This study focuses on the role and the changing definition of tradition in respect to modernism in the period 1920 to 1970. In the last quarter of the 19th century Japan was urged to westernize completely without respecting its own traditions. Immediately after the first World War a feeling of uneasiness towards the transplanted western culture rose among Japanese architects. Japan’s own identity and traditions seems to perish. How to return to your own tradition without returning to feudalism? How can one create an identity worthy of the traditional values, but representing a new world power? After the initial struggle with the japanesque style *nihon shumi*, modernist architects recognised that their own architectural tradition could be brought into dialogue with modernism and the modern style. The process of this transformation, of this paradigm shift, is examined in this research work through the specific architectural oeuvre of Kunio Maekawa. Maekawa is in this case especially interesting for different reasons. He designed as well in the turbulent pre-war situation as one of the foremost designers of this “new architecture”, as in the post war period. Working as one of the first in the office of Le Corbusier in Paris, he brought the modernist experience firsthand back to Japan. Consecutively working in Raymond’s office, a Czech architect who focused on traditional architecture, introduced Maekawa to his own cultural past. A fusion of these two experiences will lead Maekawa to develop his own architectural identity, Japanese modernism. Crucial is that the paradigm shift - tradition/modernity versus identity - represents one of the most essential elements in his architectural design theory. By this he influenced future generations of architects and paved the path for influential post-war architects as Kenzo Tange, Tadao Ando, Toyo Ito….

This study focuses on architectural spatial design strategies. It defines the mechanisms and grasps its underlying motives. It is, by this, not a conventional biography, but rather an analysis on the way how architectural space and form are being created in relation to architectural identity, in this case Japanese architectural identity. The research problem is approached from two sides: firstly from the idea that the creation of a new modern nation was seen by Maekawa as essential to put Japan into the twentieth century. This is principally represented through the influence of Le Corbusier’s ideas on Maekawa. Secondly the research problem is approached from influence of Japanese architectural tradition. Although moderns was essential to create an architectural identity of the new Japan, this could not be realized without the quest to know and understand the intrinsic spatial Japanese qualities. It is interesting to analyze how Maekawa implements this quest to reach his architecture essence. Finally Maekawa develops a designing method, able to abstract all influences creating both traditional and contemporary readings of the same component. His buildings attain a harmonious, peaceful spatial richness and accomplish an unusually sense of proportion.