm and seclusion of the place.

This continuity, in the way of looking at the landscapes of Sagano, can also be appreciated in touristic guides like *Miyako meisho zue* (1780), *Miyako rinsen meishô zue* (1799), etc., which quote many *utamakura*. Even in the guides which were published in the first half of the XXth century, literary representations of the past are abundantly quoted. True, the material reality of the *meisho* had often changed, due to wars, fires etc. Yet, past images did not only survive in the books; they influenced also the production of material realities. For example, Kyorai's hermitage, the Rakushisha where he had received his master Bashô, was rebuilt according to its evocations in Kyorai's haiku-s. In the same way was rebuilt the Giô-ji. Literary representations of historical landscapes have, thus, profoundly influenced modern landscape architecture.

Nevertheless, new ways of looking at the landscape appeared in the XXth century. This can be appreciated, for example, in Ôtsuka Gorô's *Expressions of Sagano* (*Sagano no hyôjô*, 1939), which was much influenced by Kunikida Doppo's famous descriptions of *Musashino*. Just like Doppo had liberated the landscape from its traditional frame,

Ôtsuka discovered new interesting views in Sagano, not limiting the landscape to sets of *meisho* (which he does not forget, either). He likes, for example, everyday scenes of the countryside, discovered along the path.

In Ôtsuka's time, the landscapes of Sagano had still not been much transformed by urbanization. This evolution became conspicuous only after 1955, during the years of high economic growth. Yet, thanks to the modern legislation protecting landscape and cultural heritage, among which mainly the so-called Law of preservation of the old capitals (*Koto hozon-hô*, 1966), the landscapes of Sagano have on the whole been rather well preserved.

6. Chiba Masatsugu presents a case study of the general theme of the seminar in « Mediance and sustainability of habitation in a Japanese regional centre city : discourses on modernization and endogenous development concerning the comprehensive national development plans, in the case of Sendai ». After the second world war, the townscape of Sendai, like that of most Japanese cities, was profoundly transformed. The extension of suburbs in adjacent hilly areas became conspicuous after 1957. This development, for the greater part, was not linked with railway stations ; it relied on road transportation (buses, trams, automobiles).

As the use of private cars soared rapidly, tramways were suppressed in 1973. The City of Sendai deliberately chose to promote car transportation, together with a policy of extension of its area, bringing forth a general tendency to urban sprawl. This American-like way of life was indeed very popular.

Yet some different opinions also were expressed during those years, stressing that this model did not suit with the Japanese conception of life. In the West too, this model was criticized. Nevertheless, its application went on. It was the basic conceptual frame of the successive comprehensive national development plans, especially that of the second one (the *Shinzensô*, published in 1969). Rapid transportation systems, like super highways, were particularly favoured by this plan. Correlatively, urbanization progressed in the surroundings of their interchanges, like the development of Izumi Parktown to the North of Sendai. Such suburbs were supposed to become independent cities, but they were no more than bedtowns.

By the time of the Third Plan (*Sanzensô*, 1977), emerged gradually the idea of fixing rather than mobilizing the population. Simultaneously, prime minister Ôhira promoted the idea of making the whole territory become like a garden city (*den'en toshi kokka* 田園都市国家). This did not change much the course of the building industry, nor the traditional domination of the central government over the provinces. After 1981, the policy of technopolises was developed in that same way, and such also was the fate of the Fourth

Plan (1987), published in the midst of the speculative Bubble which aggravated the concentration of higher activities in and around the capital city, Tokyo.

Meanwhile, the need for another type of development became more and more evident. Instead of a unipolar structure, centred on Tokyo and subordinating the provinces, what was stressed was the idea of an endogenous development (*naihatsuteki hatten* 内発的發展), based on the mediance (*fūdōsei*), or peculiar features, of each region. At the same time, the unsustainability of urban sprawl was more clearly recognized, and a turn toward the objective of more compact cities started to appear in city planning policies, so much the more as the demographic future of distant suburbs is quite dim: given the decrease of the Japanese population, who is going to live there after their first inhabitants have disappeared?

In Sendai, this turn was embodied by the decision to build a second, East-West subway line (the first line ran from North to South). This is supposed to promote a compact form of urbanization near the crossing of the two lines, close to the centre of the city. What kind of city should be built is still not very clear, but a strong accent is being put on the idea of « urban villages », with their inhabitants living at foot distance from the stations. Correlatively, social and cultural types of considerations become preponderant in the thematics of city planning, instead of an engineer's vision. That is, instead of only producing lodgings (*jūtaku* 住宅) for the people, the main question now becomes that of habitation (*sumai* 住まい).

7. In his paper « Shrinking or receding cities and future farming landscape », Yokohari Makoto examines the consequences and opportunities brought forth by the phenomenon of population decrease in Japan. Owing to remarkably low fertility rates and to the aging of the first (1947-1951) and second (1971-1973) generations of postwar baby-boomers, for whom extensive suburbs and new towns had been built, Japanese cities have begun to shrink, and this tendency will develop in the future. The problem is how to deal with this phenomenon, which totally upsets the hitherto customary practices of town and country planning, all founded on the assumption of urban growth.

Now is the time of disurbanization (*gyaku-toshika* 逆都市化), but one cannot think that the land which is thus becoming vacant can simply return to agriculture. As a matter of fact, Japan's farming population is too old, and its next generation too scarce, to make such a reclamation possible.

On the other hand, though the advantages of more compact cities – as contrasted with the unsustainability of urban sprawl – have become evident in recent years, it appears

that organizing such a transformation will entail tremendous costs for public finances, especially in what concern green spaces. These can reasonably not all be converted into public parks or forests, and most of them will probably remain private land.

In such conditions, the idea of *garden cities* is gaining a new audience. « Garden » here would mean a third type of land use, halfway between the rural and the urban ; that is, gardens for producing food (vegetables, fruits etc.). These would take the place of receding urban land uses, but, for all that, they would not become pure farm (or forest) land. Due the shortage of agricultural labour, their manpower would essentially be constituted with retreated urbanites, for whom this activity would be a complementary one.

Modern town and country planning, in Japan as in Western countries, has always strived to avoid mixing urban and agricultural activities, and this has led, in the last two centuries, to an almost complete eradication of agricultural landuses in cities. Yet in fact, owing to the difficulties of transportation, pre-modern cities always had numerous productive gardens, and this was especially true in Japan, where farmland and cities had never been sharply distinguished, owing to the absence of city walls. It is assumed that in Edo, nearly one half of the land were such productive gardens, which used urban dung as manure and thus accounted for the remarkably hygienic ecological cycle of this giant city.

Considering the failures of town and country planning during the era of urban growth, an unplanned regression of urban land use would certainly provoke still worse disorders. Promoting actively an extension of productive gardens in the shrinking cities of Japan seems much more desirable.

8. Toriumi Motoki asks « How should urban design be in order to retrieve mediance and sustainability in habitation? Comparing Japan and France in questions relating to urban design entailed by the rapid increase of urban dwelling ».

In recent years, the laws relating to urban design have evolved. These revised or new laws intend to check the sprawl of cities produced by the increase of large retail centers in the suburbs together with the decay of retail shops in central wards, and endeavour to bring the population back to the centre of cities. On the other hand, the increase of high rise mansions in central wards calls forth problems of townscape. Whether the new laws can regulate these problems is doubtful.

The law on landscape instituted in 2004 was much influenced by the judgment of 18 December 2002 on the disputes which had been stirred up by the construction of a high rise mansion in Kunitachi. Many instances are concerned with such townscape problems:

inhabitants, developers, public authorities, researchers, and media. As professionals, developers are much more accustomed than the inhabitants to deal with these problems; they have a tendency to present exaggerated projects (e.g. a 18 storeys building) in a first stage, in order to settle the matter by « mutual concessions » in a second stage, leading in fact to their real intentions (e.g. a 14 storeys building). Municipalities in general have a loose consciousness of their liabilities (in Kunitachi, the municipality was sued by the developer and had to pay). As for researchers, they are divided in two tendencies: on the one hand, city planners and jurists generally are on the side of the inhabitants, against the developers; neo-classic, liberal economics generally are on the other side. The media have generally adopted the point of view of the inhabitants.

It is difficult to measure the costs and benefits of townscape, since it does not have a direct monetary value. In addition, contrary to ordinary goods, its value generally increases with time. Calculations depend heavily on the way the problem is defined.

Also, it is difficult for planners to estimate the will of potential inhabitants, and to define who really benefits from the townscape. When a dispute occurs about the construction of a high rise building, arguments relating to townscape are not much efficient, since the law is too loose in this respect.

Yet there are some other means, for example if the development may affect a cultural heritage. This is especially the case of the old capitals like Kyoto, which are protected by a special law.

After some comparisons with the French system, the article concludes that, if it is difficult to define mediance, it can be appreciated indirectly through its expression in the landscape. Preserving mediance through the landscape cannot be done without the participation of the inhabitants. Evaluating sustainability is easier, but it must be stressed that this does not concern only ecological questions; sustainability comprises social aspects too. For example, living in the upper storeys of a high rise mansion impedes the socialization of the inhabitants, to begin with children who cannot play outside.

In the present phase of deregulation policies, one cannot hope for much improvement in these questions. What is most needed can be summed up in three recommendations: stimulating the participation of inhabitants in the making of urban projects; precisising morphologic regulations; instituting fiscal and monetary incentives for the builders to abide by policies respecting landscape and sustainability.

9. Miura Atsushi analyses the phenomenon of « *Fast fūdo* – an unsustainable milieu ». He has coined the word *fast fūdo* ファスト風土 a few years ago, playing on its phonetic

ambivalence: it is homonymous with *fast food* ファストフード, but written 風土, *fûdo* means in fact a milieu, that is the natural and cultural features of a certain region, place or country. This notion refers in particular to a famous book published in 1935 by the philosopher Watsuji Tetsurô, *Fûdo*, which stressed the respective singularity of several milieux, especially that of Japan. Such milieux were produced, over the centuries or even millenia, through the historical relationship of a certain society with its natural environment. Now, our present society evolves in such a way that milieux change drastically in a short period of time. This is the meaning of *fast fûdo*.

Fast fûdo appears unsustainable for several reasons:

- First, because of the loss of respective singularity of the regions which compose the territory of Japan, in the general trend of the present world toward homogeneization. This is properly a loss of *fûdo*, or loss of mediance (*fûdosei* 風土性).
- Second, because of the deterioration of the various social links which composed a milieu. This results notably in profound transformations in the location of commerce. Retail shops in the centre of cities are replaced by big stores in distant suburbs, and consequently, shopping streets (*shôtengai* 商店街) become « shutter streets » (シャッター街).
- Third, since in the *fast fûdo* people have become more and more mobile and anonymous, new types of criminality have appeared, which could not be possible in a traditional urban environment.
- Fourth, *fast fûdo* dilapidates space and energy, as is illustrated by enormous shopping centres which are open all the year 24 hours a day.
- Fifth, the loss of local cultures brings about a crisis of identity, which could, as a reaction, provoke a surge of nationalism.
- Sixth, life in the *fast fûdo* is confined in artificial environments: the house, the car, the shopping mall, all cut from the outside and from the possibility of meeting unexpected or different people, as in a traditional city. This makes the socialization of children difficult, which in its turn jeopardizes the future of the whole society.

10. Augustin Berque, in « Pan's cave and the Japanese house », examines the historical process which led to the idealization of the single house close to nature, and accordingly to the sprawl of suburbs into low density « edgeless cities », squandering Japan's exceptionally scarce agricultural land.

The *principle of Pan's cave* alludes to an episod of ancient Greek history, when Athens, in 490 BC, transported the statue of the Arcadian god Pan to a grotto at the foot of

the Acropolis, thus making him a symbol of nature, whereas in Arcadia he only was the god of goat keepers. This principle means that it is not the peasants who define « nature », but the city dwellers.

This logic was illustrated in Southern China during the Six Dynasties, when the notion of landscape was invented by retreated mandarins. That which, until then, had been the milieu of husbandry, became an object of aesthetic delectation for those who do not cultivate the soil. Only this leisure class (in Veblen's sense) had the necessary « taste » (*shang* 賞) for looking at the environment as a landscape. This is the *principle of Xie Lingyun* (from the name of the first landscape poet, 385-433).

Another aspect of the same principle is that, for those who have the *shang*, the countryside, though being produced by several millenia of peasant's work, is looked on as « nature » (as revealed by the sinogram 野, which means both « cultivated fields » and « wilderness »). The work of the peasant is forcluded (not perceived, though visible).

These same mandarins invented the aesthetics of the « hermit's hut » (*caotang* 草堂), e.g. that of the poet Bai Letian near Mount Lu. This model, which penetrated in Japan through poetry (as is illustrated by a famous scene in Sei Shônagon's *Makura no sôshi*), later inspired the architecture of tea pavilions, especially those in the *sukiya* style. Still later, this architecture exerted a profound influence on the architecture of ordinary houses.

Nowadays, in the suburbs all over Japan, the single family house reveals this genealogy in many details, especially the *tokobashira* 床柱, a column on one side of the *tokonoma* 床の間 which affects to be a natural piece of wood, symbolically making the house a hermit's hut in the wilderness, like Bai Letian's *caotang* affected to be.

Yet this way of life entails an enormous ecological footprint, much wider than that of a compact city. It is clearly unsustainable. In that sense, « nature » (as a representation) has come to destroy nature (as an ecological fact).

A. Berque