

How Does Japanese Cultural Principles Improve Japanese Human-centric Urban Development in Tokyo, Japan?

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Abstract: People grown up in their hometown will get used to the living environment, socio-economic atmosphere, and culture in their childhood, and still miss their hometown when they become adults, which is called topophilia. However, the current circumstances have seemed to be derailing from the bare-bone concept of the original craved-for human-centric designs and planning. In this article, we talk about how Japanese unique cultural principles, including harmony (“Wa”), order (“Kansei”), atheistic (“Wabi Sabi”), resilience, and pursue of excellence, guide Japanese urban environment and their socio-economic atmosphere, and further shape Japanese citizen’s topophilia for their hometown. These precious Japanese culture principles also encourage Japan’s urban development towards more and more sustainable and human-centric. This article uses the Tokyo as a case to establish a good image for other cities who wants to achieve the human centric urban development, it is also meaningful in exploring the relationship between human and city in Japan and inspire the governments to construct the city suitable for their citizens.

Keywords: human-centric urban development, urban design, Japanese culture, architecture, place.

1. Introduction

People always explore the environment around them, but the living environment when their childhood affects them more than the environment they grow up. People grown up in their hometown will get used to the living environment, socio-economic atmosphere, and culture in their childhood, and still miss their hometown when they become adults, which is called *topophilia* [1]. As an international metropolitan, Tokyo shape people’s spiritual attachment to their hometown by its unique socio-economic atmosphere and culture principles, encompassing optimal utility of public and private space, creating a simple and diverse lifestyle, revolving around the concept of ease and comfort. For example, people grown up in Tokyo tends to be attached to Tokyo’s urban environment: artificial intelligence within convenient stores, the highly accessible public transportation systems, and most uniquely, the efficient lifestyles that the compact city functions around. Despite economic blooms and falls, this city maintains its pose in a way that it stays true to its roots and integrates Japanese cultures and traditions into the considerations of developments.

However, the current circumstances have seemed to be derailing from the bare-bone concept of the original craved-for human-centric designs and planning. For instance, the growing desirability of high-end locations have cooked up prices of real-estate and housing situations in general, leveraging

countless families without the financial capabilities, causing a prolonged addition into the wealth gaps between each level. Another instance lies with the aging infrastructures within the city, which have also made buildings and areas limited to further utility and development, detracting away slightly the efficiency and hindering the area's overall livability with minor concerns on the aesthetics of the area and on specific sites. These urban development guidance against the living environment citizens familiar with, they are prone to incompact with the unfamiliar environment and recall the missing for their hometown.

The entirety of human-centric urbanization, summarized, is to prioritize citizens and their senses of belonging into this city through the aids of different infrastructures and additions onto the current foundations, thereby creating or improving one's attachments for the city. Lots of cities seemed to be deviating from it, and it is slowly shifting into a realm that is not domestic to the cultures and views many citizens are used to, being one of the many victims of the new generational trends and fads within industries such as architecture, fashion, communications and numerous other businesses and corporations.

Because of the overlooked trends of lots of cities' development as an urban city, cities in general should develop more in correlation with its culture principles that developed and matured into the current states, and to emphasize more on the characteristics of heritage from the older iterations of city, to preserve its identity while developing into a newer state that is able to keep up with the growing industries and sectors around us globally. Using Tokyo as an example, this article illustrates how to effectively integrate city's unique culture principles into its development.

2. Literature review

A lot of citizens explore their attachments to their city because it is a place where they flourish, whether it be in age, socially, or financially, that is, our dependence to the environment we grow used to [1]. With a new wave of definitions on what urban cities are, many geographers have stated that the current unified development models of cities can and will possibly initiate a sequence of deaths and destructions on the local cultures, where traditions and historical customs become invisible within the newer models of urbanized centers [2]. Cities start to face towards the evolution of a superficial metropolis that loses scents of its predecessors, those crucial to the development of the cities to the current states. This cultural death, or loss, in turn can hinder the pursuits of spiritual dependence by the residents, who were shaped by the local culture. In short, citizens might not feel comfort and welcomed by the newer and future city around them, being stripped away from the things that the citizens lived to accustomed to, thereby losing its human-centric nature in its spiritual connection between the city to the settled citizens and other people living in it [3].

However, this theory can sometimes prove to be too conservative. In the context of modern technological updates and renewed global requirements and baseline stats for fields such as the sustainability of a city and the emissions of buildings and areas, the homogeneous modes of urban evolution have become imperative to implement and conform to. Therefore, a method is needed to organically merge spiritual attachments with the pre-existing modes of one city with the modern strategies to demonstrate the city's unique cultural heritage. This study takes Japan as an example and a precedent to explore how cities within Japan such as Tokyo evolves to accommodate traditional cultural principles in the context of modern urban construction regulations and how it maintains its own cultural heritage while conforming to standardized guidelines [4].

3. Results

Japanese cultural principles significant roles in shaping human-centric urban development, reflecting a deep-rooted respect for harmony, nature, community, and well-being. These principles influence

the design, planning, and management of urban spaces in Japan, with a focus on creating environments that prioritize the needs and experiences of residents.

The first concept is harmony, or the term “Wa.” In Japan, it emphasizes the importance of balance and coherence in all aspects of the citizens' lives. In human-centric developments, this principle is reflected in the balanced design of urban spaces, ensuring a harmonious integration of infrastructure, green spaces, cultural landmarks, including the integrations of considerate residential areas and compounds. Though parks and utility-based areas do not receive facade treatments to appeal aesthetically to the newer generations or the trajectories of future architecture and metropolis designs, these spaces are usually constructed with a sense of beauty that lies within the simplicity of its functions, differentiating zones and the needs of the citizens.

Jane Jacobs, an urban theorist, championed the concept of New Urbanism [5]. This promotes walkable neighborhoods, mixed land uses, compact development, transit-oriented design, and sustainable practices to create more livable, vibrant, and socially connected communities. It draws together traditional town planning principles and aims to revitalize urban areas where it attempts to resurrect a sense of place to the citizens. Tokyo, for instance, acquires much of the traits elaborated by Mrs. Jacobs. Next to the residency of my family, there is a park organized into a 20-80 layout, where the playground and equipments for senior residents stay at the right side, and then a large open field filling up the rest on the left. Unlike the parks near Shinjuku, a popular area for younger generations, parks there differentiate in utility and aesthetics. Because of the large amount of senior residents, parks near the area of my family's residence consists of more laid-back activities and thus spaces prioritize more on utility, whereas spaces in Shinjuku consist more of trendy sculptures and photogenic scenes of a more urbanized space with more appealing aesthetics but a degrade in the space's functionality. The concept of harmony is integrated in both of these areas as they allow for different utility-based purposes that benefit different groups of people with a balance of suitable exterior treatments and utility treatments. Spaces such as parks and public areas also conform to the principle of harmony as they serve to extend relationships within communities, emphasizing cooperation, respect, and social cohesion. In human-centric developments, fostering a sense of community and belonging is crucial for creating inclusive and vibrant urban environments. These instances of spaces corresponding to the correct cultural clients make ease for transportations and considers the limited movability of different groups of residents with different age groups. These benefits not only range between the reduced transportations for the elderly and the specific targeted residency groups, but it also helps the city relief in areas such as sustainability, where reduced traffics and improved usages of public transportation could also foster a movement to greatly reduce emission rates and to maximize public resources.

The second cultural principle is order (“Kansei”). In an urban metropolis where overpopulation becomes a precedented and ubiquitous conflict to the infrastructures of the city, order has become an essential Principle within Japanese cultures and traditions within the functionalities of the city. Order, also known as the term “Kansei”, refers to the organizations of not only oneself, but also the city one lives in. One apparent hint of Kansei appears during queues for popular activities. Lining up manifests the organization's of an infrastructure in a way that eases the citizen's queues or how much each queue disturbs the surrounding activities and traveling pedestrians. A lot of instances, shops take in consideration queueing strategies to help create a compacted shape or pattern for which people should line up in. This again emphasizes the orderly principles that the Japanese infrastructures hold true to.

Kansei in Japanese culture is also closely associated with cleanliness, tidiness, and meticulous attention to detail. In human-centric developments, maintaining a clean and well-constructed urban environment is essential for promoting residents' health, comfort, and overall quality of life. Regular upkeep of public spaces, waste management systems, and infrastructure facilities reflects a commitment to creating pleasant and hygienic surroundings for residents, where this, again, becomes

a long-lasting tradition and impression of environments within Japan to tourists and locals. This can be found in instances such as cleaned roads, cleaned public amenities, restrooms and other spaces within the city and the suburbs. A popular concept that deals and eases with this principle of Kansei is the integration of minimalism, symmetry, and natural materials, to create visually appealing and harmonious urban landscapes while reducing the efforts needed to clean and organize spaces. As a result, minimalist-style buildings and interior designs throughout the city have made possible the strategy of cleansing each space in detail with great deal of efficiency and speed, helping maintain the orders of the city, reducing consumptions on materials such as water and therefore implicitly contributing to the sustainability of Japan's urban developments within areas such as Tokyo, where Kansei not only carries the orderliness of spaces into the current development models, but it also integrates the orderliness of an easy-to-tend future solution for residents of Japan.

The third cultural principle is about the unique Japanese aesthetic, which can be reflected through "Wabi Sabi." In the realities of us strive to create a city that is visually appealing to the masses, Japan has not only successfully created a harmonious blend in its starrng concept of practicality, but also successfully coats practicality within their unique senses of aesthetics and appreciations to beauty. This could be condensed into the term "Wabi Sabi", where Wabi Sabi embraces a harmonious blend of tradition and innovation, honoring the traditional celebrations on imperfect designs and errors while bringing forward this appreciation into a highlight, thus creating unique and timeless spaces reflecting Japan's rich cultural heritage and the creative spirits.

An instance of the benefits brought by Wabi Sabi can be exemplified by Yoyogi park in Tokyo. Yoyogi Park is known for its sprawling green spaces that incorporate existing natural elements, such as mature trees, undulating terrain, and natural water features. The park's design retains and enhances the natural character of the site, embracing the imperfections and irregularities of the landscape to create a harmonious and organic environment. The park includes rustic features such as weathered wooden structures, stone pathways, and natural rock formations that exhibit signs of age and wear. These elements add a sense of authenticity, history, and character to the park, embodying the wabi-sabi aesthetic of appreciating imperfections and embracing the beauty of weathering and patina. In addition, Yoyogi Park also celebrates the changing seasons through its landscaping, incorporating seasonal flora, such as cherry blossoms in spring and colorful foliage in autumn, to create dynamic and visually engaging landscapes throughout the year. The park's design reflects the transient beauty of nature and the impermanence of seasonal changes, aligning with the wabi-sabi principle of appreciating the fleeting moments of beauty and also appreciating the moments of imperfections during the period of time before and after the blossoms. This artistic integration into such a historical natural site not only bring benefits to the values of the park itself, and the values it brings to the residents in terms of emotional and mental relief, but it also creates a relief to heat islands created by the mass urbanization developed around this green area, where it balances out the temperature spikes created by these islands and the towering skyscrapers nearby, seamlessly merging the championed concepts of human-centric perceptions where residents feel the nature around them, observe on the natural scapes and the blossoming flowers, while experiencing the benefits spaces like the Yoyogi park brings to the city's developments and heritage with traditional cultures and principles.

The resilience in the blood of Japanese can also reflected in their urban environment and city management. Sitting on the tectonic plates where earthquake activities could spike uncontrollably, architecture, landscapes, and the resilience of Japan had to be taken into consideration as one of the priorities of design and utility. Examples of this could be traced back to year 706, when architectural temples such as Horyu-Ji implemented a structural beam that interlinks with the rest of the rooms within the temple in a way that allowed for trembling, which greatly reduced the impact of earthquakes to the building itself. Aesthetic features were then interlocked onto the existing frameworks of the temple, where it became a balance of safety, utility, and unique Japanese aesthetics.

The term for excellence, “Kaizen,” blends the need for safety with the appealing nature of spaces and landscapes within Japanese cities.

Finally, the pursuit of excellence in Japanese culture emphasizes a commitment to quality, precision, and attention to detail. In human-centric developments, this translates into a focus on creating high-quality products, services, and experiences that meet the needs and expectations of users. From well-crafted infrastructure to meticulously designed public spaces, the principle of excellence drives a culture of precision and quality assurance. This results in the creations of well-utilized spaces that do not create the best aesthetic results, but the excellence of craftsmanship, thoughtfulness, and logical reasoning behind the design process could be easily acknowledged through the observation of these simple yet complicated infrastructures. Creating a safe city that preserves the excellence of quality and its own distinct design language to different areas of design.

4. Conclusion

In summary, Japanese cultural principles play a pivotal role in shaping human-centric urban development by emphasizing harmony, order, appreciation of beauty, and excellence. The concept of harmony, known as “Wa,” underscores balance and coherence in urban design, integrating infrastructure, green spaces, and cultural landmarks to create harmonious environments that cater to residents' diverse needs. This principle is evident in the thoughtful layout of parks and residential areas, focusing on functionality over aesthetics while maintaining simplicity and beauty. Order, or “Kansei,” reflects the Japanese commitment to organization and cleanliness, essential for promoting residents' health and quality of life. This principle is seen in meticulous attention to detail, minimalism, and natural materials that not only create visually appealing urban landscapes but also facilitate efficient maintenance and cleanliness. The traditional view on Japanese beauty, or “Wabi Sabi”, encapsulates Japan's blend of tradition and innovation, celebrating imperfections and embracing the beauty of aged and weathered elements. This aesthetic is exemplified in spaces like Yoyogi Park, where natural features and seasonal changes are integrated to create authentic and dynamic environments that resonate with residents and visitors alike. The pursuit of excellence, or “Kaizen,” drives a culture of quality, precision, and attention to detail in Japanese urban development. From well-crafted infrastructure to meticulously designed public spaces, this principle ensures that urban environments not only function effectively but also showcase exceptional craftsmanship and thoughtful design.

Overall, these cultural principles not only shape urban landscapes in Japan but also contribute to creating inclusive, vibrant, and sustainable cities that prioritize residents' well-being and experiences while celebrating the country's rich cultural heritage and creative spirit, in short, a human-centric network amongst the bustling streets of this compact nation, this compact city. One important lesson to take away from the Japanese approaches to creating and sustaining a human-centric community is to preserve and to strip the community down to the bare bones, where the network of essentials has to be created with great deal of care first, with the aesthetic choices coming in later. It is also important to acknowledge the cultural principles that brought each city to the current phase, and not only acknowledging the preserved traditional landmarks, but also learning to celebrate the minor cultures and traditions the residents grew up with, to foster a community tailored for them, that is, the whole goal for a human-centric city.

This study explores how Tokyo has preserved itself as a city with a unique cultural heritage under the premise of sustainable development, known as a harmonious, ordered, beautiful, and resilient neighborhood city for the masses. This type of city manifests the integration of technology and culture, meeting people's needs for both material and spiritual aspects in urban settings while respecting their attachment to different cultures and principles. Consequently, this consideration enhances resident satisfaction. Moreover, this serves as a reminder for urban designers to incorporate humanistic care

in urban design, striving to achieve the mutual interlinkage of innovative effects and spiritual attachments in the city to its roots and traditions.

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