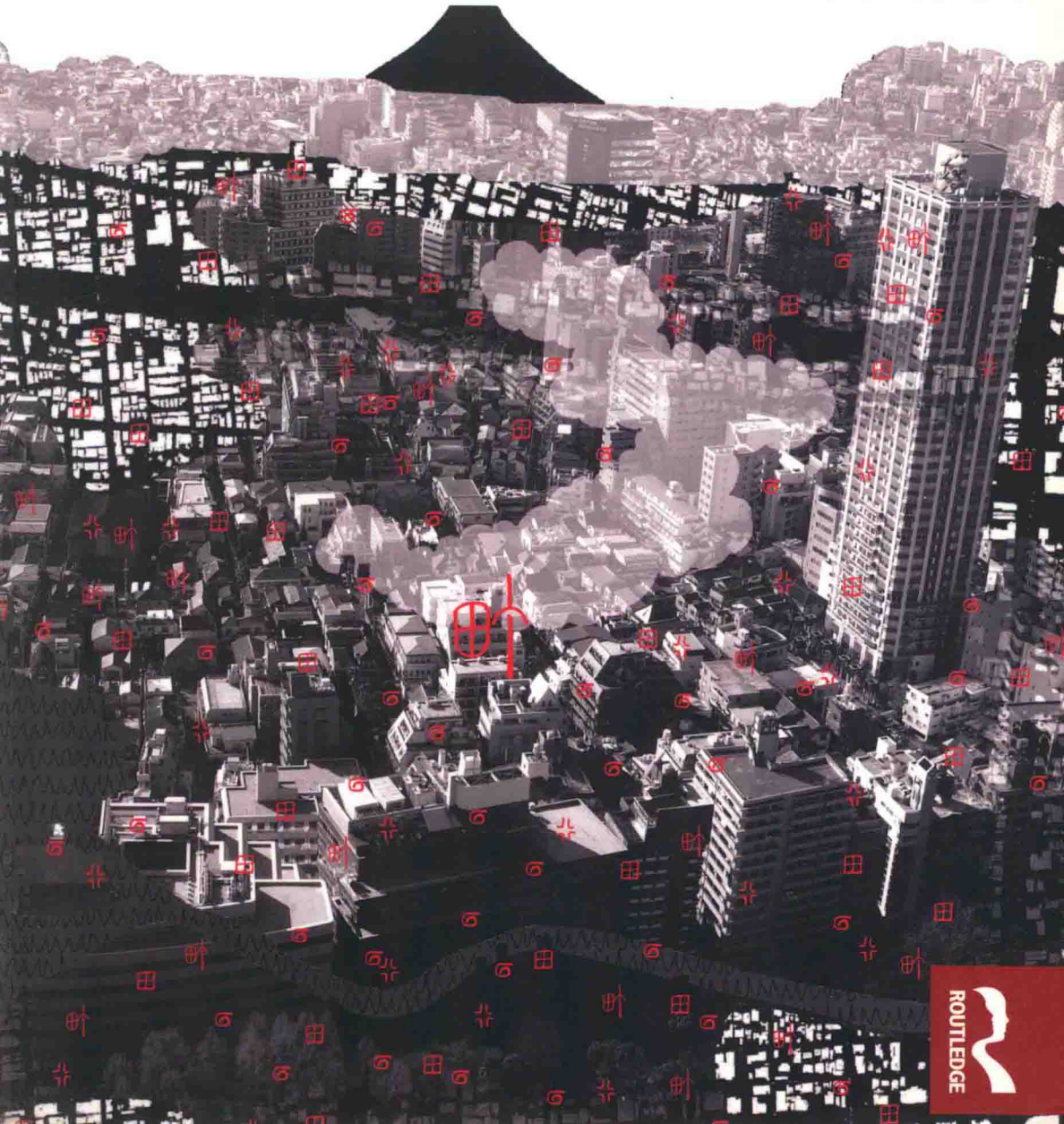
LEARNING FROM THE JAPANESE CITY

LOOKING EAST IN URBAN DESIGN

SECOND EDITION

BARRIE SHELTON



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Looking East in Urban Design

Second Edition

Barrie Shelton

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LEARNING FROM THE JAPANESE CITY

Japanese cities are amongst the most intriguing and confounding anywhere. Their structures, patterns of building and broader visual characteristics defy conventional urban design theories, and the book explores why this is so. Like its cities, Japan's written language is recognized as one of the most complicated, and the book is unique in revealing how the two are closely related. Set perceptively against a sweep of ideas drawn from history, geography, science, cultural and design theory, *Learning from the Japanese City* is a highly original exploration of contemporary urbanism that crosses disciplines, scales, time and space.

This is a thoroughly revised and much extended version of a book that drew widespread praise in its first edition. Most parts have stood the test of time and remain. A few are replaced or removed; about a hundred figures appear for the first time. Most important is an entirely new (sixth) section. This brings together many of the urban characteristics, otherwise encountered in fragments through the book, in one walkable district of what is arguably Japan's most convenient metropolis, Nagoya.

The interplay between culture, built form and cities remains at the heart of this highly readable book, while a change in subtitle to *Looking East in Urban Design* reflects increased emphasis on real places and design implications.

Barrie Shelton is Associate Professor – Urban Design, University of Melbourne and Honorary Associate Professor, University of Sydney.

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Preface to the Second Edition

In 1607, a letter passed from the Japanese regent, Prince Shotoku, to the Chinese Emperor, Yangdi: the former described himself as 'prince of the land where the sun rises' and addressed the recipient as 'emperor of the land where the sun sets'. Such descriptions depend of course on geographical position: to see the rising sun you must view from the west, and to see it setting you look from the east – in this instance from China and Japan respectively. There is in the statement at least an inference of equality (west looking east and *vice versa*) or perhaps of Japanese superiority, if one's idea of the setting sun is metaphor for 'sinking' or 'demise'. Either way, it ruffled the Chinese Emperor, who saw the words as mocking his place at the pinnacle of world power and his country as the dominant cultural force. The letter was written in *kanbun*: that is, in Chinese language and script. At the time, this was the written language of literate Japanese, who otherwise spoke their native tongue.

The letter reflects two things: unease between the two political domains, and the presence of elements of Chinese culture in Japan, conditions that persist to this day. Chinese culture has exerted profound influences on that of Japan. Many aspects of the former have been adopted and adapted by the Japanese, often in some kind of coexistence with the native Japanese – a phenomenon made amply clear in the first edition of this book.

For instance, the Buddhist and Shinto religions, respectively from China and Japan, have sat alongside each other for well over a millennium, often enjoying a symbiotic relationship. Likewise, in spoken 'Japanese' there are invariably *kun* (Japanese) and *on* (Chinese) pronunciations for the same written characters – a duality of tongues mingling as one. This extends to written Japanese, where there is a thoroughly mixed script: of *kanji* characters (originally imported from China) and *kana* ('made in Japan'). And so on. These and other 'borrowings' from China and their relationships with Japanese native elements are used to shed light on several characteristic Japanese attitudes to space and design, and form an essential backcloth to the subject of the book: Japanese urbanism and built form, past and present.

Further, the first edition concluded that many Japanese ways of spatial thought and practice are different from their Western counterparts of Greco-Roman descent. Not least was a Japanese propensity for 'area' in matters of spatial thinking, in contrast to a Western inclination for 'line'. That enquiry has since expanded and I feel even more confident now about its validity (Shelton, 2004, Shelton and Okayama, 2006). It was driven initially by a comparative examination of spatial and visual characteristics of Japanese and alphabet writing. Everywhere, evidence suggests 'areal' and 'linear' proclivities respectively across many fields and scales of spatial conceptualization. These range from the design of the tiny identification-cum-pricing codes on retail sale items to the extensive spatial frameworks

for organizing and identifying lots and buildings in cities. I refer, at the micro-scale, to the Japanese-initiated *QR* (quick response) *codes* consisting of *areas within areas*, and the Western *bar codes* made up of *long lines of short lines*; and at the larger scale, to the street as a *line* datum for the sequential identification of lots and buildings in contrast to a scatter of numbers across local *areas* called *machi* or *cho* in Japan. (The latter are respectively terms of Japanese *kun* and Chinese *on* origins in the manner of the 'two languages' explained above.)

Another first edition observation is that many long-established Japanese ways of spatial thought and practice are at odds with Western traditions, but are often consistent with and pre-date (usually Western generated) modern theoretical positions in philosophy, science or design. This is much in the manner that certain characteristics of Japanese traditional architecture (modular organization, free sub-dividable interior space, uninterrupted indoor-outdoor space, etc.) predated the spatial musings of Western Modernist designers. In Western culture, the quest for universal theories is commonly to the fore with strong inclinations to 'integrate' knowledge by way of 'grand syntheses', a desire apparent also in the quest for perfection in design. The stronger inclination in Japan has been to put things together by juxtaposing and connecting parts, not necessarily 'integrating' them – but accepting 'coexistence' as a form of 'synthesis'

This broad-ranging discussion of the interplay between culture, built form and cities remains at the heart of this new edition. However, the revised version takes the opportunity to provide more tangible description and analysis of actual places at city and district scales, informed by recent writing on urban structure, pattern and connection from commentators such as Hillier (1996), Marshall (2005), Salingaros (2005) and others. These shifts of emphasis and extensions are sufficient to warrant a subtle change of title – from '*West meets East* in Urban Design' (connoting a more conceptual understanding of Japanese urban, spatial and design culture) to '*Looking East* in Urban Design' (connoting more focused observation of tangible forms as 'models' and inspiration).

The revision has prompted a great many changes, large and small. Some pieces have been removed: for instance, the discussion of Tange's post-modern pile, Tokyo City Hall, seems less significant now than it did a decade ago. Many items and explanations have been replaced with what I hope are improved versions, and a few errors corrected. A full half of the 200-plus figures appear for the first time. And of the written additions, the largest and most important is the sixth and final chapter: this entirely new section turns its attention to one small district in Japan's third largest city, Nagoya. The chapter, 'Glorious Gokiso', is an exploration of the extraordinary in an ordinary superblock in what is arguably Japan's most livable and convenient big city. It is an exposition of a typical place that has within it many of the urban elements and characteristics otherwise encountered piecemeal across the book. In this way, it is a pragmatic ending, offering an everyday place as a kind of synthesis, model and implied theory – which is in essence rather Japanese!

Melbourne, Australia
February 2012

Please note:

1. Events are frequently placed in time by reference to commonly accepted periods in Japanese history. To assist the reader dates for these may be found Appendix I.
2. Throughout the text, Japanese terms are sometimes used. Again, to assist the reader, a glossary of these terms appears in Appendix II.

Preface to the First Edition

Western attitudes to Japanese city form have rarely been very positive. Further, for those with the sketchiest knowledge of Japan's design history, the schizophrenic and excessive nature of much modern Japanese architecture and urban fabric seems unfathomably at odds with the refined and restrained design traditions. Writing a few years ago, Pierre Vago (former editor of *Architecture d'aujourd'hui*) was not untypical when, under the telling title of 'Taking Fright in the Far East', he wrote of his 'disappointment' and 'disquiet' with the country's recent architecture and urban character, and its 'brutal rupture (with) tradition' (Vago, 1992, p. 81). At the same time, it was clear from his tone that he was neither ungenerous towards the Japanese nor uninformed of their urban and architectural developments: he could nevertheless not contemplate a visit without great trepidation.

In recent years, it has been more common for commentators, while often remaining critical of appearances, also to speak in awe of the energy, vitality, efficiency and technological sophistication of Japan's cities. These are, however, qualities that can hardly be viewed from afar but must be 'sensed' in the full scope of the word.

I empathize with Vago for I too must admit to once having an extreme reluctance to visit Japan and it took a very dear friend to entice me to go there. When I did eventually set foot in a string of Japan's cities, I was baffled, irritated and even intimidated by what I saw. Yet at the same time, I found myself energized, animated and indeed inspired by them. The effect was liberating and my intuition was quick to suggest that further exploration of their chaotic vitality might be extremely rewarding.

At that time (1989), my association with urban planning had spanned over two decades and my grounding in the history and theory of Western urban design was particularly strong. Over the previous few years, I had prepared a handful of entries which had all met with some level of success in urban design competitions. Further, these were founded on compositions and processes that sought to bring order to their subject sites in, more or less, well-tried Western ways (well-defined public spaces, coherent groupings of buildings, etc). To start to appreciate Japanese city form in its own right, I realized that my knowledge and experience may have been more handicap (with preconceived and inflexible notions of good city form) than advantage (i.e. as a sound basis for critical judgement). Increasingly, the many notions of urban form that I held dear in my own cultural domain seemed irrelevant in Japan.

Indeed, it was the differences between what I had come to value in the urban West and what I experienced in the far Far East that triggered a fascination with Japan's cities that continues to endure. During that visit almost a decade ago, I started to ask myself certain questions which remain at the heart of this book:

Why do Japanese cities look the way they do?

What relevance, if any, do they have to the wider world of contemporary urban design?

And, how sharp is the divide between what we experience today and the country's urban traditions?

Since that date, I have returned to Japan on numerous occasions and each time made it my business to investigate on foot as many corners of the cities visited as possible: alleys, shrine and temple precincts, highways, railway stations (and their 'magnetic' fields), roof-tops, observation decks, arcades, underground streets, bars, gardens etc. I have gained entry to a great range of dwellings including old merchant and warrior houses. In all, I have tried to witness the city from the most seedy to the most sophisticated of quarters; and I have been careful to include the common with designer-label places. Paralleling these 'field excursions' has been an almost compulsive poring over city maps (old and new), museum models, old photographs, postcards, etc. And in addition, there have been sessions with urban scholars and designers, and the inevitable piles of books and other papers consulted at home and away.

Nevertheless, I am only too aware of at least two considerable limitations in my quest to explore urban Japan. The first is that my travels are far from comprehensive. 'My' Japan extends only from the Kumamoto and Nagasaki areas of Kyushu north-westerly to Tokyo region and generally falls within what might loosely be called generous commuting distances of the Shinkansen (or bullet train) spine. This does however include the nation's historical heartland, the Yamato Region. Also, I have only a poor knowledge of the language thus Japanese sources are essentially through translated publications and the help of Japanese friends. Where I deal with the language in any detail, emphasis is upon visual characteristics of the written and printed text. Where meanings are concerned I am mostly in the hands of others.

The book has been accumulating in my mind throughout this time, although in material form only over the last three or four years. The result is often speculative and generated not only from observation, reading and discussion of architecture and city places but also from forays into other aspects of culture that prompt urban insight. There are, for example, detours into the nature of Japanese writing and mapping as well as even broader meanderings into the Shinto and Buddhist religions, and indeed their coexistence. In other words, the book is broad in sweep in order to comment on its particular urban focus.

As background, Chapter 1 reflects on changing Western attitudes to Japan's city forms. Chapter 2 explores contrasting Japanese and Western ways in thinking about space, showing some consistencies over a range of visual phenomena and scales from writing on a sheet of paper to settlement on a landscape. The third and largest chapter presents a miscellaneous array of Japanese urban characteristics and building types (past and present) that offer insights into today's cities: these range from the bridge and its environs as an urban node through historic samurai and merchant houses to contemporary building types. The next (Chapter 4) extracts aspects of religion and culture which bear upon attitudes to urban form and space. The fifth and final chapter gathers threads from throughout the book to show consistencies between many Japanese urban design traditions and much contemporary thought.

Without wishing to steal too much ground from subsequent chapters, I shall at least hint at three conceptual threads that run through them in response to those earlier-posed questions. The first is that behind Japan's urban forms are ways of thinking and seeing which are quite different from those of the West; and these are rooted deeply in the wider culture. Here, for example, it is suggested that one fundamental difference between Japanese and Western thinking about space is that the former has more affinity with area (hence the importance of the *tatami* mat and the floor in building and the *machi* as an areal unit of organization in the city) while the latter has more to do with line (with an emphasis on linear phenomena like walls in buildings and the sequential ordering of buildings along city streets).

The second is that the deep roots, being cultural, are mostly also old roots, although modern appearances may often belie this. Indeed, some physical manifestations may seem superficially at odds with the past yet are underlain by attitudes and values that have considerable age. For instance, Japan has put greater emphasis in city place-making on content (information, activity and animation) while Westerners have been more preoccupied by form (object, physical pattern and aesthetic composition). Consistent with this emphasis is the profusion of signs, lights and animation which cover whole buildings and even districts in today's urban Japan. Irritating Western sensibilities, such sights tend to be attributed somewhat simplistically to the big bad world of twentieth-century commercialism. This overlooks the fact that the sign-suffocated building has a long tradition in Japan and that steel, neon and electronic animation have simply supplemented or displaced the wind-generated flappings, inflations and gyrations of cotton and bamboo. Thus, while so many aspects of today's cities appear so very different from those of earlier times, there are also some surprising continuities – but of essence or principle rather than form or material.

A third thread is that many characteristics of Japanese cities, though rooted in national culture and history, have much affinity with contemporary ideas in science and philosophy which are mostly Western-generated – ironically, more affinity than the characteristics of Western cities themselves. These ideas embrace fracture, transformation, the autonomy of parts, non-linear qualities, etc. and it is here that the apparently chaotic but flexibly ordered Japanese city emerges as a potential source of learning and inspiration in today's uncertain and pluralistic world – for both people with professional design and broader cultural interests alike.

Hobart, Australia
December 1998

Please note:

I have assumed that most readers will be familiar, directly or otherwise, with more significant Western sights and objects to which I refer. Also, Japan is the main focus of attention. Thus, in many of my city contrasts, I make only fleeting reference to the Western examples and show relatively few illustrations. A name is deemed sufficient for an Eiffel Tower or a Bellini painting whereas a picture is shown of Tokyo Tower or an Hiroshige print. Where points of Western reference are pictured, it is usually of more obscure places – for instance, from my native Nottinghamshire or adopted Australia.

Second Edition Acknowledgements

Preparing the first edition of this book in the late 1990s was a considerable task and the result of much inspiration and help from other people. Accordingly, thanks were expressed to many colleagues and friends who contributed ideas, material or other assistance, and *First Edition Acknowledgements* reappear in slightly abbreviated form on pages that follow. Since that time, the book's content has been both reviewed and much extended: consequently, new people deserve recognition for their help and advice.

First, however, I must again extend thanks to my wife, Dr Emiko Okayama, who has continued as the most significant source of advice and inspiration. Her knowledge of both East Asian and Western cultures across languages, visual arts, literature, and related theories, plus her skills in translation and calligraphy never cease to surprise. All have contributed immensely, and our occasional joint papers and projects on related topics are indicative of shared interests and mutual help. Other family members who have contributed photographs or given other assistance include Fumihiko and Kazuyo Iwano, Masafumi Okayama and my son, Maki Shelton.

A period was spent as a Visiting Professor at Nagoya University, which enabled me to access both data and sites, and work alongside Professor Atsushi Katagi and Dr Yoshihiro Hotta (Department of Architecture): both opened my eyes to new sources and places. I also met with Professor Yoshitsugu Hayashi whose research was influential.

In a similar context, I must thank Professor Atsushi Deguchi (now of Tokyo University) and Koichiro Aitani, of Kyushu University, whose discussion and information on Japanese built form and Fukuoka city, invitations to Kyushu University, and facilitation of fieldwork were much appreciated.

Ideas honed in conversation with colleagues Professor Tom Kvan and Associate Professor Justyna Karakiewicz while co-authoring *The Making of Hong Kong: from Vertical to Volumetric* (Routledge, 2011) also percolate parts of this work.

I did not know Professor Tom Heneghan (now of Tokyo University of the Arts) when I wrote the first edition; but his appreciative review of the first edition for *Architectural Review* was the first to appear. By coincidence, we came together 3 years later as colleagues at the University of Sydney and remain good friends: the content of our many discussions lurks often behind this new edition. At the same university, insights arose from conversations with Dr Neena Mand during her doctoral candidature (now teaching at Newcastle University, Australia). And, remaining in Sydney, two postgraduate urban design students who contributed both analytical and graphic assistance deserve recognition: Hugh Nicholson and Madhan Sekhar.

After, I moved to the University of Melbourne in 2010, a Faculty of Architecture Building and Planning Publications Assistance Grant assisted final preparation. At this time Aileen Goh was an enthusiastic and effective research and graphics assistant.

I have known Li Dan at three universities (Sydney, Kyushu and Melbourne) as a postgraduate and doctoral student, research and teaching assistant. Her unflagging interest in my work, assistance in the field, fleetness of mind, knowledge of China and Japan, three relevant languages, considerable graphic skills and unbounded energy are all present in this new edition.

Last but not least, I must thank Masako Tsuzuki and her mother who are long standing residents of the Nagoya district of Gokiso, a place that occupies much of Chapter 6. Together, they were able to describe first-hand experiences, and recall memories of their much-appreciated neighbourhood.

This much revised and extended version of *Learning from the Japanese City* is thanks to all of the above plus the many students, of Sydney and Melbourne Universities, whose questions and comments have kept me on constant alert.

Finally, substantial efforts have been made to contact copyright holders and identify sources of material reproduced in this book. Further, the author and publishers wish to thank many individuals and organizations for allowing items to re-appear here. These are acknowledged either in these acknowledgements and/or in the body of the work. However, if any errors or oversights have occurred, we would wish to correct these at a later printing. Please contact the author, c/o Routledge.

Barrie Shelton
University of Melbourne
February 2012

First Edition Acknowledgements

Work of any magnitude cannot be completed without a great deal of assistance and this book is no exception. I am grateful to many people and organizations, too numerous to list individually; some, however, deserve, particular mention.

First, is my wife, Emiko Okayama, without whom I may never have experienced the subject and without whose support I may not have persevered. Certainly, there were Japanese sources (texts and people) from which I could only benefit thanks to her very special knowledge of her native language far beyond translation and interpretation. I must also thank her for her calligraphic contribution. A further family contribution was from our son, Herbert Maki, whose ability to interchange between the habits of two cultures was an inspiration.

I am most grateful to the Japan Foundation for their support over a period of four vital months (as a Japan Foundation Fellow) during which time my research was at its most intense. At that time, I was based in the Department of Architecture, Nagasaki Institute of Applied Science, where Professor Kazuma Hayashi and his colleagues kindly introduced me to useful resources and relevant places. Thanks also to Professors Toshihide Katayose and Masami Hibino for their parts in introducing me to aspects of Nagasaki and general encouragement.

Personal thanks must be extended to the Okayama family who were gracious in allowing me to create household disruption while occupying one of their rooms as a messy office-cum-library, and generously placing a variety of helpful equipment and facilities at my disposal.

I was especially indebted to Professor Hidenobu Jinnai, of the Department of Architecture at Tokyo's Hosei University, without whom I would not have discovered many pertinent nooks and crannies in his beloved Tokyo nor sensed so profoundly the capital's history. Though my one (very long) meeting with Professor Yoshinobu Ashihara occurred back in 1989, it was crucial in encouraging my interest in the topic and may well have made the difference between my later starting this project or not. I found the writings of both authors greatly helpful. Three people I have never met but whose extensive writing I have read (and, in the case of Maki, buildings I have seen) and found informative, insightful and inspiring are: architectural critic, Botond Bognar; architect and theorist, Fumihiko Maki; and writer/journalist, Peter Popham.

For reasons, which will soon be apparent, searching for places in Japanese cities can be an elusive and time-consuming, even for Japanese. For me, much help was forthcoming from many people to make the exploration more pleasurable and rewarding. A few sensed

particularly my subject and led me to pertinent places in their own cities and regions. The late Hironori Okubo and his wife, Teiko, were enormously generous in introducing me to some very special Fukuoka places and people. Naoko Nakajima, Yoshie Fusejima and Chad Wynn explained hidden corners of Osaka and the wider Kansai region. Others in Japan who deserve mention include: Mayuko Sano for advice and assistance in obtaining materials; several Nagasaki and Fukuoka city officers (particularly Kengo Gosho and Ryuji Inoue) who helped me 'see' their cities more clearly by assisting with site visits and information; Katsuhiro Kobayashi of Tokyo Metropolitan University for extending my horizons of certain Tokyo buildings; and Michiyuki Hirashima of Fukuoka Yomiuri Technical College who enhanced my understanding of Japan's traditional town houses.

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I am greatly indebted to Ann Rudkin of Alexandrine Press, Oxford, who on behalf of the publishers did a splendid job in keeping me on track and more or less on time with good sense and good spirit. Special thanks are necessary to Miki Okamoto who came to my rescue with some last-minute material. Thanks also to: Kevin Nute who prompted helpful discussion; Professors Stephen Hamnett (University of South Australia) and Thong Nguyen (then of the University of Tasmania) who expressed confidence in me and my project when circumstances required external support; and Jacqui Pickard, librarian, without whose help and encouragement my reading might have been narrower and persistence weaker.

Contents

Chapter 1

Western Interest in the Japanese City

Europeans first stepped onto Japanese soil in 1543. Just ninety-six years later (in 1639), they were almost totally barred from the country. For the two-and-a-half centuries that followed (until 1854), contact between Europe and Japan was primarily through a handful of Dutchmen who were generally confined to a small man-made island in the harbour of Nagasaki.

During that first and relatively brief period (especially brief when you consider that the return sailing time between Europe and Japan was then in the order of two or more years), a trickle of Europeans (mostly Spaniards, Portuguese, Italians, Englishmen and Dutchmen) ventured to trade and often preach and teach at the edge of their known world. They discovered a populous country with extensive settlement and substantial cities and towns. Japan's population in the late sixteenth century of about eighteen million was large compared, for instance, to England's four-and-a-half million and Spain's eight million. Settlement through lowland Japan was extensive and surprised visitors: in the 100 leagues plus distance between Miyako (modern-day Kyoto) and Suruga (Shizuoka), the Mexican-born Spaniard, Rodrigo de Vivero y Velasco, visiting Japan in 1609, noted that 'you would not even find a quarter of a league unpopulated' (Cooper, 1965, p. 282). Comparisons were readily made between the apparent dimensions of European and Japanese cities. In 1613, Englishman, John Saris found Suruga to be 'full as bigge as London with all the Suburbs' and Osaka to be 'as great as London within the walls' (*Ibid.*, pp. 287 and 288). Likewise, de Vivero y Velasco wrote (with some justification) of Miyako 'that there is no larger place in the known world' (*Ibid.*, p. 280).

Further, the cities and buildings of the time aroused a measure of fascination and even admiration amongst the visitors. The great castles, and particularly Osaka's, were viewed with awe. The capital was admired for its extensive grid of streets and the spaciousness of particular streets. Large Buddhist temples and more particularly their idols captured attention. It should, however, be noted that the capital and the temples were in essence more Chinese than Japanese and effectively cultural imports. Kyoto was modelled originally on the Chinese capital of Chang-un and was unusual in Japan, then and now. Castles were conceived and made in Japan although their scale was very much prompted by the arrival of European firearms. Superficially at least, they bore some resemblance to

European fortifications, exceeding some in scale while, at the same time, adding a touch of the exotic.

However, the more extensive and more typically indigenous aspects of cities also drew responses. A common cause for comment was the sharp division within the cities between the areas of the warrior classes (where there were houses in gardens) and of the merchants and artisans (where buildings were aligned along streets) with the further division of the city into gated sections, often according to trades in the latter areas. The separateness of the houses (many that may have appeared to be in rows still stood independently) and their largely single-storey nature were both noted characteristics. The vulnerability of the timber buildings to fire and their portability left strong impressions upon the minds of visitors, many of whom witnessed first-hand the destruction of whole city quarters and the moving of buildings to new sites. While European cities of the time were not immune to Acts of God and fire, they must have seemed, by comparison, remarkably solid and enduring. Further, given the appalling hygienic conditions in many contemporary European cities, it is not surprising that the cleanliness of Japan's cities was also a common point of comparison – the cleanliness referring both to streets and buildings (and people). In some cities, Osaka included, the number and quality of bridges also brought favourable remarks. One of the more perceptive comparative comments (as will later be gleaned) came again from de Vivero y Velasco who noted that 'our Spanish [or did he mean Spanish-Mexican where his observation may have been even more relevant] houses look better from without [but] the interior of these [Japanese] houses is far more beautiful' (*Ibid*., p. 294).

During that first century of contact, European commentary on Japanese cities appears to have been mostly descriptive but basically positive. Other aspects of culture such as manners, dress, customs, festivals, the arts, language and even buildings (especially noble houses) were perhaps the subject of more enthusiastic curiosity. Nevertheless, a variety of city features was both noticed and noted with favour but, at the same time, seen as very different, as were most things in Japan. Another perceptive visitor was the Italian Jesuit, Alessandro Valignano, who wrote: '… Japan is a world the reverse of Europe; everything is so different and opposite that they are like us in practically nothing.' Yet he added: '… this would not be surprising if they were like so many barbarians, but what astonishes me is that they behave as very prudent and cultured people…' (*Ibid*., p. 229). Both the culture and the city seem to have been observed in a manner that accepted difference within a framework of tolerance. The cities may not have been proffered as great examples of urban civilization, but they appear not to have been belittled and included many elements that commanded respect. The impression is that they were seen as different but, in some sense, equal.

During the years of national isolation, Japan's merchant class expanded enormously and with them, the country's towns and cities. By the eighteenth century, Edo (now Tokyo) had emerged as the world's largest city easily outstripping the largest that Europe could offer, London and Paris. Thus, when Japan re-opened its doors in the 1850s, there were more, larger and denser cities than ever before for Westerners to view. There were also many more people from the West to see them including, for the first time,