

## Component 1: Japanese Cultural Landscapes

An American visiting Japan is immediately struck with the realization that Japan looks different than the United States. They may not be able to exactly put their finger on why things are different, but, they recognize that the Japanese landscape is more congested, compact, and variegated than landscapes in the United States. A lifelong student of the Japanese landscape described it as "visually chaotic."<sup>1</sup> One purpose of this component is to assist students and teachers interested in Japan to understand that while the Japanese landscape may at first appear chaotic, it is actually meticulously planned and arranged due to basic fundamental geographic concepts about the land and people of Japan.

Pierce Lewis succinctly defined a cultural landscape as ". . . nearly everything that we see when we go outdoors" (Meinig 1979, 12). In other words, a cultural landscape is the result of the interaction between a culture and its environment. Why are cultural landscapes important? Geographer Terry Jordan-Bychkov, thinks the cultural landscape "visually reflects the most basic strivings of humankind: for shelter, food, and clothing" (Jordan-Bychkov and Domosh 2003, 26). Pierce Lewis transcends the concept of basic necessities when he emphasizes that: "Our human landscape is our unwitting autobiography, reflecting our tastes, our values, our aspirations, and even our fears, in tangible, visible form" (Meinig 1979, 12). Every cultural landscape has cultural meaning. Study of them furthers our understanding of any culture by providing us a window into it. A cultural landscape is also a reflection of the opportunities and constraints the physical environment provides a given culture. This is particularly important in Japan where high population densities have yielded many interesting landscape adaptations due to limited space availability.

A basic premise illustrated through the content of this component is that Japan's landscapes are a direct reflection of its culture and that study of its cultural landscapes will further our understanding of the Archipelago. Japanese cultural landscapes are documented, described, and explained through extensive use of photographs and other imagery. To assist in this endeavor, the component is organized into the following parts. Part one will examine general characteristics of the Japanese cultural landscape. Part two will examine specific characteristics of the Japanese cultural landscape. The remaining parts on the website will visually document and examine different categories of Japan's cultural landscape including urban, suburban, and rural.

This component is intended for introductory human geography, world regional geography, and regional Asia/Japan geography courses. Hopefully, the many photographs used in this component will both be used to teach about Japan and illustrate basic concepts of cultural geography.

The photographs used in this component have all been taken on the island of Honshu, particularly in the central and southern part of the island. Honshu is Japan's largest island and is home to the country's largest cities, densest populations, and most of its historical and cultural heritage. While other Japanese islands, like Okinawa and Hokkaido, have their own unique cultural landscapes, it is central and southern Honshu that are the most representative of Japan

and its traditional cultural landscapes.

### **Literature Cited**

Jordan-Bychkov, T. G., and Domosh, Mona. 2003. *The Human Mosaic: A Thematic Introduction to Cultural Geography*. New York: W. H. Freeman and Company.

Meinig, D. W., ed. 1979. *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*. New York: Oxford University Press.

1 P.P. Karan used this phrase in his syllabus for a course entitled "The Japanese Landscape" that he teaches at the University of Kentucky and is available at <http://www.uky.edu/AS/Geography/People/Faculty/Karan/GeoJPN491G.pdf>.

## **General Characteristics of Japanese Cultural Landscapes**

**Part 1**

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. The eight general characteristics they identify are broad generalizations about Japan's landscape. This part provides examples of these characteristics using photos taken during a study tour of Japan in 2006 and other images from a variety of sources, including Google Earth and relevant books.

## **Specific Characteristics of Japanese Cultural Landscapes**

**Part 2**

Mather and Karan's ten specific characteristics of the Japanese cultural landscape represent individual, single elements found on the landscape. This part provides examples of these characteristics using photos taken during a study tour of Japan in 2006 and from Google Earth.

## **Japan's Urban Cultural Landscapes**

**Part 3**

Part 3 further examines the cultural landscapes of Japan through a focus on its urban landscapes using photos taken during a study tour of Japan in 2006 and from Google Earth. This approach provides an opportunity to extend our analysis of Japanese cultural landscapes beyond Mather and Karan's general and specific characteristics. However, viewers are encouraged to look for evidence of these characteristics in the following images.

## **Japan's Suburban Cultural Landscapes**

**Part 4**

Part 4 further examines the cultural landscapes of Japan through a focus on its suburban landscapes using photos taken during a study tour of Japan in 2006 and from Google Earth. This approach provides an opportunity to extend our analysis of Japanese cultural landscapes beyond Mather and Karan's general and specific characteristics. However, viewers are encouraged to look for evidence of these characteristics in the following images.

## **Japan's Rural Cultural Landscapes**

**Part 5**

Part 5 further examines the cultural landscapes of Japan through a focus on its rural landscapes using photos taken during a study tour of Japan in 2006, from Google Earth, and relevant books. This approach provides an opportunity to extend our analysis of Japanese cultural landscapes beyond Mather and Karan's general and specific characteristics. However, viewers are encouraged to look for evidence of these characteristics in the following images.