

Component 1, Part 2

Japanese Cultural Landscapes: Specific Characteristics

Geographers Cotton Mather and P.P. Karan have spent many years studying and analyzing the Japanese cultural landscape and have synthesized their observations into a number of general and specific characteristics that accurately portray it.¹ The ten specific characteristics they identify represent individual, single elements that are physically found on the landscape. This part provides examples of these characteristics using photos taken during a study tour of Japan in 2006 and other images from Google Earth. Mather, Karan, and Iijima (1998) explained that the existence of these characteristics on the Japanese landscape can be attributed to several factors, including responses to Japan's limited land base, attempts to organize and maximize the utility of land, and considerations for aesthetics.

The ten specific characteristics of the Japanese cultural landscape are:

1. Gardens with sculptured plants
2. Flowers along thoroughfares
3. Lack of lawns
4. Dearth of roadside shoulders (and abundance of vending machines)
5. The profusion of aerial utility lines
6. Pervasive vinyl plant covers
7. Walled houses with gates
8. Sacred spaces
9. The waning of traditional architecture
10. Urban theme parks

Specific characteristics of the Japanese cultural landscape:

1. Gardens with sculptured plants

Japanese gardens are a common landscape element and are found in a variety of forms ranging from the large Adachi Art Museum's award winning garden to small home gardens. Japanese gardens often are idealized representations of nature as elements including rocks, trees, and water, are carefully arranged, and the grounds are meticulously maintained.



Figure 2-1: Adachi Art Museum gardens, Yasugi (Shimane Prefecture)

This garden has been rated the best garden in Japan by *The Journal of Japanese Gardening* for 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006. It is a great example of how many Japanese gardens are idealized representations of nature. Note the meticulously pruned shrubs. Do you see any debris, such as leaves or twigs? Also, museum patrons view the garden from behind glass or a small outdoor viewing area on the garden's edge (notice the glass windows to the left). In your opinion, how natural does this garden look? Further information about this garden can be found

at: <http://www.adachi-museum.or.jp/e/index.html>

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-2: Adachi Art Museum gardens, Yasugi (Shimane Prefecture)

Another view of the same garden shown in the previous photograph. This garden has been rated the best garden in Japan by *The Journal of Japanese Gardening* for 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006.

There are two interesting points about this garden and how such gardens are often idealized representations of nature. First, the waterfall in the background is artificial. In the evening, when the museum closes, the system is turned off and the waterfall disappears. Second, a highway (which cannot be seen) passes between the mounds in the middle of the photograph and the hill

in the background. Further information about this garden can be found at: <http://www.adachi-museum.or.jp/e/index.html>

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-3: Family garden, Hirose (Shimane Prefecture)

In the United States, this space would typically be a patio or a lawn, but, in Japan, it is often occupied by immaculate small gardens.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing

2. Flowers along thoroughfares

Flowers play an important role in Japanese culture and the art of flower arranging is held in high-esteem.



Figure 2-4: Highway, Aске (Aichi Prefecture)

Even with narrow roads and sidewalks, people still find a place to set out potted plants next to their homes and businesses.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing

3. Lack of lawns

One of the first things that an American notices about residential landscapes in Japan is the lack of lawns. Due to space limitations and the preference for gardens, lawns are a rarity, even in suburban or rural areas where one might expect more room for lawns.



Figure 2-5: House, Hirose (Shimane Prefecture)

In this scene, other houses, a detached garage, a rice field, and roads have crowded out any space for a lawn. What has this homeowner done with the small space between the house and the road?

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-6: Houses and street, Togo (Aichi Prefecture)

Suburban areas, like Togo (a suburb of Nagoya), also lack lawn space. Notice how these houses come right out to the street leaving no room for a lawn.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-7: Houses, Yasugi (Shimane Prefecture)

One might expect more lawns in rural areas because of more space. However, notice here that several houses have clustered together and maximized the amount of agricultural land. So this suggests that the lack of lawns on the Japanese landscape is as much a cultural preference as a reaction to the lack of space.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing

4. Dearth of roadside shoulders (and abundance of vending machines)

One of the more interesting landscape elements related to the limitation of space is the narrowness or absence of roadside shoulders and the small width of some roads. Despite this restricted space, the Japanese have been able to cram an enormous number of vending machines on sidewalks and along roadways. Vending machines help alleviate one of Japan's space problems by decreasing the amount of shelf space needed in retail shops. They also increase convenience for the busy Japanese lifestyle. In 2000, there was one vending machine for 23 people in Japan, compared to one for every 42 people in the United States, and revenue from vending machines in Japan exceeded \$60 billion compared to \$36 billion in the United States (Karan, 2005). Japanese vending machines sell a wide variety of products. Additional examples of vending machines and the products they sell can be seen at the following Web sites:

(1) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vending_machine and

(2) <http://www.photomann.com/japan/machines/>



Figure 2-8: Highway near Asume (Aichi Prefecture)

This van has pulled off onto the shoulder (Japanese drive on the left side of the road) and is still partially in the road.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-9: Highway near Izumo (Shimane Prefecture)

Notice the quick drop off into the rice field.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-10: Street, Hirose (Shimane Prefecture)

Here is an extreme example of lack of roadside shoulders. Note the car in the distance and the lady to give a perspective of the width of this road. A little ice on this roadway would make for a very interesting drive.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-11: Vending machines, Asuke (Aichi Prefecture)

This is a good example of how the Japanese maximize space by cramming vending machines in very restricted spaces.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-12: Vending machines, Toyota City (Aichi Prefecture)
A row of vending machines along a sidewalk in Toyota City. Can you tell what they are selling?
Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-13: Vending machine, Kyoto (Kyoto Prefecture)
What is this vending machine selling? From the instructions on the left, it looks like the machine will add water and heat it for you. The purpose of the aliens in the bottom of the photograph is unknown.
Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-14: Vending machines, Kyoto (Kyoto Prefecture)

This popular sports drink, like Gatorade, has an unusual name in English. A good explanation of this drink's name can be found at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pocari_Sweat

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing

5. The profusion of aerial utility lines

Karan (2005) offers two explanations about why the Japanese landscape has a dizzying array of power lines. Karan suggests that given the frugality of Japanese society, burying these lines is too costly. Japan's greater concern for inside space, compared to outside space, means that many Japanese view street space as functional and have no problem with above-ground power lines.



Figure 2-15: Side street, Kyoto (Kyoto Prefecture)

The density of power lines on this side street is remarkable.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-16: Older neighborhood, Kyoto (Kyoto Prefecture)

Even in the older sections of Kyoto, power lines are visible. In the United States, in areas such as this there is often an attempt to preserve the "authenticity" of this landscape, which might include burying power lines to hide the intrusion of modern developments.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing

6. Pervasive vinyl plant covers

Greenhouses have become a ubiquitous feature of the Japanese landscape in urban, suburban, and rural settings. Economic and social changes have contributed to their expansion. Continued urbanization, rising land prices, and demand for "off-season" crops have forced farmers to use their land more intensively through techniques such as greenhouse farming. For example, during the winter, greenhouses in southern Japan grow vegetables and ship them north to large urban areas when climatic conditions prevent local produce cultivation (Mather, Karan, and Iijima, 1998).



Figure 2-17: Greenhouses near Taisha (Shimane Prefecture)

Can you identify the greenhouses in this image (they are long, thin, and blue-green in color)? In this image, they occupy just about every bit of available land. Most of these greenhouses are growing grapes, as this area is famous for them.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-18: Greenhouses growing grapes near Taisha (Shimane Prefecture)

This photo shows a close-up of the greenhouses seen in the previous image.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-19: Greenhouses near Yasugi (Shimane Prefecture)

In many rural areas, greenhouses can be found in the middle of fields. Often, these greenhouses are growing rice seedlings that are eventually transplanted in adjacent fields; but, many other crops may be grown in them as well.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-20: Greenhouses in Chugoku Mountains (Okayama Prefecture)
A close-up view of several greenhouses in this rural mountainous region.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-21: Greenhouse, Togo, suburb of Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)
This greenhouse grows rice seedlings and is completely surrounded by suburban homes.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing

7. Walled houses with gates

Karan (2005) suggests that the tendency for many Japanese homes to be surrounded by walls reflects the cultural penchant to value family and community solidarity over individualism.



Figure 2-22: House with wall, Hirose (Shimane Prefecture)

This scene includes many traditional Japanese landscape characteristics: wall around house, Japanese architecture, and a garden with meticulously-pruned shrubs.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing

8. Sacred spaces

Religious structures are an important part of the Japanese landscape. In the late 1980s, there were over 81,000 Shinto shrines and 77,000 Buddhist temples in Japan (Karan, 2005). A few of the more common landscape features of these sites are discussed below.



Figure 2-23: Torii gate at Heian Jingu Shrine, Kyoto (Kyoto Prefecture)

Torii gates are found at the entrance to all Shinto shrines. Specifically, they mark the entrance to the sacred "inside" space of the shrine. More information about this shrine can be found at this

Web site: http://www.heianjingu.or.jp/index_e.html

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-24: Shinto shrine and torii gate, near Kiyomizudera, Kyoto (Kyoto Prefecture)

This small shrine has physical objects common to a Shinto shrine. Go to this Web site (<http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2059.html>) and read about the structures and objects at a Shinto shrine. How many of these structures and objects can you identify? At the Web site, read about the different groups of shrines. What kind of shrine is this, what kami (or god) is it dedicated to, and how can you tell?

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-25: Shinto shrine, Benten Island, Inasanahoma Beach, Taisha (Shimane Prefecture)

This miniature shrine is on a small island built for the god of fishing, Benten.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-26: Omikuji and ema, Shinto shrine, Kyoto (Kyoto Prefecture)
Omikuji and ema are commonly found at Shinto shrines. What are they? (hint: <http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2059.html>)

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-27: Pagoda, Kiyomizudera, Kyoto (Kyoto Prefecture)

As landscape clues, torii gates mark the location of Shinto shrines, while pagodas mark the location of Buddhist temples. Pagodas developed from the Indian stupa and were originally built to hold remains of the Buddha. Over time this function of the pagoda declined and today they are more symbolic than functional.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-28: Chionin Temple, Kyoto (Kyoto Prefecture)

Go to this Web site (<http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2058.html>) and read about the structures at a Buddhist temple. What is the structure in the photograph? Go to this Web site to read more about this temple (<http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e3928.html>).

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-29: A jizo statue on a street corner, Togo, suburb of Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)
Statues of the Japanese Buddhist divinity, Jizo, are found along roadways as he is the guardian of travelers.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-30: Mizuko jizo statues, Kiyomizudera, Kyoto (Kyoto Prefecture)
Mizuko jizo statues represent the guardians of young babies who have died from a variety of causes including abortions and stillbirths. It is common to dress them up in bibs and warm clothing.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-31: Small mizuko jizo statue, near Kiyomizudera, Kyoto (Kyoto Prefecture)
Mizuko jizo statues represent the guardians of young babies who have died from a variety of causes including abortions and stillbirths. It is common to dress them up in bibs and warm clothing.

Source: photo by Alice Tym

9. The waning of traditional architecture

Japan's highly urbanized society and industrialized economy, combined with an intense competition for land, threatens the survival of Japan's traditional architectural heritage. While many historically significant structures have been saved, many less historical, but still culturally

significant ones have been lost. What is also interesting is that new structures incorporate elements of traditional Japanese architecture.



Figure 2-32: Modern architecture, Kyoto (Kyoto Prefecture)

Kyoto served as the imperial capital of Japan for over a thousand years and the urban landscape is full of historic buildings on almost every street corner. Despite this history, some areas of Kyoto like this one seem to have lost touch with this history.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-33: Modern architecture, Okayama (Okayama Prefecture)

This scene is a good example of urban architectural styles in Japanese cities during the second half of the 20th century.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-34: Traditional architecture, Asuke (Aichi Prefecture)

Notice the difference in the architecture of this small town compared to Figure's 2-32 and 2-33.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-35: Apartments, Chugoku Mountains (Okayama Prefecture)

Do these apartments look Japanese? Western-style houses and Canadian log homes are becoming increasingly popular in Japan, especially in American-looking suburban settings (Karan, 2005).

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-36 and 2-37: Suburban sprawl, Yonago (Tottori Prefecture)
Change the language on the signs and this could be anywhere in the United States.
Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-38: Thai-style house, Hirose (Shimane Prefecture)

This house reflects a growing popularity of non-Japanese style homes. During the 1990s, Japan experienced a noticeable increase in the number of imported home styles, but they still represented a small percentage of the entire market (Karan, 2005).

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-39: Building on Hinomisaki coast, near Taisha (Shimane Prefecture)

This architectural style is based on the earliest Shinto shrines.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-40: Restaurant, Yonago (Tottori Prefecture)
This buffet restaurant resembles an Edo Period castle.
Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-41: Pagoda, Kyoto (Kyoto Prefecture)
Traditional architecture in a sea of modern architecture.
Source: photo by Craig R. Laing

10. Urban theme parks

Urban theme parks are just one of a variety of recreational spaces you can find in Japan. An urban theme park, like [Joypolis](http://tokyo-joypolis.com/language/english/) (<http://tokyo-joypolis.com/language/english/>) uses an arcade theme and infuses it with modern technologies, including virtual rides and smaller roller coasters, all set indoors. Other recreational spaces include large fantasylands that often replicate foreign locations such as [Huis Ten Bosch](http://english.huistenbosch.co.jp/index.html) (<http://english.huistenbosch.co.jp/index.html>), a Dutch village near Nagasaki. Another interesting recreational space concept are food theme parks. These include a clustering of numerous stores specializing in one type of food dish. Further

explanation of Japanese food theme parks can be found at <http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e3035.html>.



Figure 2-42: Joyplex, Yonago (Tottori Prefecture)

What three entertainment venues are combined into this one location?

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-43: Kotobukijo Confectionery, Yonago (Tottori Prefecture)

This food theme park is devoted to sweets. Notice the architectural style and the large castle keep or donjon.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 2-44: Kotobukijo Confectionery, Yonago (Tottori Prefecture)

This food theme park is devoted to sweets. It consists of numerous booths devoted to different dishes with samples.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing