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TYPE: Book Chapter

BOOK TITLE: Cartographic Japan

USER BOOK TITLE: Cartographic Japan

CHAPTER TITLE: Tange Kenzo's Proposal for Rebuilding Hiroshima

BOOK AUTHOR: Hein, Carola

EDITION:

VOLUME:

PUBLISHER: University of Chicago Press

YEAR: 2021

PAGES: 203-206

ISBN: 9780226073057

LCCN:

OCLC #:

PATRON NOTES: Thanks! EndNotes Title/Verso Page(s)

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USER BOOK TITLE: Cartographic Japan
HUL CATALOG TITLE: Cartographic Japan
CHAPTER TITLE: Tange Kenzo's Proposal for Rebuilding Hiroshima
BOOK AUTHOR: Hein, Carola
EDITION:
VOLUME:
PUBLISHER: University of Chicago Press
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ISBN: 9780226073057
LCCN:
OCLC #: HUL OCLC #: 903812387
CROSS REFERENCE ID: [TN:6176518][ODYSSEY:206.107.43.109/HUL]
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Cartographic Japan

A HISTORY IN MAPS



EDITED BY Kären Wigen,
Sugimoto Fumiko, and
Cary Karacas

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
Chicago & London

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The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 60637

The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London

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Printed in China

25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 1 2 3 4 5

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-07305-7 (cloth)

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-07319-4 (e-book)

DOI: 10.7208/chicago/9780226073194.001.0001

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Cartographic Japan : a history in maps / edited by Kären Wigen, Sugimoto Fumiko, and Cary Karacas.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-226-07305-7 (cloth : alkaline paper) — ISBN 978-0-226-07319-4
(ebook) I. Cartography—Japan—History. I. Wigen, Kären, 1958— editor.
II. Sugimoto, Fumiko, 1958— editor. III. Karacas, Cary, editor.
GA1241.C37 2016
911'.52—dc23

2015006383

♾ This paper meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (Permanence of Paper).

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47 Tange Kenzō's Proposal for Rebuilding Hiroshima

Carola HEIN

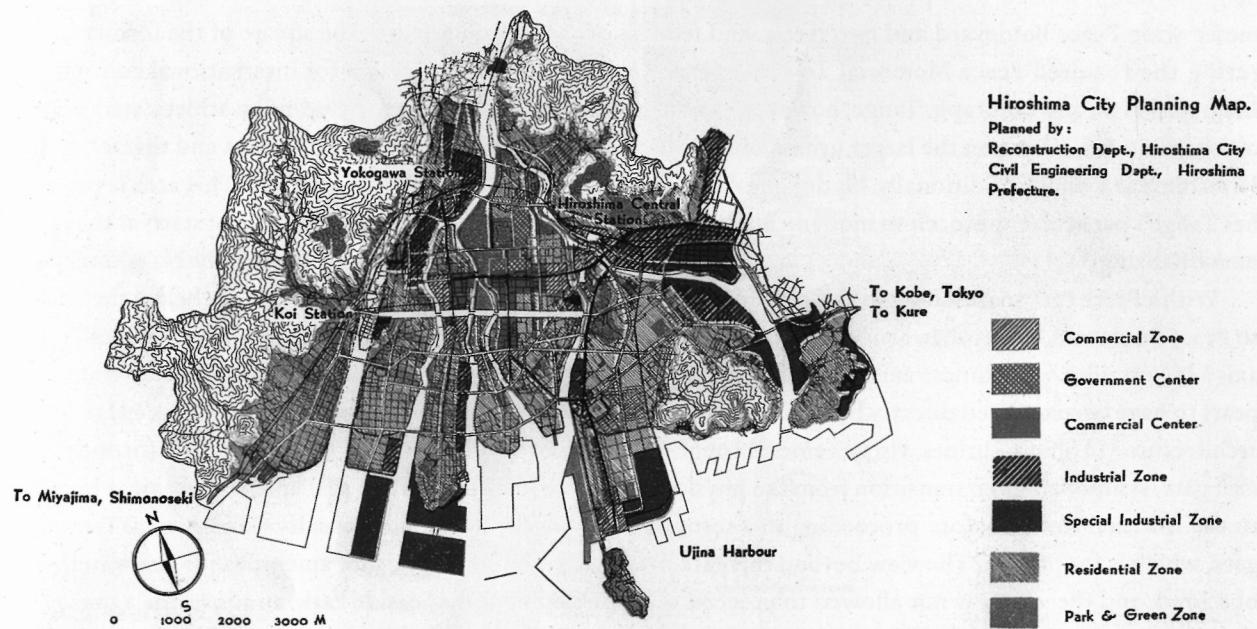


FIGURE 47.1 "Hiroshima City Planning Map," by Tange Kenzō 丹下健三, in *Peace City Hiroshima* (Tokyo: Dai-Nippon Printing), undated (ca. 1948).

The unprecedented nature of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima posed a unique challenge for the city's reconstruction. In the immediate aftermath of the bombing and Japan's surrender, with the city's mayor and half the members of his administration among the dead, Hiroshima initially lacked the manpower needed to tackle the city's rebuilding. In November 1945, however, the city assembly organized a reconstruction committee composed of neighborhood representatives, and following the establishment of the Hiroshima Reconstruction Bureau in 1946, the central government dispatched planning experts and architects to the city.¹ Aware of Hiroshima's status as the first city in the world to have been destroyed by an atomic bomb, in 1949 the city government held a competition to realize a comprehensive project—one that would require both permission of the Allied Occupation authorities and funding from the central government—to rebuild a large urban area in the center of the city for the purpose of memorializing its destruction. Architect Tange Kenzō, who in 1946 had developed a land-use plan for Hiroshima under the auspices of Japan's War Damage Rehabilitation Board, thereafter submitted his design—one of 145 competition entries—for the Peace Memorial Complex to Hiroshima City (fig. 47.1).²

According to the competition brief, the project had to be located in the former Nakajima neighborhood, the epicenter of the atomic explosion, which was to become “a symbol of lasting peace and a place suitable for recreation and relaxation for all people.”³ The majority of the entrants limited their proposals to the Nakajima neighborhood, framed by a projected one-hundred-meter-wide Peace Boulevard and two rivers, and featuring the required Peace Memorial Tower, Science Memorial Hall, and cenotaph. Tange, however, was far more ambitious, taking on the larger urban context of Hiroshima as a whole. Additionally, his design exemplifies Tange’s particular approach to monumentality and memorializing.⁴

With a Peace Park to run along an axis perpendicular to Peace Boulevard, rather than a monumental Western axis à la Versailles or a Chinese axis, Tange’s design appears to have been inspired directly by Shinto religious architecture.⁵ In Shinto shrines, visitors enter through a *torii* gate, symbolizing the transition from the physical to the spiritual world, before proceeding to a second gate, which is for prayers. The view beyond this gate is obscured, and the visitor is not allowed to proceed to the inner precinct. Tange uses this same organizational principle in his design for Peace Park. The Peace Memorial Museum serves as the gateway to the inner precinct, while the cenotaph functions as the place for prayers. Beyond, shaded by the trees of Peace Park and separated by the river, is the sacred space, inaccessible to the general public: the A-Bomb Dome. At Ise, bridges—which are among the structures that are ritually rebuilt—lead to the shrine precinct. At Hiroshima, bridges are likewise a central element. Tange, for whom Peace Boulevard signified the “Road to Peace,” saw them as symbolizing the link between one culture and another. Perhaps the most surprising part of Tange’s Peace Memorial Park design was his proposal for an arch, which appears to be a direct reference to Eero Saarinen’s design for the Saint Louis Gateway Arch.⁶ For a cenotaph, the centerpiece of his project, Tange eschewed the vertical structure typical of Western monuments, opting instead for a saddle-vault cenotaph inscribed with the names of the dead. While fulfilling the requirement to memorialize the first city destroyed by an atomic bomb, Tange echoed the moniker “workshop for peace” (given to the United Nations Headquarters in New York) in proposing that his design would become a “factory for peace.”⁷

Tange’s proposal also included facilities spread throughout the city (fig. 47.2). The background of the proposal shows an aerial photograph depicting the larger Hiroshima area with the Ota River’s seven river mouths, the six islands that host most of the city, and the surrounding mountains. Green areas indicate proposed locations for new “peace activities.”⁸ In the center of the city, adjacent to the square of the former castle, Tange proposed an area for international cultural and recreational facilities (including an athletic stadium and a swimming pool, a wrestling arena and theater, a playground, and a children’s center). This area is part of a ribbon of waterfront green spaces that starts at the top of the delta and ultimately connects to the Nakajima neighborhood. The triangular-shaped area below the epicenter of the atomic explosion marks the location of Tange’s proposed Peace Hall. A one-hundred-meter-wide, tree-lined boulevard running south of the Peace Hall would connect green areas in the mountains (proposed to house international hotels) and, in the east, a building for the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission. Tange also proposed several leisure amenities for the waterfront, including Ujina Seaside Park, an aquarium, a horse-race track, dormitories for youths visiting from throughout Japan and the world, and a yacht harbor.

Going yet another step, Tange’s proposal included infrastructure and institutions to improve the quality of life of the local population: fireproof housing, public health facilities, schools, waterworks, and parks and greenery along the rivers. Tange argued that housing for citizens and the creation of an international memorial complex had to go hand in hand. New buildings, indicated in white with stark black outlines, dot the proposed green spaces. Their function is rendered identifiable through the design: large rectangles surrounded in greenery represent high-rise housing blocks, which reference modernist design proposals like Le Corbusier’s 1934 design for Nemours. The more individualistic outlines on the map are proposed cultural and recreational facilities along with hotel buildings. White lines drawn onto the aerial photograph sketch out a comprehensive street network, with several new bridges to facilitate communication across the broader river spaces, tying together the dispersed peace sites and serving as a basis for the postwar redevelopment of the city. The plan further includes, albeit in thinner lines, proposals for urban improvement that are not directly related to

CENTRAL THEME OF HIROSHIMA CITY PLANNING

PEACE PARK PROJECT

Designed by:
Kenzō Tange, Takeki Asada, Sachio Otani
and their associates of the Planning Research
Group, Architectural Department, Tokyo Uni-
versity.

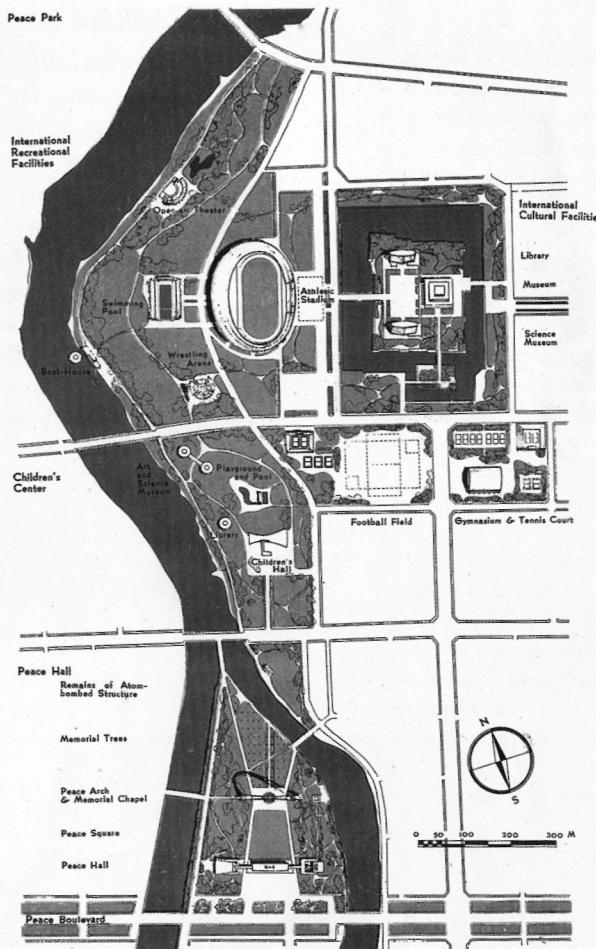


FIGURE 47.2 "Peace Park Project," by Tange Kenzō 丹下健三, in *Peace City Hiroshima*, undated.

the peace function, such as reclamation projects along the waterfront.

According to Tange, his comprehensive approach to rebuilding the city was meant to reflect the officially stated theme of turning Hiroshima into "the symbol of the human ideal for eternal peace as well as a plan for the reconstruction of human life." The pamphlet accompanying the drawing appropriately argues that Hiroshima now belongs to "the whole human society" and therefore aims to introduce facilities that are of "real service to mankind in its pursuit of peace and happiness."

Tange's proposal for the peace park represents one of the few visionary projects for the postwar reconstruction of Japan and the only one that was realized.⁹ In this regard Hiroshima is unique among the many Japanese cities that faced the task of reconstruction. Tange's larger plan for all of Hiroshima, however, was not realized. By 1949, with the city's population having almost doubled,

to 270,000, the acute postwar housing shortage made it difficult to clear large urban areas for greenery. Instead, the city government put up public housing on lands west of the castle. In the end, only the heart of Tange's proposal for the Peace Center located in the former Nakajima neighborhood was built. Nonetheless, the realization of only the Peace Memorial Park, completed in 1955, should not be considered a failure. Japan's early postwar economic difficulties meant that almost all visions for transforming Japan's cities would go unrealized. While most Japanese cities were rebuilt without significant memorials or any other obvious traces of their destruction, Hiroshima literally underwent a change of heart, due in large part to the visionary and concrete foundations provided by Tange's proposal.

Notes

1. Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation, *Hiroshima Peace Reader* (Hiroshima: Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation, 1994), 19.
2. Tange worked on the project with Asada Takashi, Otani Sachio, and Kimura Tokokuni: "Shinsahyō," *Kenchiku zasshi* 10–11 (Tokyo: Architectural Institute of Japan, 1949), 37–39.
3. Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation, *Hiroshima Peace Reader*, p. 45.
4. For a further examination of Tange's attitude toward traditional Japanese architecture, see Cherie Wendelken, "Aesthetics and Reconstruction: Japanese Architectural Culture in the 1950s," in *Rebuilding Urban Japan after 1945*, ed. Carola Hein, Jeffrey Diefendorf, and Ishida Yorifusa (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
5. Tange et al., "Shinsahyō," 37–39; and Naka Masaki, *Kindai-kenchikuka Tange Kenzō ron* (Tokyo: Kindaikenchikusha, 1983), 172.
6. Naka, *Kindaikenchikuka Tange Kenzō ron*, 175.
7. I would like to thank Joan Ockman for drawing this point to my attention. See Naka, *Kindaikenchikuka Tange Kenzō ron*, 167–68.
8. *Peace City Hiroshima* (Tokyo: Dai-Nippon Printing, n.d.).
9. While European planners developed extensive projects for postwar reconstruction, and despite visionary Japanese proposals for colonial endeavors, there were few grand visions for rebuilding in early postwar Japan. Among them are Tange's proposal for Hiroshima, Ishikawa Hideaki's projects for Tokyo, and a competition proposal by Uchida Yoshifumi for Tokyo's Shinjuku district. See Carola Hein, "Visionary Plans and Planners," in *Japanese Capitals in Historical Perspective*, ed. Nicolas Fiévé and Paul Waley (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 309–46.

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