

HISTORICAL CITIES AND POST-MODERN ARCHITECTURE
The Rebirth of Machiya in Kyoto: From Moneyland to Loveland

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1. The Characteristics of Japanese Dwellings and the Meaning of Machiya

The historical development of dwellings in Japan is very different from that of other countries, and the special characteristics of Japanese dwellings are shaped by that difference. For example, during the Edo period (17th-19th centuries), the population of Tokyo was 1,300,000 at its high point, and all of the houses, without exception, were built of wood. Not one house was made of stone, nor one roof of ceramic tile. This exclusive use of wood is one characteristic of Japanese dwellings.

A second characteristic is flatness. The major part of the lives of people residing in dwellings was restricted to one floor. In this, there was no difference between rich or poor, high or low class. The few examples of the construction and use of a second floor include aristocrats' tea rooms, guest rooms at inns, quarters for officials and nobility, and storehouses.

A third characteristic is the high-floored structure of Japanese dwellings. Most of the interior of a dwelling is built up off the ground with airspace left underneath. When one steps up to that high floor, one must of course remove zori, wooden clogs, and shoes. Aside from maintaining the cleanliness of the interior, this is a remnant of the sacredness of dwellings in ancient Japan, and it reflects the class consciousness of later Japanese society.

Finally, a fourth characteristic: the dwellings of people in the city all open directly onto a public street, and the households on either side of a street form a community centered on that street. Setting aside the warrior families who built large residences and renters who lived in nagaya (multiple dwelling units lined up horizontally under one roof), the dwellings of most of the mid-sized business class in the city can be described in this way. As a result, lots were formed with narrow frontage on the street and great depth behind. In Kyoto, such lots are called "eels' bedrooms". The city was built, ordered, and has developed with eels' bedroom lots as the basic form. Machiya, the city dwellings built on these lots, are all made of wood and have only a single story. Yet despite these constraints, for hundreds of years they

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have influenced the development of large cities like Edo (Tokyo), Kyoto, and Osaka, each with its own particular culture.

2. The Case of Kyoto, the City of Machiya

But Japanese dwellings with the above characteristics have disappeared rapidly in the waves of the Industrial Revolution, westernization, and modernization after 1868 and in the destruction of World War II. Kyoto is one of the few cities where we can still see that traditional Japanese style today. This is because Kyoto has special Japanese industries like weaving and pottery which are housed in traditional dwellings, and because the city escaped destruction in the war.

But the shape of Kyoto is being transfigured by the redevelopment of the cities which has accompanied the high level of economic growth of the 1960's and 70's. So-called "modernization" is continuing. In the realm of architecture, the eels' bedrooms, or strip lots, are being bundled together into carpets on which giant boxes are placed. In the process, the shape of the city is changing from its former, traditional Japanese style to that of an ordinary modern city.

But there is also a movement to hold onto the strip style. This is partially a result of Kyoto people's strong consciousness of old, established shops, a consciousness that stems from the great number of small and mid-sized businesses in the city. Even if they know they can make a profit, some people will not sell a strip lot only to have it made into part of a carpet. Instead, flat machiya, which no longer suit the age of high economic growth, are remodeled into three to six stories, and the cereal box building makes its appearance. As a result, Kyoto is being transformed into a strange townscape in which three styles--giant box architecture, cereal box architecture, and countless traditional machiya that no one knows what to do with--are mixed.

There has been a new change in the shifting face of Kyoto in the 1980's. An architectural style we might call post-modern has intruded into the redevelopment of strip architecture. Lots remain eels' bedrooms, but what are erected on them are no longer cereal boxes. To stretch the point a bit, the new constructions might be compared to pieces of cake of various shapes. Cereal box architecture utilizes the total volume allowed by law, but it is

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dominated by the blandness of standardization and the ugliness that comes from constructing forms in literal accordance with the sunshine law. But cake architecture does not necessarily use the total volume allowed by law. Rather, it focuses on shape and color in space, with which it enlivens people's interest; embracing them with its many charms, it beckons people in. We might call this the appearance of a new method of business, one in which the competition is joined over the creation of interesting space as opposed to the full use of total volume. Because of this change, parts of Kyoto are coming to look like a bakery-show window.

3. The Rebirth of Machiya in Kyoto: From Moneyland to Loveland

What are we to make of Kyoto, where post-modern cake architecture takes its place alongside giant box architecture, cereal box architecture, and groups of machiya, the traditional town houses?

It is true that the townscape of Kyoto is losing its uniformity. But what is uniformity? And what does "the beauty of uniformity" mean?

In every place and time, attempts have been made through city planning to establish the city as a cosmos by giving it uniformity, and there have indeed been times when the city has functioned as one. But it is also true that the character of that cosmos is not absolute. The productivity of societies changes, the structures of authority and leadership change, and the philosophies which support societies change; when they do, the cosmos, too, changes greatly. At the borderline between old cosmos and new, there appears a kind of chaos. This, too, is inevitable.

In that case, what kind of new cosmos is the chaotic city of Kyoto heading toward?

People used to come to the city seeking work: the city was Moneyland. But if that is the only reason people gather in the city today, Kyoto should be wasting away. Kyoto's traditional industries are declining, and there are not many new industries to replace them; the shrinking tax income of the city is proof of this. The city tried to place a tourist tax on the temples in Kyoto, which are visited by 10,000,000 people a year, but it was unable to do anything against the strong opposition of the temples. Nevertheless, the population of Kyoto is growing, and the number of people who visit the city is

not decreasing.

What do people seek when they come to Kyoto? I think they come in search of love. Love--by love, I mean rich human relations that help one discover oneself, love that is not limited to lovers or husband and wife. In this broad sense, we can imagine love without restriction, as illustrated, perhaps, by the unconstrained relationships among gods and humans in the world of the Greek myths. The myths give us a glimpse of the ungoverned and free ways in which the earliest people must have loved.

But monotheism laid values such as race, culture, class, and wealth on top of love. In other words, belief in one god gave birth to permanent residence and agriculture, and to the system of monogamy as a support for those ways of life. It also produced the concepts of family, humankind, race, and nation. The city was originally a place where people could gather freely, like caravans at an oasis in the desert. But in a monotheistic context, the city was often subordinated to the nation. For example, the character of the city as a place for restraining workers has already been discussed widely.

In most developed countries, the character of the city changes in accordance with the advance of high technology. But today, technology is withdrawing into the shadows, and people are coming to the city seeking love, not work. The city is once again becoming a world of freedom, like the mountains, plains, rivers, and oceans were to people long ago.

Marvelous space as well as good drink and good music are necessary in order for people in the city to talk freely together of love. Just as good drink and music stimulate people to love, so, too, does marvelous space. Actually, there are many places like this in Kyoto: spaces woven by the mountains, rivers, and green of nature, spaces layered by history, and spaces in which a blend of many different cultures comes bubbling up as a new culture.

I see the cake architecture which stands on the strip lots of machiya, the traditional city dwellings, as the harbinger of Kyoto as Loveland.

SUMMARY

Kyoto is an old city with 1,000 years of history, but her shape is being transfigured by the redevelopment of the cities which has accompanied the high level economic growth of the 1960's and 70's. So-called "modernization" is continuing. In the realm of architecture, the long, narrow machiya lots (commonly called "eels' bedrooms", each lot is a strip of land) are being bundled together into carpets on which giant boxes are placed. In the process, the shape of the city is changing from its former, traditional Japanese style to that of an ordinary modern city.

But there is also a movement to hold onto the strip style. This is partially a result of Kyoto people's strong consciousness of old, established shops, a consciousness that stems from the great number of small and mid-sized businesses in the city. Even if they know they can make a profit, some people will not sell a strip lot only to have it made into a carpet lot. Instead, flat machiya, which no longer suit the age of high economic growth, are remodeled into three to six stories, and the cereal box building makes its appearance. As a result, Kyoto is being transformed into a strange townscape in which three styles--giant box architecture, cereal box architecture, and countless traditional machiya that no one knows what to do with--are mixed.

There has been a new change in the shifting face of Kyoto in the 1980's. An architectural style we might call post-modern has intruded into the redevelopment of strip architecture. Lots remain "eels' bedrooms", but what are erected on them are no longer cereal boxes. To stretch the point a bit, the new constructions might be compared to pieces of cake of various shapes. Cereal box architecture utilizes the total volume allowed by law, but it is dominated by the blandness of standardization and the ugliness that comes from constructing forms in literal accordance with the sunshine law. But cake architecture does not necessarily use the total volume allowed by law. Rather, it focuses on shape and color in space, with which it enlivens people's interest. With its many charms, it beckons people in. We might call this the appearance of a new method of business in which the competition is joined over the creation of interesting space as opposed to the full use of total volume. Because of this change, parts of the city of Kyoto are coming to look like a bakery show window.

What are we to make of the town of Kyoto in which post-modern cake architecture takes its place alongside giant box architecture, cereal box architecture, and groups of machiya, the traditional town houses?

Résumé

Kyoto, ville ancienne de 1000 ans d'histoire, s'est vue, elle aussi, métamorphosée par le redéveloppement des villes accompagnant la Période de Haute Croissance Economique des années 60-70. Et ce qu'on appelle "modernisation" continue... En ce qui concerne l'architecture, les terrains longs et étroits (terrains en bandes) des maisons citadines *machiya*, (communément appelées "lits d'anguille"), sont réunis en tapis, sur lesquels sont placées d'énormes boîtes. De ce fait, l'ancienne forme de style japonais traditionnel de la ville disparaît au profit de celle d'une ville moderne tout à fait ordinaire.

Mais il y a aussi un mouvement de persistance du "style en bandes". Ceci est dû au grand nombre de petits et moyens commerces autant qu'à la forte conscience, qu'ont les propriétaires de boutiques anciennes, d'une tradition à transmettre. Ainsi, même s'ils connaissent le profit à faire, ils refusent de vendre leur bande de terrain qui deviendrait un "morceau de tapis". Mais, la maison traditionnelle à un niveau ne répondant pas aux nouveaux besoins de la Période de Haute Croissance, on la transforme sur place en un petit bâtiment de 3 à 6 étages, en forme de lame de couteau. Et la ville se mue en un étrange spectacle, mélange de trois types d'architecture: boîtes gigantesques, bâtiments en lame de couteau et innombrables maisons traditionnelles dont personne ne sait quoi faire.

Pourtant, les années 80 ont vu apparaître une nouveauté dans cette situation urbaine de Kyôto. L'architecture dite "post-moderne" s'est introduite dans le redéveloppement de l'architecture en bande. Le terrain reste celui du "lit d'anguille" mais ce qu'on construit dessus n'a plus rien d'une simple "lame de couteau". On pourrait, en exagérant un peu, comparer ces nouvelles constructions à des tranches de gâteaux de formes diverses. L'architecture en lame de couteau respecte les lois et utilise au maximum le volume, mais elle est dominée par le manque de saveur de l'uniformité et la laideur de formes conçues exclusivement en fonction des règles sur le prospect et l'ensoleillement. Au contraire, l'architecture "tranches de gâteaux" n'utilise pas forcément l'intégralité du volume autorisé et s'attache plutôt à une recherche sur les formes et couleurs dans l'espace. Ainsi, elle attire la curiosité et l'intérêt des gens et les appelle en les enveloppant de ses charmes. On pourrait dire qu'il s'agit de l'entrée en scène d'un nouveau code de commerce jouant sur la création d'espaces intéressants en opposition à un code qui assurait l'utilisation "à plein" des volumes. Il en résulte qu'une partie de la ville de Kyôto tend à prendre l'apparence d'une vitrine de pâtisseries.

Finalement, que devons-nous penser de cette ville de Kyôto où prennent place côte à côte, l'architecture "tranches de gâteaux" appelée "post-moderne", l'architecture extra-fine en "lames de couteau", l'architecture de boîtes gigantesques et enfin les groupes de *machiya*, maisons citadines traditionnelles?