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## URBAN SPACE AND CULTURAL ARCHETYPES: A VIEW ON THE JAPANESE CITY<sup>1</sup>

### ON THE THEORY OF CULTURAL ARCHETYPES: DEFINITIONS OF THE BASIC CONCEPTS IN A NUTSHELL

What are Cultural archetypes? In the realm of architecture and urban environments that express a cultural identity, one can discern cultural deep structures based on cultural values or meanings unique to a particular culture. I call these value formations “cultural archetypes”. *Cultural archetypes* can thus be defined as enduring *cultural value formations* that have evolved over centuries and symbolically convey meanings. They are embedded in *collective memory* and generate the *cultural identity* of a nation, of a group of people, or of a place.<sup>2</sup>

What is Collective Memory? Collective memory is a term originally used by French sociologist and philosopher Maurice Halbwachs in his book *La mémoire collective* (1950). It refers to the intimate relationship between a group of people and their living environment,

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1 This article is based on my ongoing research on Japanese architecture and urban space. It is an updated and partly revised version of my conference paper initially published in the Proceedings of the 21<sup>st</sup> International Congress of Aesthetics held at the University of Belgrade in 2019. See Kaisa Broner-Bauer, “The Japanese City – A View of An Archetypal Order”, *Possible Worlds of Contemporary Aesthetics: Aesthetics between History, Geography and Media*. Proceedings of 21<sup>st</sup> International Congress of Aesthetics (Belgrade: University of Belgrade, 2019), 1834–1848.

2 This conclusion pertains to my research, where I am formulating a theory of cultural archetypes as the core elements of cultural identity. The theory will be presented in my upcoming book *Identity and Transcendence in Architecture: Japanese Minimalism*, set to be published in 2024.

which Halbwachs describes as follows: “Inhabitants look like their neighbourhood or their house. In every epoch, there exists a close relationship between habits, the spirit of a group and the appearance of the place where it lives.”<sup>3</sup>

And further: “When a group of people settles in a part of space, it transforms that space according to its own image, but at the same time it bends and adapts to the material things that cannot be changed [...]. The image of the environment, including the image of the permanent relationship that the group maintains with that environment, influences first and foremost the idea that the group has of itself.”<sup>4</sup>

When speaking of the habits and the spirit of a group of people, Halbwachs points to what he terms *collective memory*, describing it as “a continuous trend of thinking; but it is of a continuity that has nothing artificial, while it retains from the past only what is living and capable of living in the consciousness of the group of people who maintain this trend.”<sup>5</sup>

*Collective memory* can consequently be defined as a *living entity of thoughts* spontaneously persisting and being transferred from one generation to another in the *consciousness of the people* concerned *within* their own cultural sphere.<sup>6</sup>

What is Cultural Identity? In line with the above, it can be said that it is through collective memory that the cultural archetypes of a given culture are transmitted from one generation to the next. They constitute the “collective persona”, the “self” or the “ownness” of that culture or society. *Cultural identity* is thus based on cultural archetypes that are manifested explicitly or symbolically in all areas of a given culture, including architecture and urban space.

3 Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris: PUF, 1950; 1968), 54. Translation of this and the following extracts from Halbwachs’ book by the author.

4 Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, 132.

5 Ibid., 70.

6 Cf. the concept of “collective consciousness” (*conscience collective*), which basically refers to the collective understanding of social norms, and was first developed and analysed by Emile Durkheim in his doctoral dissertation *De la division du travail social* (1893). Halbwachs was a student of Durkheim and of Henri Bergson, the ideas of both of whom influenced his own thinking.

## ON HISTORICAL URBAN FORMATIONS IN JAPAN

Kyoto and Tokyo offer examples of two different historical patterns of urban space in Japan. The first Japanese urban communities emerged around imperial palaces, and the first cities were founded by successive emperors from the 7<sup>th</sup> century onwards in the region of Nara, near the present-day Kyoto. Japan’s first historical era, the Asuka period (538–710), marked the arrival of Buddhism from China and Korea to Japan and is renowned for its high-quality art. According to the rituals of the era, the Emperor’s palace was rebuilt after the death of the old emperor. In the early days, the administrative town grew randomly around the Emperor’s palace. The early Japanese capitals before the feudal era were known as the imperial *miyako* cities (都).

Chinese art as well as city and temple techniques were used as a model for the Japanese imperial cities. After Emperor Kōtoku’s rise to power in 645, for the first time a plan was made to build the imperial capital in Naniwa, the current Osaka area. However, in 667 the capital was moved to Ōtsu on the shore of Lake Biwa, and then in 694 back to the Nara area, to Fujiwara-kyō.

Fujiwara-kyō (694–710) was the first Japanese capital built according to the Chinese-style grid plan. Its dimensions were 3.8 km on the north-south axis and about 2.1 km on the east-west axis. Although Fujiwara-kyō was designed as a permanent administrative town, in 710 the capital was again relocated to the site of the present-day city of Nara. The new capital, founded by Empress Gemmei, was larger than the previous one and was named Heijō-kyō, the Citadel of Peace. Heijō-kyō became the first “permanent” administrative centre and served as such during the reigns of several emperors (710–784).

In 784 Emperor Kammu set up a new capital in Nagaoka, north of the present-day Nara, as he wanted to keep some distance from the great Buddhist temples of the time. In 794 he decided to move the capital further north to a new site he called Heian-kyō, the Capital of Peace and Tranquillity. This was the beginning of the Heian period, the last period of Japan’s early Middle Ages. Heian-kyō remained the residence of Japanese emperors until the Meiji reform in 1868. The name of Kyoto came into use in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

The plan of Heian-Kyō was built on a regular grid similar to the Chinese capital Chang’an, albeit much smaller. It also resembled the plan of Heijō-kyō, crossed by a wide central north-south axis, with a block size of 120 m × 120 m. The street network of Heian



FIG. 1. ANCIENT IMPERIAL CAPITALS. IMAGE FROM *ATLAS HISTORIQUE DE KYÔTO*, ED. BY NICOLAS FIÉVÉ (PARIS: UNESCO & LES ÉDITIONS DE L'AMATEUR, 2008).

was hierarchically subdivided into the broader main avenues or traffic lanes and into smaller streets. The major lanes were places for ceremonies, processions, and all manner of manifestations of power where all movement could be controlled.<sup>7</sup> These were not real streets

<sup>7</sup> *Atlas historique de Kyoto. Analyse spatiale des systèmes de mémoire d'une ville, de son architecture et de son paysage urbain*, ed. by Nicolas Fiévé (Paris: Unesco & Les Editions de l'Amateur, 2008), 57–61.



FIG. 2. CHANG'AN AND THE EARLY IMPERIAL CAPITALS OF JAPAN. IMAGE FROM *ATLAS HISTORIQUE DE KYÔTO*.

however, because the enclosed residential areas were surrounded by earth-filled embankments. High mountains protected the capital to the north, east and west.

The principles of geomancy, itself based on Chinese cosmology, were the guiding principles of city planning. The orthogonal check plan for the imperial capital was copied from China during the periods of the Sui (589–618) and Tang (618–907) dynasties. The plan was clearly delimited and almost symmetrical with respect to the central north-south axis of the city, with a hierarchical spatial organisation.<sup>8</sup> The imperial quarters were located at the northern end of the central north-south axis, and the most prestigious plots, for example Buddhist temples and the abodes of the nobility, were placed around the Emperor's palace. The plan reflected the centralised imperial power as well as the city's administrative and social structure symbolising the prevalent order of the time. The adoption of the Chinese grid plan in Japan was also probably affected by the traditional pattern of rice paddies with their rectangular path networks, since the street networks of rural villages were often also built to be compatible with the field grid.<sup>9</sup>

After the Heian period (1185), Japan was a feudal state under military rule for almost 700 years, until imperial power was restored with the Meiji reform (1868). Urban communities grew around the castles of military chiefs and a new city type, *jōkamachi* or "castle town", developed. Most castle towns were built according to a predetermined pattern. The Warlord's castle was in the middle, and in hierarchical order around it were samurais, merchants and artisans, and farthest away the classless. Moats and roads were carefully planned. The blocks were built radially toward the centre around the castle. The street network was intentionally irregular, with temples usually located near the outer moats of the castle, contrary to the *miyako* towns.

Tokyo, the historical Edo, became a castle town in 1457 when a military castle was built there. And when the military leader of the country, *shōgun* Tokugawa Ieyasu, moved the base of governance from Kyoto to Edo in 1603, it became the capital of Japan. The *shōgun's* castle

8 *Atlas historique de Kyoto*.

9 Günter Nitschke, "'MA'. The Japanese Sense of 'Place' in Old and New Architecture and Planning", *Architectural Design*, 3 (1966), 116.

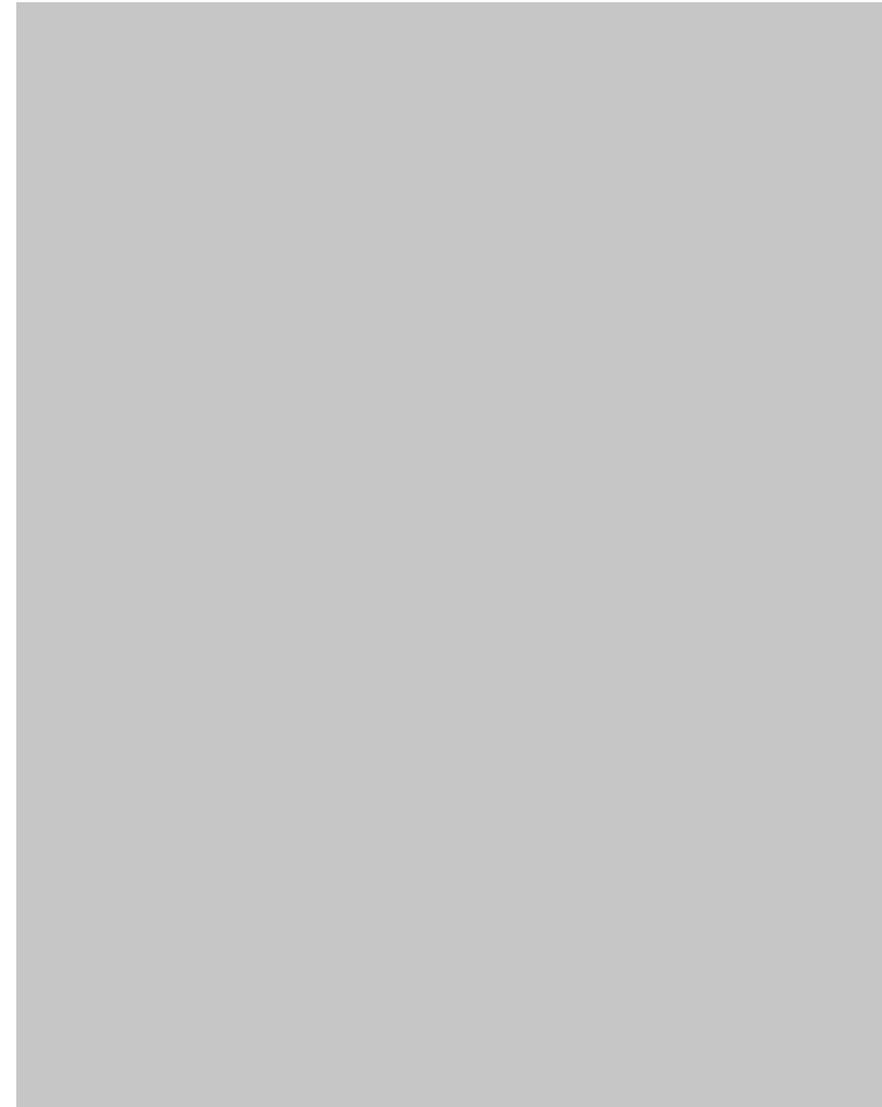


FIG. 3. A MAP OF EDO (TOKYO) IN THE EDO PERIOD. IN THE CENTRE OF THE PICTURE IS THE MILITARY RULER'S (SHŌGUN) CASTLE. TODAY IT IS THE SITE OF THE EMPEROR'S PALACE. IMAGE FROM *PROCESS ARCHITECTURE*, 72 (1987).

denoted the centre of power in the city, and the hierarchical urban order intertwined spiralling around it.<sup>10</sup> Edo gradually developed the

10 See for example Kazuo Nishi, Kazuo Hozumi, *What is Japanese Architecture?* (Tokyo; New York: Kodansha International, 1989), 90–91.

identity of a modern forward-looking capital, while Kyoto remained the traditional centre of high culture and the seat of the politically powerless Emperor until the Meiji reform. Most current Japanese cities were founded during feudal eras, especially around the castles built during the Momoyama (1573–1603) and Edo (1603–1867) periods, such as, for example, Osaka and Nagoya, not to mention Tokyo itself.

Other historical city types also developed from different functional starting points. These include, for example, port cities, religious pilgrimage towns linked to Shinto shrines, and linear postal towns. Postal towns (*shukuba* or *shuku-eki*) played an important role in the Middle Ages and the Edo period. They were built for example along the roads between Tokyo and Kyoto, where goods were transported by horse. Many postal towns have preserved their historical atmosphere and are popular as tourist destinations.<sup>11</sup>

### TOKYO: FROM EDO TO A METROPOLIS

While Kyoto is considered to be the centre of traditional Japanese culture, Tokyo expresses the dynamism of the modern, future-orientated, and secular society. This has its historical reasons. During the nearly one thousand years of its history, Tokyo has grown from a small fishing village to one of the world's largest cities. In the 1720s Edo was already the largest city in the world when its population exceeded one million.<sup>12</sup> Today, Tokyo, with its 23 wards or districts, has a population of about 14 million (2021 statistics).<sup>13</sup>

Apart from the fortress, the historical Edo was a traditional Japanese wooden town with quarters built hierarchically around the castle. The samurai's upper-class villas were located hierarchically as per the social order on the western side of the castle. The eastern side of the town was a damp wetland, which was filled in to become building land for the needs of craftsmen and merchants and for the port.<sup>14</sup> Many of the moats that spiralled around the castle were later filled in, although they have left their mark on the urban tissue of

11 Nishi, Hozumi, *What is Japanese Architecture?*, 86–89.

12 *Japan: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (Tokyo; New York: Kodansha, 1993), 1583.

13 Tokyo Metropolitan Government Bureau of Statistics (2021), <http://www.toukei.metro.tokyo.jp/jsuikai/js-index.htm> [accessed 15/08/2023].

14 *Japan: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, 1583.

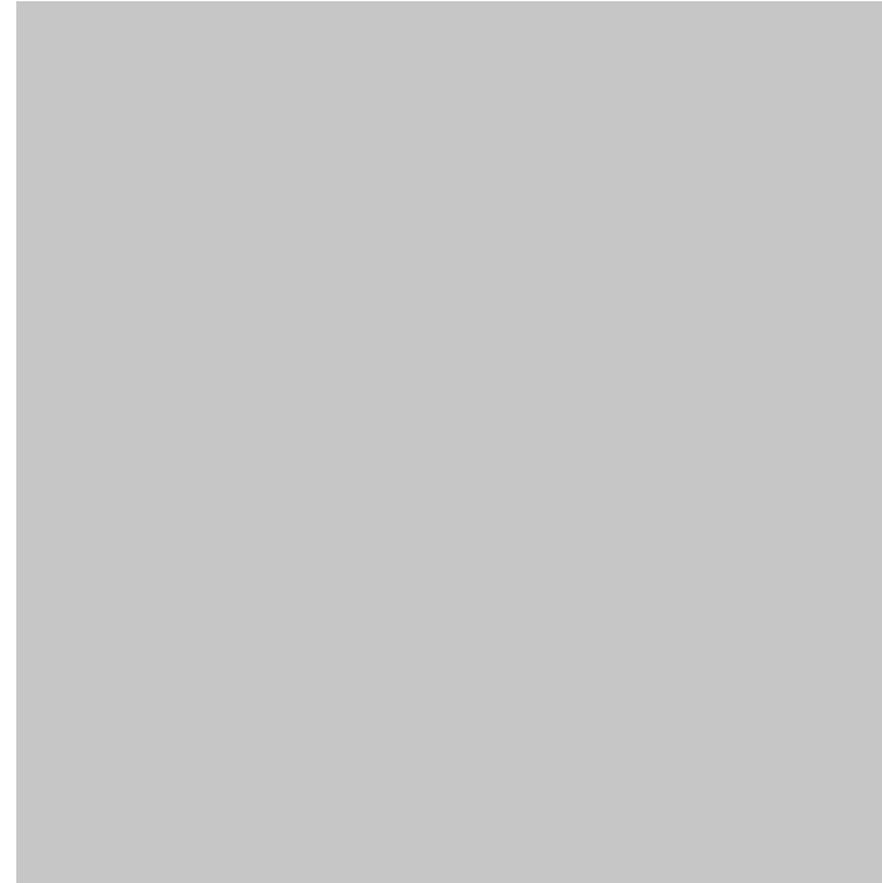


FIG. 4. UTAGAWA HIROSHIGE, *EDO IN BIRD'S EYE VIEW (EDO MEISHO ICHIRAN SUGOROKU)* (JAPANESE WOODCUT, 1859). IMAGE FROM *PROCESS ARCHITECTURE*, 72 (1987).

Tokyo. Today, Tokyo's mosaic identity is characterised by a locally diverse socioeconomic structure that has its roots in Edo's historical layers.

The quarters on the western part of the Emperor's Palace are still called Yamanote (towards the mountains) or Uppertown, which comprises wealthy garden city-style residential areas. In the eastern part of the city, in the deltas of Sumida and Arakawa rivers on the shores of Tokyo Bay, is Shitamachi, or downtown, which remains a bustling shopping area and business centre.

Over 250 years of peace prevailed in Japan from the beginning of the Edo period to 1867, when the last Tokugawa *shōgun* resigned



FIG. 5. HOKUSAI, *NIHONBASHI IN EDO* (JAPANESE WOODCUT FROM THE SERIES *THIRTY-SIX VIEWS OF MOUNT FUJI*, CA. 1830–1835). IMAGE FROM *HOKUSAI & HIROSHIGE: ON A JOURNEY TO EDO* (THE ZASUSABURO HARA COLLECTION) (HELSINKI: ATENEUM, 2008).

and power was restored to the Emperor in 1868. The Meiji reform meant the Emperor moved from his Palace in Kyoto to Edo Castle, and Edo was now renamed Tokyo, the Eastern Capital (Tôkyô). The restoration of power to the Emperor came, in many ways, to mark the modernisation of Japanese society, as the country opened itself once again to the outside world. Over the following decades, Tokyo continued its steady growth, both physically and in importance, as the political, administrative, and economic centre of Japan.

In 1923, Tokyo encountered the greatest disaster of its history when almost the entire city was destroyed by an earthquake. However, in a few years it was rebuilt and extended further in 1943 when large suburban areas were annexed to the administration of the metropolis. Another disaster took place during the Second World War, especially in 1945, when about half of the city was subjected to American bombing. The damage was almost as large as that of the combined atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

After the war Japan experienced unprecedented rapid urbanisation. As Japan traditionally had only a few urban planning regulations and the cities were built in a *laissez faire* manner, land prices rose to a peak.

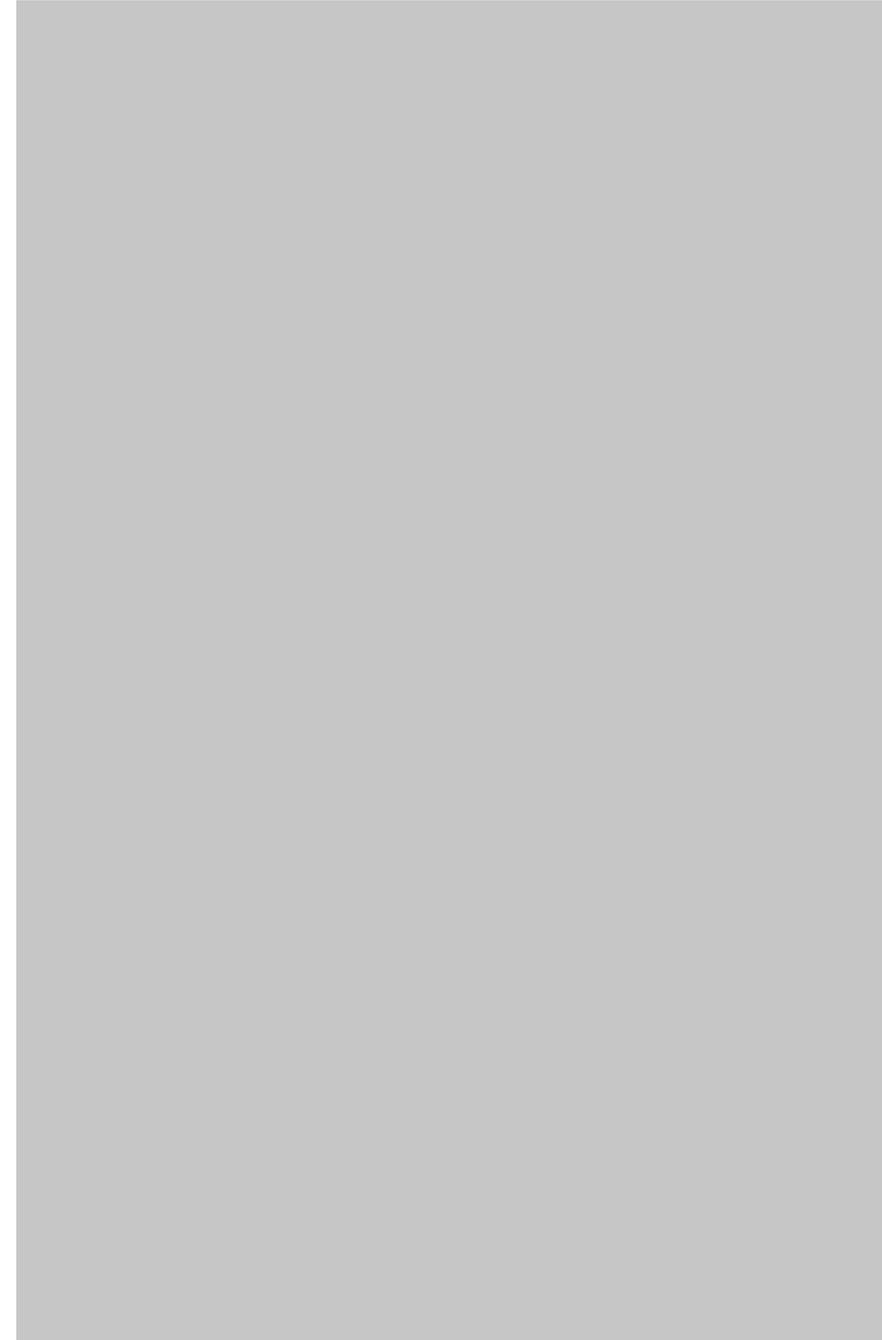


FIG. 6. UTAGAWA HIROSHIGE, *EVENING VIEW OF SARUWAKA-MACHI* (JAPANESE WOODCUT FROM THE SERIES *ONE HUNDRED FAMOUS VIEWS OF EDO*, CA. 1856–1858). IMAGE FROM *HOKUSAI & HIROSHIGE: ON A JOURNEY TO EDO* (THE ZASUSABURO HARA COLLECTION) (HELSINKI: ATENEUM, 2008).

As a result, over-efficient construction gained ground especially in business-dominated urban areas. The economic boom of the 1950s, however, meant a new time of strong growth and development for Tokyo as the centre of both administration and large corporations. Simultaneously, Japan became one of the world's centres of modern architecture.

The Tokyo Olympics of 1964 provided a new impetus to already intense construction activities, especially to solve the housing problem caused by the growing population. In 1965 there were 10.9 million inhabitants in Tokyo, and housing and plot prices rose dramatically.<sup>15</sup> The same trend has persisted despite momentary recessions, and Tokyo is still one of the world's most expensive cities today. Yet in international comparisons, Tokyo has often been ranked among the safest and most comfortable residential cities in the world and belongs also among those which function the best. While the problems of the 1970s were pollution and traffic, today the waters of the Sumida River are relatively clean, and the Tokyo transport system works well.

Tokyo Metropolis or metropolitan area – of which Tokyo itself comprises only the central area –, forms its own prefecture, being one of Japan's 47 prefectures. Tokyo Prefecture is a giant urban cluster and yet it is only a part of a wider, continuous city network that covers, from the European viewpoint, many large cities and has more than 37 million residents,<sup>16</sup> making the Greater Tokyo region the world's largest metropolis and economic area (New York is the second).

Although the many social, economic and administrative causes affecting urban development in Japan are comparative to the rest of the world, the cultural meanings inherent in urban environments are always local and differ from each other. Tokyo's "Empire of Signs"<sup>17</sup> can give the impression of uncontrolled chaos, but beneath the rich texture there are deep spatial and aesthetic structures that provide the content for the city's cultural meaning.

15 *Japan: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, 1583.

16 See for example "Population of the Greater Tokyo Area from 1950 to 2015 with a forecast until 2030", *Statista*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/608524/japan-population-greater-tokyo-area/> [accessed 15/08/2023]. The statistics may differ slightly according to the source.

17 Cf. Roland Barthes, *L'empire des signes* (Genève: Les Sentiers de la Création, 1970).



FIG. 7. TOKYO URBAN TISSUE. PHOTO: KAISA BRONER-BAUER.

## MEGALOPOLIS AND URBAN IDENTITIES

To understand the Japanese city and architecture, we must view it from within. The visual concepts of Western architecture and urban art – form, symmetry, perspective – are unfamiliar to Japanese culture. The traditional Japanese house and town are both open organisms, the functionally of which grows from the inside out. The demarcations between different areas are important, for example, the areas of temples and shrines are always marked by certain kinds of gate, although the external frontiers of buildings and cities are flexible and can change.<sup>18</sup>

In Japanese culture, the relationship with nature, based on Shintoism, is essential: for the Japanese, nature is both a model and a partner with whom they want to live in harmony. Thus, in the

18 Kaisa Broner-Bauer, "Tokio – kaos ja järjestys. Huomioita merkityksen estetiikasta japanilaisessa kaupungissa", *Kaupunkien estetiikkaa*, ed. by Anne Mari Forss, Tarja Rannisto (Kuopio: University Press of Eastern Finland, 2013), 156.

Japanese city, there is nothing absolutely predetermined or controlled, and in a similar way to in nature, its external character is subject to constant change. Except for security aspects, not many building and town regulations exist in modern Japan.<sup>19</sup> In Tokyo, the life cycle of an average building is estimated to be only about 20 years, and thus, the city's transformation process is extremely fast.

However, the Japanese city is characterised by a type of continuity. Although Tokyo has grown into a giant international city and has been penetrated by Western architectural influence since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, its urban essence still has a very Japanese character. How can this be identified? According to Hidenoby Jinnai, there is an *ethnic continuity*. This means that the disappearing city's "genes" are constantly transferred to a renewing city, whereby "the new and the old are complexly meshed", and "its old ethnic elements live in the vernacular".<sup>20</sup>

Ethnicity means something that is characteristic of a particular group of people or culture.<sup>21</sup> In other words, the cellular microstructure and macrostructure of urban tissue, in which the functional and socioeconomic urban structure is filtered in its own way, stays preserved, despite the fact that disappearing old buildings give way to new ones during the constant change. In Tokyo, the new and the old are ethnically and harmoniously mixed, although in their external shape they may differ radically and do not form any unified ensemble of architecture or urban art.

Ethnic continuity also means the cultural continuity of local urban village communities. Tokyo includes hundreds of urban villages, each with its own socio-economic structure, local lifestyle, and physical character. Urban villages form urban districts, and each of Tokyo's 23 wards or districts has its own local cultural identity, which is reflected in the areas' functions and physical forms.

In the central area of Tokyo, according to Edo's historical model, urban quarters twist in circles around the Emperor's palace and its large park, which is surrounded by a wide moat. Although the metropolitan centre has its own public character in relation to the

19 Cf. Koichi Ushio, *Sensus Communis. Vertaileva tutkielma kaupunkisuunnittelun aatehistoriallisesta taustasta Euroopassa ja Japanissa*. Doctoral dissertation (Oulu: University of Oulu, 2004).

20 Hidenoby Jinnai, "Journey into a Mysterious City", *Process Architecture*, 72 (1987), 5.

21 *Ibid.*, 6–7.



FIG. 8. A FESTIVAL DAY IN THE ASAKUSA TEMPLE AREA, TOKYO. PHOTO: KAISA BRONER-BAUER.

Emperor's palace, in other parts of Tokyo urban villages bear a close resemblance to each other, astonishingly, regardless of their socio-economic status. Tokyo's residential areas are small in scale and quiet in nature, and their lifestyle is like that of a rural village or small town.

As in the Edo period, inhabitants of urban villages formed communities who took care of common issues, providing the basis for official administration; and even today the residents of an area are bound by a shared sense of inner cohesion. Urban festivals, Shinto matsuris and other processions are traditions that reinforce the inhabitants' inner solidarity. The security of the residential areas in Tokyo is often praised, one reason for this being the strong internal control that traditionally exist in urban communities.<sup>22</sup>

The centre of an urban village is usually a railway station surrounded by various service outlets, shops, and restaurants. Narrow alleys form a labyrinthine network. Residential areas are located between larger traffic routes, which are named, and bordered by buildings of a larger scale. Small residential streets are usually

22 Broner-Bauer, "Tokio – kaaos ja järjestys. Huomioita merkityksen estetiikasta japanilaisessa kaupungissa", 158.



FIG. 9. A RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBOURHOOD AND A HIGHWAY IN TOKYO. PHOTO: KAISA BRONER-BAUER.

unnamed. An address consists of the name and postal code of the city, the name of the area, the block number and the building number, which does not refer to the adjacent houses along the street as in Europe, but to the chronological order of the date of building.

Greenery – trees and vegetation – in residential areas is also important. The garden is central to Japanese habitation. In urban environments gardens are often more of a symbolic reminder, like small groups of plants, or a few potted plants at the entrance in the street, depending on the available space.<sup>23</sup> The result is picturesque village milieus in the heart of a huge city.

The three central districts of Chioda-ku, Chûô-ku and Minato-ku form the core of Tokyo. The first two are mainly occupied by offices and commercial buildings as well as large hotels. Chioda includes the Imperial palace area, numerous state-owned buildings and the huge complex of Tokyo Central Station. The Chûô-ku district is home to the famous shopping area of Ginza with its elegant commercial buildings, department stores and restaurants – one

23 See for example Michel Butor, Olivier Delhomme, *Jardins de rue au Japon* (Genève: Editions Notari, 2010).



FIG. 10. A CITYSCAPE OF TOKYO. PHOTO: KAISA BRONER-BAUER.

of Tokyo's colourful postcards. Minato-ku is structurally a more mixed area with businesses, cultural activities, embassies and well-groomed residential areas, and is also one of Tokyo's nightlife and entertainment centres.

Other neighbourhoods in central Tokyo are Shinjuku-ku, Shibuya-ku and Bunkyô-ku. Shinjuku is the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Centre with its many skyscrapers and large department stores. The city's silhouette is crowned by the Tokyo City Hall complex designed by Kenzo Tange's Architecture Office (1991). Its 243-meter-high double-tower building was until 2006 the tallest building in the metropolis or Greater Tokyo. Shinjuku is also famous for its small-scale streets with tiny shops, and its cramped bars and restaurants<sup>24</sup> as a memorial of Edo's "floating world".

Shibuya, for its part, is an area of youthful urban culture, especially the surroundings of its central station and the Yoyogi Park subway station which is one of the younger generation's preferred weekend gathering places. Shibuya has exquisite fashion boutiques, department

24 See for example Philippe Pons, "Shinjuku, le kaléidoscope babylonien", *Autrement*, 8 (1984), 32–39.

stores, hotels and restaurants in the midst of well-to-do residential blocks. The milieu of Aoyama dôri and Omotesandô can be described as the centre of creative elegant urban culture in Tokyo.

Bunkyo-ku is a quite typical mixed-use district in Tokyo, full of small-scale residential areas, nestled in the islands between larger traffic streets. In the eastern part of the area is the central campus of Japan's oldest national university, Tokyo University (Tôkyô Daigaku), built in the Western style at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Tokyo University campus area is bordered by Ueno Park in Taito-ku, which houses several major museums such as the National Museum of Tokyo, the Historical Gallery of Horyû-ji Treasures, the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, the National Museum of Western Art (1959) designed by Le Corbusier, as well as Kunio Maekawa's Tokyo Music Hall (Tokyo Metropolitan Festival Hall, 1961), which is one of the pearls of Japanese Modernism.

Tokyo is its own world, each of its neighbourhoods hiding stories and meanings.<sup>25</sup> They cannot be understood, however, or found without a thorough search, as they do not open up at first glance and never cease to fascinate with their mysteries. Under the city's rich urban texture there is a secret order. And perhaps precisely because of this, Tokyo functions well both at the micro and macro level. Tokyo is a city of great opposites, but despite its scale and the problems this brings, it is a dynamic, optimistic and future-orientated metropolis.

#### MANIFESTATIONS OF CULTURAL MEANING IN URBAN SPACE

The Japanese city can also be regarded as a cultural metaphor. Geographical and historical circumstances have shaped urban spaces with their prevalent forces. A permanent psychological uncertainty due to the country's location on a precarious earthquake and volcanic zone, and an overall awareness of the perishability of life based on Buddhist philosophy, have deeply influenced the Japanese mind and culture. The Taoist ideal of emptiness, which is linked to Buddhist thinking, is also reflected in the urban space. For instance, in a

25 There is a lot of literature on the history of Tokyo describing its development and city life from Edo to the present-day megalopolis. See for example Edward Seidensticker, *Low City, High City. Tokyo from Edo to the Earthquake* (Rutland, Vermont; Tokyo, Japan: Charles E. Tuttle Co. Publishers, 1984).

Japanese city there is no designated urban centre in the sense of the European city centre which, on the contrary, is a culturally and economically accentuated place.

When compared to European spatial concepts, the Japanese sense of space is totally different. There are two basic spatial concepts, *ma* and *oku*, depicting the Japanese understanding of space. The original meaning of *ma* is interval, but it can also denote a silent moment, or a "meaningful void".<sup>26</sup> Its meaning in urban space is even more complex, and can be experienced, for example, as a series of intermediate spaces, a spatial rhythm, or an empty space, which provide the city a rich morphological appearance. There is no equivalent to the word *ma* in Western languages, but it always refers to some sort of void experienced in space and time – in fact, its meaning is "space-time". Various scholars have given different definitions to the space-time concept *ma*, for example, Günter Nitschke calls *ma* the Japanese "sense of place".<sup>27</sup>

間 MA

According to Arata Isozaki, the ancient Japanese concept of space was based on their aspiration to give a visible and formal figure to deities, *kami*, that were believed to fill the cosmos.<sup>28</sup> *Ma* still means a way to mark a sacred place, *himorogi*, where *kami* can settle down. This is accomplished by dividing the space: four columns or piles erected at the corners of a square or rectangular area, and a rope, *shimenawa*, attached around them. A column, *yorishiro*, is then placed in the centre of the space where the *kami* is supposed to live. The interior of the bounded area is called *kekkaï*. White paper strips symbolise the sun. The Shinto shrine Izumo Taisha has a long stairway bridge, *hashi*, which is supposed to lead from the platform on the ground to the realm of the deity. This stairway bridge symbolises the connection between heaven and earth, and between gods and people.<sup>29</sup>

26 *Japan: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, 904.

27 Nitschke, "'MA'. The Japanese Sense of 'Place' in Old and New Architecture and Planning", 117.

28 Arata Isozaki, "*Ma*" *tila-aika Japanissa*. Exhibition catalog (in English, *Space-Time in Japan – Ma*, 1978) (Helsinki: Helsingin kaupungin taidemuseo, 1981), 13.

29 *Ibid.*, 12–25.

# 奥

OKU

In addition to *ma*, the experience of *oku*, especially in Japanese urban space, is also essential; in fact, they complement each other. While *ma* is a concomitant concept of experiencing space in time, *oku* refers to the innermost space or depth,<sup>30</sup> or to the hidden dimension of the urban experience and the psychological state of processing a path. It means that the goal of the path is hidden and will be only partially discovered. *Oku* is not visible, it rather refers to an invisible urban heart.

The word *oku* has three types of meaning: relating to something private, intimate, and deep; holy or sublime; encrypted and in-depth. In architecture, *oku* refers to spatial layers in which the innermost is encrypted or can only be found gradually in an experiential manner in time and space. *Oku* thus refers to the Japanese concept of layered space, or the “onion character” of space.<sup>31</sup> *Oku* is manifested in the interaction between the empty space and the layered space.

Fumihiko Maki has written a seminal article about the impact of *oku* on urban space titled “The Japanese City Spaces and the Concept of Oku” (1979), which is still the best article on the subject written and translated into a Western language. According to Maki, *oku* may be manifested as a centripetal space structure,<sup>32</sup> however, its centre is hidden or may be something providing an orientation to the further distance or something at the end of a pathway. It may be within an area, or a centrally located place, or could be a sanctuary or a temple on a mountain slope. *Oku* itself is not something important, it is not dominant, nor a centre in the Western meaning, but rather it is a hidden core, an “invisible centre”. According to Maki, “the *oku* is nothing but the concept of convergence to zero”.<sup>33</sup>

For *oku* the spatial layering and experience of depth is thus meaningful. This happens incrementally, by moving in the streets,

30 Fumihiko Maki, “Japanese City Spaces and the Concept of Oku”, *JA / The Japan Architect*, 265 (1979), 52; Yann Nussaume, *Anthologie critique de la théorie architecturale japonaise. Le regard du milieu* (Bruxelles: Ousia, 2004), 526.

31 Cf. Maki, “Japanese City Spaces and the Concept of Oku”, 51–52.

32 Ibid., 52.

33 Ibid., 59.



FIG. 11. A RESIDENTIAL STREET IN TOKYO. PHOTO: KAISA BRONER-BAUER.

like experiencing a transition into a hidden place. Essential is not the place itself, but rather the psychological process of approaching it, which happens in time, in stages, while the experiential depth of urban space becomes emphasised. Here again we see the layered character of the Japanese sense of space, which has its equivalence in the Japanese way of wrapping packages and coating them with beautiful multi-layered paper or cloth. A similar “layered wrapping” of inner space is archetypal in Japanese architecture and urban space.<sup>34</sup> For example, the routes leading to Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples are seldom straightforward, instead they make 90 degree turns and change their character in sequences when moving inwards.

In describing the manifestation of *oku* in Tokyo’s urban space Maki chose the example of Yamanote, the residential area located west of the imperial palace and park. Here the remains of the Edo period samurai stone walls and old lush trees are still present, and the streets are still as narrow and winding as ever. Even though

34 Ibid., 60. Maki uses expressions like “inner space-envelopment” and “*oku-wrap*”.



FIG. 12. A RESIDENTIAL STREET IN TOKYO. PHOTO: KAISA BRONER-BAUER.

there are new higher buildings among the old houses, the spirit of the place is enigmatic, as if it conceals something profound. Maki poetically depicts this former samurai villa neighbourhood: "One gets a rather peculiar sense of depth from the dim spaces between the old walls and the newly built high-rise buildings that now stand squeezed among them."<sup>35</sup>

Noteworthy in Maki's description of the *oku* phenomenon in Yamanote area are the "dim spaces". Kisho Kurokawa has described the concept of "Rikyu Gray" as a term that refers to the undualistic, ambiguous and equivocal character of Japanese culture, often regarded as a central feature of the *Japaneseness*.<sup>36</sup> In architecture and urban space, this is manifested, for instance, by the "dim spaces", which may be intermediate (cf. *ma*) or multipurpose spatial zones that may combine conflicting things. The layered "onion" structure of Japanese architecture and urban space, as well as the rich local morphology of urban villages, hide many such ambiguous and equivocal situations and details.

In Japanese, there are several other words related to the notion of space that have no equivalence in Western languages. Such terms, which are also related to the architectural concept of space, are for example, *kûkan* and *en*.

### 空 KÛKAN 縁 EN 縁側 ENGAWA

From the 19th century on, the term *kûkan* has been used to mean objective, metric geometric space in the Western sense. The first part of it, *kû*, means empty space, and the remainder, *kan*, in Japanese (also *ma*), means intermediate, so the meaning of the word literally means "empty space" or empty place. The word *en* can be translated as interaction, although it has several meanings depending on the context. For example, in Buddhism, it means the connection between cause and effect, or the law of *karma* (in Japanese *in-en*), and in the social context it can refer to a relationship between people. Japanese architectural vocabulary has the term *engawa*, which means some kind of intermediate space, for instance an open corridor or a veranda.

35 Maki, "Japanese City Spaces and the Concept of Oku", 51.

36 Kisho Kurokawa, *Rediscovering Japanese Space* (New York; Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1988), 47 *et passim*. See also Yoshinobu Ashihara, *The Hidden Order. Tokyo Through the Twentieth Century* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1989), 13 *et passim*.



FIG. 13. ASYMMETRY AND IRREGULARITY ARE TYPICAL QUALITIES OF JAPANESE-STYLE ARCHITECTURE, INFLUENCED BY ZEN AESTHETICS. THE COMMUNICATIVE ENTANGLEMENT OF INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR SPACES HAS BECOME A CHARACTERISTIC FEATURE OF JAPANESE ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN SPACE. IMAGE FROM MITSUO INOUE, *SPACE IN JAPANESE ARCHITECTURE* (NEW YORK: WEATHERHILL, 1985).

As an architectural spatial element, *engawa* relates to the Japanese concept of layered space. Often a space between an interior and the exterior area is called *engawa*. In English, the term “transactional space” has also been used.

In Japanese architecture, history can be divided into two distinct traditions: the Chinese style Buddhist temple architecture and the Japanese style profane architecture crystallised in the feudal era. The transition from temple architecture to the Japanese style has been described as the transition from a closed geometric space to a movement-oriented space.<sup>37</sup> Special features of Japanese-style architecture are opposite to the Chinese-style tradition, among others, asymmetry and irregularity. The communicative entanglement of movement-oriented interior space and exterior space has become a characteristic feature of both traditional and modern Japanese architecture and urban space.<sup>38</sup>

37 Mitsuo Inoue, *Space in Japanese Architecture* (New York; Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1985), 138.

38 Ibid., 137 f.

## THE JAPANESE CITY VERSUS THE EUROPEAN CITY

Perhaps the most obvious way of thinking about the deep structures of the Japanese city is to highlight the features that separate it from a typical European city. One major difference between Japanese and European urban cultures is the idea of the city centre. The city centre is essential in European culture, while as an urban idea, or component, it is completely missing from the Japanese city. This applies to both the imperial towns built according to the Chinese model and the castle towns built in feudal times. In the *miyako*-type city the axial north-south main street was a central ceremonial lane representative of the imperial order. Likewise, the fortress in the midst of the Japanese medieval castle town was merely a central representation of the feudal system and shogunate power, with the mission of military defence, and did not correspond to the needs of the citizens and urban life, whether social or cultural. Temples and shrines were built here and there in the urban structure, often in peripheral areas.

The Japanese urban structure is multi-centred in its own way. The city's various areas, the urban villages, form a mosaic where each area has its own local socio-economic identity. The centre has a different meaning in the Japanese context than in the European city, where it has the task of gathering the citizens and maintaining the values of society.<sup>39</sup>

In fact, in the European city there has always been a clearly defined centre built for the urban community and where the most important institutions, services, and monuments are located. Thus, the representative religious, administrative and cultural buildings are erected in the city centre, often in an artistic urban composition emphasising their public value. In Japan, however, traditionally no squares or public monuments for the value of urban art were built. Outwardly controlled urban forms or monuments that maintain historical memory are strange to Japanese culture. Japanese spatial thinking is completely different from its Western counterpart. On one hand, it is based on the Japanese concepts of space and the Japanese relationship with nature in reference to

39 Cf. Jouko Piilola, "Japanilainen katu. Japanilaisen katutilan luonteesta, historiasta ja merkityssisällöstä", research paper (Oulu: University of Oulu, Department of Architecture, [n.d.]), 7.

Shinto and the open order of nature; and, on the other hand, to *oku*, as described earlier, as well as to the concepts of emptiness in Buddhist philosophy, which is also a strong influence on Japanese culture. Similarly, the centre of the city is “empty”, meaning it is unmarked and thus non-existent.

It should also be noted that in Japan space is understood as space-time, although regarded visually as two-dimensional planes rather than three-dimensional volume. Perspective is unknown in traditional Japanese painting, where depth is expressed in sequences with the aid of pictorial planes. Similarly, for example, the viewing point of the Japanese scroll painting changes in sequence as the scroll is unrolled. Kisho Kurokawa has described the Japanese relationship with space-time as follows: “At the heart of all creative manifestations of traditional Japanese culture there is a sense of two-dimensionality or frontality, an attempt to crystallise consciousness out of the sensual in frozen instants of stopped time.”<sup>40</sup>

Reducing the sensual “tangible reality” of a three-dimensional space to an abstract two-dimensional space reflects, according to Kisho Kurokawa, the ambiguity and “synthesis of contradictions” characteristic of Japanese culture that he calls “Rikyu gray”.<sup>41</sup> Examples include the fading of boundaries between different spaces and the allowance of opposites or alternative interpretations. In other words, reality is accepted as such with all its contradictions, but in symbolic representation, such as painting, it is reduced to fragmentary and sequential pictorial planes that oblige the viewer to have a sequential interpretation only.

Similar to traditional painting scrolls, Japanese architecture is characterized by a diagonal, or rotating, spatial structure that cannot be perceived at once from solely one place. When looking from a garden or passing through a series of spaces, the views and spaces or places unfold one by one, like the planes of images in scroll paintings. Structuring space in the style of Rikyu gray converts sculptural physical space into two-dimensional space. This kind of aesthetic sensibility is considered one of the common characteristics of all Japanese art. The space is lived and consists

40 Kurokawa, *Rediscovering Japanese Space*, 63.

41 *Ibid.*, 47 *et passim*.

of fragmentary parts. It is structured topologically, not according to geometric principles.

Certainly, the best example of a dim or gray space is the traditional Japanese street. The urban street scene is that kind of grey zone, a common ambiguous space of communication between the inhabitant and the city, between the private and the public, to which Kurokawa referred. In this way, the Japanese sense of community and social commitment, but also privacy, exist simultaneously. In spatial terms this can be seen in cellular continuity and transformability, as well as in intermediate spaces such as sheltered pavements, little alleys or, for example, verandas under the eaves, the *engawa*.<sup>42</sup> According to Kurokawa, even the beauty of the Japanese street scene is so far only expressed in the special greying light of dusk.<sup>43</sup>

The above-mentioned grey ambivalence is both a functional and an aesthetic characteristic of the Japanese street. The street space is likewise comparable to the scroll painting, the images of which unfold in sequences as two-dimensional planes to the viewer’s consciousness. Experiencing the traditional Japanese street scene as a series of images provided by semi-open facades covered with *shôji*, as in sequences of different views, is an aesthetic experience as such.

As already stated, in the Japanese city there are no squares or other urban artistic compositions in the European way. Instead, the basic urban component is the inner street in residential areas, primarily the walking street or the so-called *roji*, which also allows for social exchange, while as an urban space has a meaning and functionality which is more multidimensional than the traditional European street.<sup>44</sup> In fact, the concept of *kai-wai*, which describes the Japanese street, has the meaning of a functional space.<sup>45</sup> It means a flexible and vague urban space according its shape and boundaries and is usually a linear pedestrian area generated by human activity.

In principle, all urban street space, i.e. exterior and intermediate zones between buildings, are *kai-wai* space whereby the interior and exterior spaces communicate with each other, and there is not

42 Cf. Piilola, “Japanilainen katu. Japanilaisen katutilan luonteesta, historiasta ja merkityssisällöstä”, 11.

43 Kurokawa, *Rediscovering Japanese Space*, 62.

44 *Ibid.*, 54, 67.

45 Nitschke, “‘MA’. The Japanese Sense of ‘Place’ in Old and New Architecture and Planning”, 126.



FIG. 14. TOKYO SUBWAY MAP: THE URBAN MOSAIC OF A METROPOLIS. THE FRAMED AND BOXED STATIONS ARE THE CENTRAL STATIONS IN TOKYO'S POLYCENTRIC URBAN STRUCTURE.

necessarily a clear boundary between them. When the *shôji* panels of the house fronts are opened during local festivals and religious processions, the urban space expands inside.<sup>46</sup> In fact, the street front of the *machiya*, the Japanese town house, is light and half-open even when closed. *Kai-wai* can also be a temporal phenomenon and movable as a procession because it is not bound to physical boundaries.<sup>47</sup> In this way, the Japanese traditional street space is more of an event, a happening, than a geometrically or physically measurable space.

While the street is undeniably the basic component of the Japanese city, another cultural base is the private interior of the house, or you could simply say home, where the basic intimate activities of life take place. Yoshinobu Ashihara has described how the fact that

46 Cf. Riitta Salastie, *Living Tradition or Panda's Cage? An Analysis of the Urban Conservation in Kyoto*. Doctoral dissertation (Espoo: Helsinki University of Technology, 1999), 131, 260 *et passim*.

47 Nitschke, "'MA'. The Japanese Sense of 'Place' in Old and New Architecture and Planning", 126–128.

when entering a Japanese home, shoes are always removed, is of such a fundamental cultural significance that the Japanese city cannot be understood without it.<sup>48</sup> The question is first of all about the appreciation of cleanliness, which is a reflection of both Buddhist and Shinto teachings on everyday life.

On the other hand, this is also a question of lifestyle, which at its best is reflected in the architecture of the traditional Japanese house. The floor and the ceiling are its basic elements; instead the walls are light and slide and have no structural significance. Horizontality is the dominant feature, while the floor is of vital importance. Since the floor is also used for sleeping and eating, its cleanness is the basic criterion of a Japanese home.

Ashihara's thesis, however, goes beyond the description of trivial functionality. According to him the entire Japanese city, or at least the residential areas, are like annexes to the homes. If generalising, one could say that one's home address means only a bedroom, as all other activities take place mainly in urban space, in streets, parks, shops, restaurants and so on. Ashihara refers to this by the name "horizontal city", or rather, he speaks of a "ground-oriented lifestyle", emphasising horizontality and horizontal views,<sup>49</sup> which in its own way also supports Kurokawa's theory of grey space. The concept of the street as an ambiguous living space, or even as a living room, is still a powerful factor in the analysis of the Japanese city. More generally, being down-to-earth, with importance given to ground level, is, in Japanese culture, symbolically the basis of all existence.

## CONCLUSION

Japan, and its capital Tokyo, can be looked at in two ways. For example, as seen from a train window, it appears as an endless heterogeneous urban carpet, a modern and confusing environment that, at first sight, is difficult to describe as beautiful or pleasant. However, a deeper acquaintance with the country's culture and urban history brings a different view. Ethnically speaking, Tokyo is a quite traditional Japanese urban environment, with countless urban villages continuing the centuries-old tradition of local urban

48 Ashihara, *The Hidden Order. Tokyo Through the Twentieth Century*, 13 *et passim*.

49 *Ibid.*, 21–22 *et passim*.

culture. In residential areas, there is an internal coherence and a sense of togetherness. Scale-wise they are usually small, often resembling rural villages with small houses and green plants.

The basic element of an urban village is the street, which above all is a space of activity and motion, the *kai-wai*-type of social urban space. The Japanese street is said to be a process. But it is also an extension of the home, as Ashihara has described in his analysis of the Japanese city. Tokyo, as with other Japanese cities with a historical background, is a cellular-type structure that grows and is renewed from the inside out, the shape of which is formed spontaneously from continually changing components without any externally controlled or predetermined form.

I have previously referred several times to the fact that the Japanese way of thinking deviates from dualism and has led to fundamental differences in Japanese aesthetics in comparison to Western countries. This also explains the basic features of Japanese urban space – the primordial significance of the street, the cellular urban structure, the city's centreless-ness and multi-polarity and the rapid urban change or instability. Such an ambiguous blend is typical of Japanese culture and the Japanese city.

Philosophically speaking, the apparent chaos may in fact be considered an imitation of nature. In its own way nature is chaotic, although its structure is open and flexible, as is that of the Japanese city.

**KAISA BRONER-BAUER: URBAN SPACE AND CULTURAL ARCHETYPES: A VIEW ON THE JAPANESE CITY**

**KEYWORDS:** CULTURAL ARCHETYPES; URBAN IDENTITY; THE JAPANESE CITY; JAPANESE CONCEPTS OF SPACE; TOKYO

### SUMMARY

This paper analyses cultural and aesthetic phenomena and their inherent meanings within the Japanese city. In the introduction, I first briefly define the key concepts used in the analysis: cultural archetype, collective memory, and cultural identity. I will approach

the theme from a comparative point of view by examining Japanese urban features and archetypal principles in contrast to the European city.

Early Japanese urbanisation centred around imperial palaces, with the first cities founded by successive emperors from the 7<sup>th</sup> century onwards in the Nara region, near present-day Kyoto. The orthogonal plan for the imperial capital was copied from the contemporaneous Chinese dynasties. Spatial organisation was hierarchical, imperial quarters were located at the northern end of the central south–north axis of the city, and the most prestigious plots were around the Emperor's palace. Kyoto, the historical Heian-Kyô, was founded as the imperial capital in 794.

Tokyo, the historical Edo, became a “castle city” in 1457 when a military castle was built, and subsequently the capital when the *shôgun* moved government from Kyoto to Edo in 1603. The *shôgun*'s castle, the centre of power, intertwined with the hierarchical urban order spiralling around it. Edo gradually became a modern capital, Tokyo, while Kyoto remained the traditional centre of high culture and the seat of the powerless Emperor until 1868.

The Japanese city is a cultural metaphor. Psychological uncertainty, due to the country's location in a precarious earthquake and volcanic zone, and an awareness of the perishability of life based on Buddhist philosophy, have all deeply influenced both Japanese culture and the Japanese mind. Emptiness, the Taoist ideal linked to Buddhist thinking, is also reflected in the urban space. For instance, a Japanese city has no designated urban centre whereas in the European city this is a culturally and economically accentuated place.

In this paper, I also analyse the Japanese spatial concepts *ma* and *oku*, along with their archetypal manifestations in urban tissue and street scape. While *ma* means experiencing space in time, *oku* refers to the hidden dimension of the urban experience, or the psychological state of processing a path whereby the urban core remains hidden and only partially discovered.

Regardless of Japan's recent historical and economic development, the cultural characteristics of urban spaces have not changed a great deal. Tokyo is still a mosaic city of small village-type communities with an inherent feeling of togetherness. Hidenoby Jinnai has called this phenomenon an “ethnic continuity” whereby the new and the old are mixed in an ethnic order.

**CV**

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