

Component 1, Part 3

Japan's Urban Cultural Landscapes

Parts [1](#) and [2](#) provide specific examples of Mather and Karan's characteristics of the Japanese cultural landscape. Part 3 further examines the cultural landscapes of Japan through a focus on its urban landscapes. This approach provides an opportunity to extend our analysis of Japanese cultural landscapes beyond Mather and Karan's characteristics. However, viewers are encouraged to look for evidence of these characteristics in the following images.

Cities have a long history in Japan dating back to the Nara Period (700-800 CE), but, it has only been since the latter half of the twentieth century that the majority of Japan's population has lived in urban areas. Today, about 80 percent of the Japanese population lives in urban areas, but, in 1950 only 37 percent lived in urban areas. This relatively recent urbanization coupled with the devastating effects of World War II bombing means that modern architecture dominates most large urban areas. Traditional architecture is found in pockets in large urban areas, but, is more common in small urban areas, especially in the mountains. One of the more apparent features, for an American, of Japanese urban areas is their compactness and high densities. The Kanto Plain, which includes Tokyo, has a population larger than Canada within an area slightly larger than Connecticut. With a population density of 343 persons per sq. km. (only three countries have higher population densities: Bangladesh, South Korea, and the Netherlands) it is no surprise that Japan often sells urban land in 36 sq. ft. parcels called tsubos. As a result, lot sizes are small and narrow and the buildings on them are usually also small and narrow. It is much cheaper to build vertically than horizontally which would require, because of the high price of scarce land, more tsubos. Examples of such buildings can be seen in [Figures 3-1 through 3-4](#).

Another interesting landscape feature related to population density is the higher densities that occur near rail stations. As highly accessible nodes on commuter rail networks and the Shinkansen (bullet-train), the demand for space adjacent to these stations has increased densities around them. For example, in [Figure 3-5](#) the JR (Japan Rail) station in Nagoya (the two cylindrical towers in the center of the image) anchors a high density commercial and office core just west of the city's center. The station itself, called the JR Central Towers, reflects these higher densities as one tower houses a Marriott hotel, the other tower thirty floors of office space, and the lower levels house a department store, shopping mall, and the train station (see <http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e3305.html>). The densities surrounding the train station can be seen in [Figures 3-6 through 3-8](#).

Both Japan and the United States employ zoning principles in their urban areas, but in Japan, it is administered less stringently than in the United States resulting in a greater variety of land use types and densities (Karan and Stapleton, 1997). [Figure 3-9](#) shows several single-family homes surrounded on all sides by larger apartment buildings in Hiroshima. Also, note the local train in the foreground and the horizontal structure in the distance, which is the Shinkansen.

Entertainment is an important function of Japan's downtown areas (see <http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2164.html>).¹ Sakae, the downtown district of Nagoya, is one of these areas with a plethora of shopping, dining, and entertainment, both above ground and underground, including a ferris wheel ([Figure 3-10](#)). [Figures 1-29 and 1-30](#) show the entrance to the Oasis 21 complex in

Sakae which is connected to a larger underground space that includes over five miles of hallways, 70 entrances, and 600 shops (Karan, 2005).

The landscapes of many of Japan's smaller urban areas, especially those in the mountains, are much different from large urban areas and show more evidence of traditional Japanese architecture. Asuke, a small city (population 10,000) located in the mountains just east of Nagoya in northeastern Aichi Prefecture, is a good example as many of the old wooden buildings have been preserved. In the 18th century, Asuke grew as a result of the locational advantage of being on a highway that was used to transport salt made in Mikawa Bay to inland towns. [Figures 3-11 and 3-12](#) provide general views of Asuke. [Figure 3-13](#) shows one of the main commercial streets in Asuke. Several storefronts are seen in [Figures 3-14 and 3-15](#). [Figure 3-16](#) shows a residential street in Asuke and [Figure 3-17](#), a house on this street. [Figure 2-4](#) shows the main highway coming into town.

1 For a good geographic assessment of Japan's entertainment districts, read the short essay entitled "Entertainment Districts in Japanese Cities" in Karan (2005, 277-278).

References

Karan, P.P. 2005. *Japan in the 21st Century: Environment, Economy, and Society*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press.

Karan, P.P. and Kristin Stapleton, eds. 1997. *The Japanese City*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press.

Photos



Figure 3-1: Sakae District, Downtown Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)
Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 3-2: Sakae District, Downtown Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)
Note the extremely narrow tan brick building on the right.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 3-3: Sakae District, Downtown Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)
Note the extremely narrow gray brick building on the left. The simulated thatch roof over the entrance to the mustard colored building is representative of traditional Japanese farmhouses

found in central Honshu. Also, notice the signs to the right of the photograph indicating the businesses on each floor of the building.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 3-4: Okonomiyaki Restaurant, Downtown Hiroshima (Hiroshima Prefecture)
The first floor of this narrow building is occupied by the Okonomiyaki Restaurant. Okonomiyaki is a Hiroshima specialty that is a cross between an omelet, pancake, and pizza. For more information about okonomiyaki and its geographic differences,

see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Okonomiyaki>

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 3-5: Nagoya JR (Japan Rail) Station (Aichi Prefecture)

The dark shadows by various buildings provide an indication as to the height of the building and therefore illustrates the density in that area. Note the concentration of tall buildings and higher densities around the station compared to the surrounding area.

Source: Google Earth



Figure 3-6: Nagoya JR (Japan Rail) Station (Aichi Prefecture)

This is the Shinkansen pulling into the Nagoya JR (Japan Rail) Station. Note the buildings in the distance that contribute to the high density core around the station.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 3-7: Nagoya skyline from JR Station (Aichi Prefecture)

Another view of the high density core around the station.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 3-8: Nagoya skyline from JR Station (Aichi Prefecture)
A third view of the high density core around the station.

Source: photo by Alice Tym



Figure 3-9: Hiroshima (Hiroshima Prefecture)

Notice the mixing of high and low density residential land uses— several single-family homes are surrounded on all sides by larger apartment buildings.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 3-10: Sakae district, downtown Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)
This ferris wheel represents the emerging entertainment function found in many downtown districts.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 3-11: General view of Asoke (Aichi Prefecture)
As can be seen in this view, level land is at a premium in Asoke.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 3-12: General view of Aске (Aichi Prefecture)

This view of an intersection in the center of Aске is a good representation of many of Mather and Karan's eighteen characteristics of the Japanese landscape. How many can you identify?

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 3-13: Commercial street, Aске (Aichi Prefecture)

This narrow two-way street is dominated by businesses on both sides of the street.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 3-14: Grocery store, Asuke (Aichi Prefecture)
Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 3-15: Book store, Asuke (Aichi Prefecture)
Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 3-16: Residential street, Asuke (Aichi Prefecture)
Houses line both sides of this narrow two-way street. A few businesses can be found in the distance on the right side of the street.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 3-17: House, Asuke (Aichi Prefecture)

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing