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**Christoph Brumann and Evelyn Schulz (Eds.). Urban Spaces in Japan, Cultural and Social perspectives. London and New York, Routledge, 2012.**

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**Christoph Brumann and Evelyn Schulz (Eds.). *Urban Spaces in Japan, Cultural and Social perspectives*. London and New York, Routledge, 2012.**

The book *Urban Spaces in Japan* by Routledge is a collection of several essays and case studies from a broad range of disciplines related to the design and planning of space in Japan. The case studies focus on the urban space, public space, and body space in Japan. Many researchers have studied the concept of urban space globally. Even though urban studies and perceptions have been influenced by the contemporary globalized world, space in Japan has held its own connotations and particularities that make its perception of space different from that of other cultures.

Taking on a very ambitious proposal, this book demonstrates the different conflicts related to the control of urban space in Japan. The different authors of the book's chapters present social studies and pragmatic cases on historical and contemporary issues related to urban space in Japan. This book brings to mind personal anecdotes for this reviewer, having lived in Japan for seven years and also provides for the lay reader clarifications of many important facts about the Japanese urban culture. Researchers of this region will find the book very useful with its explanation of the different vicissitudes, challenges, and cultural aspects related to the appropriation of urban spaces in specific case studies of the country.

The first chapter serves as an introduction to the book. Chapter two references the development of urban Japan and the importance of the "shi" (city) in the development of the Japanese economy. This section explains the difference between two periods, the first, from 1950 to 1990, when urban growth went hand in hand with an economic boom and the second, from 1990 to the present, during which the economy has declined and the cities have shrunk. The author believes that urban shrinkage is not necessarily a bad thing and that it can, in fact, have a rather positive effect on the nation's urban future. For example, he says, a shrinking city offers future opportunities such as reduced traffic, more space, and less pollution. Chapter three is a historical essay about the appropriation of public space in the Japanese occupied Manchuria. This essay provides readers with an understanding of the urban achievements of Japan as the real power behind the puppet state of Manshûkoku. Furthermore, the relation of those achievements to East Asia's new modernity and the urban growth of modern Japan are examined.

Chapter four is related to the changes in urban Kyoto. The author examines the dichotomy between the traditional and the modern city as a consequence of new, stricter building codes in Japan. The subsequent chapter expresses an appreciation for public space in accordance with a thoughtful understanding of Japanese culture (as opposed to from an international or "outsider" point of view). In contrast, chapter six, provides an analysis of citizen participation in urban development of Japan as it compares to the participation of citizens in Germany. Although both countries have similarities related to planning, regulations, and citizen participation, urban planning in Japan is more centralized than it is in Germany, which has stricter regulations with respect to building height, type, etc. In general, the urban systems in both Japan and Germany offer citizens the opportunity to comment on urban issues but not to decide their ultimate outcomes.

Chapter seven analyzes the importance of neighborhood associations in pre-war Tokyo. The significance of these associations is related to the way in which neighborhood inhabitants perceive and appropriate urban spaces. The relatively high level of participation of Japanese citizens in neighborhood associations in the pre-war period is not a product of Japanese urban traditions but mostly of the local traditions of keeping harmonious social relations and providing

mutual help among inhabitants. Japan has a “long and vital tradition of local self-help and strong neighborhoods (Kurata, 2000). However, many urban residents form part of an indifferent community, in which strong communal relations among neighbors through participation in communal activities are absent.

Chapter eight addresses the conservation and preservation of the existing and historical urban landscape. In most European cities, the government endorses and promotes preservation, while in most Asian countries, priority is placed upon development. This essay highlights the few examples of urban spaces that have been conserved in Tokyo, as the city has only a few structures of historical significance, most of the buildings being relatively new. The reason for this may be that for the Japanese authorities, history does not hold as important a place in Tokyo as it does in other historical cities such as Kyoto and Nara. The author believes that conservation efforts in Japan depend on civil society groups, which have been facing considerable difficulties due to lack of government support.

Chapter nine is an empirical analysis of how space is gendered and how men and women in Japan appropriate space differently. In a future stage, this research could be developed very successfully, the author asserts, “The genderization of spaces is effected through the organization of perceptions, in particular of glances and the body techniques corresponding to them” (Löw, 2006). The analysis explains the nonverbal behavior of users inside an underground station, in accordance with gender. For example, women tend to walk and stand erect with their arms kept close to the body and knees together. In contrast, men walk with full movement of their bodies and are more relaxed when standing. The way that each gender approaches space is very different and, the author concludes, males have a “right of place” most of the time. The presented analysis of this chapter is especially noteworthy because it is an empirical study that may require strict research methods.

Walking the city is the basis of chapter ten. The author takes an interesting approach to the city walker or *flâneur* and the appropriation of urban space in Japan through narrative. This study shows authors such as Nagai Kafû, who describes his walks in Tokyo as dichotomies between Edo areas<sup>1</sup> and modern neighborhoods. The author believes in the importance of the *flâneur* and how city walkers can potentially help in the future design of space in Japanese cities. The last chapter is a vision of the future of urban Japan based on an imminent population decline and shrinking cities. The author believes population decline can lead to livable cities that will attract and retain people. One argument put forward in this essay is on the negative impact of a “construction state,” which wasted money on unnecessary projects that damage the environment. However, this construction system demonstrates the potential of transformation into a positive element for the country.

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<sup>1</sup> Edo is the name of Tokyo before 1868 when it was already the world’s biggest city. Nowadays, in the old traditional neighborhoods of Tokyo, it is possible to imagine the Japanese culture of the Edo times.

Overall, the book presents an important contribution to the understanding of certain elements of the urban space in Japan. Some chapters require a stronger consideration of the values of Japanese culture in order to avoid inconsistencies or misconceptions. A stronger interpretation of the importance of Japanese culture and idiosyncrasy, for example, could substantiate the thesis presented by the authors. Unfortunately, the illustrations are not of the best quality and the book lacks a final concluding chapter in which the ideas and dilemmas of the preceding chapters could be summarized and compared. While the chapters differ in their disciplines, a final conclusion would allow the lecturers to grasp a better comprehension of the themes discussed.

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