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Gideon S. Golany Koide, Keisuke Hanaki, eds. Osamu. *Japanese Urban Environment.* New York: Pergamon, 1998. xlvii + 367 pp. $80.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-08-043359-2.

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As has often been noted, there is a dearth of books on Japanese urban planning and urban environments, so any addition to the literature is very welcome. Golany, Hanaki, and Koide have thus made a real contribution to the English language literature on Japanese cities with the publication of this book. Along with introductory texts by Golany, the book consists of translations of nineteen papers originally written in Japanese specifically for the book by Japanese academics and practitioners in the fields of urban design, planning, and engineering. In presenting a large number of original papers by prominent Japanese urbanists in excellent English translations, the book represents a resource for scholars interested in Japanese cities.

The book interprets the concept of urban environment broadly and is divided into four parts: 1) Social, Cultural and Physical Determinants of the Japanese Urban Environment, 2) Japanese Urban Environment and Human Comfort, 3) Infrastructure of the Japanese Cityscape, and 4) Urban Planning and Design: The Present and Future in Japan. Golany introduces the book and also provides a brief introduction to each section as well as a conclusion.

Although there are several good papers in the book, and there is no question that it is a useful addition to a scant literature, there are several serious flaws. The most important are the weakness of Golany's own contribution and that, notwithstanding the title, the reader is able to learn relatively little about Japanese urban environments from reading the volume. A secondary point is the poor bibliographical documentation. I discuss both points below.

Quite possibly the most important reason that the literature on Japanese urban environments and planning is relatively weak is that the endeavor itself is fraught with pitfalls. The very reasons that make Japan such an interesting case for urban or other comparative research–that it is the only developed country that does not share the Western cultural and philosophical tradition, was never colonised, and has a rich non-Western tradition of land law and policy–make such research much more difficult than comparisons between Western countries. Masser (1986), for example, has brought together studies examining the difficulties inherent in comparative urban research. In particular, it is easy to fall into the trap of explaining the special characteristics of Japan as being the product of Japanese culture. There are three major problems with this approach. First, invoking "culture" as an independent variable amounts to circular reasoning, saying in effect that "they are that way because that is the way they are." Second, the resort to such "cultural" explanations is particularly problematic in application to the Japanese case because of the recent history of the use and misuse of Nihonjinron (theories of Japanese uniqueness) as examined by Sugimoto and Mouer (1989). Third, as noted by Eccleston (1989, Chapter One), in all studies of the "other" there is a tendency to fall back on idealised or stereotypical views of one's own country as the basis of comparison.

Unfortunately, Golany appears to have fallen into all these traps. His introductions depend heavily on simplistic generalisations about the nature of Japanese society and culture, and similar generalisations about the West. For example, he suggests that this book

highlights the cultural evolution, the social cohesiveness, and the solidarity of the average Japanese person for their institutions as the basis for the quality of urban life. Most Japanese cities are characterised by low crime, safety at night and daytime, a collaborative and team-oriented society, with a deep interest in art and beauty, pride, and last but not least, obedience and sincere respect of the individual for local government as a trusted public enterprise. (p. xxxv)

Golany also asserts that "the Japanese have not

lost their ancestors' sensitivity toward the natural and socio-urban environment to the extent Westerners have. This Japanese attitude was primarily presented in the conservation of the physical setting of the traditional Japanese urban neighbourhood" (p. xxxix). Problematic is that Golany's interpretation of the significance of the Japanese case relies heavily on such broad generalisations as these, without reference to any literature or data which might support them, nor does he indicate any knowledge of other studies of Japanese society, politics, or urbanism.

Central to Golany's thesis is the unsubstantiated argument that while the outward form of the city may have changed dramatically–referring to Japan's rapid urban and economic growth, the introduction of western building forms and materials, and presumably also the widespread destruction of the built heritage of Japanese cities by war and redevelopment–these changes have not significantly affected Japanese cities because "the foremost characteristic of the Japanese city is the invisible city which lies hidden within the Japanese who carry it with them on a daily basis. In short, the invisible part of the Japanese city consists of the culture, individual and collective dignity, social values, norms of behaviour, individual attitude toward governments, gender interactions, the integrative community, family and individual norms as well as the complexity of viewing art as representative of culture and nature" (p. xxxix). Golany argues that "the introduction of Western urban forms and architecture have certainly influenced the physical part of the Japanese urban environment, but it has far less influenced the invisible city of Japan and it is this retention which characterises the Japanese urbanscape today" (p. xl). Therefore he concludes that "major changes did not take place on the socio-cultural level which makes the Japanese city different from those in the west" (p. xli). Critical here is that Golany produces no evidence to support such sweeping claims. Indeed, it is hard to imagine any evidence which could either support or deny his conclusions, which would, in the normal course of social science research, cast doubt on their validity.

Golany repeatedly refers to the safety and cleanliness of Japanese cities as a major contrast with "Western cities." There is no doubt that the safety of Japanese cities is a wonderful thing; however his contrast with *all* Western cities is a gross oversimplification. While most Japanese cities do sit in sharp contrast to many American cities, Golany's point would be better served if he more cautiously referred to "some cities in the United States." Many European, Canadian, and Australian cities are no less safe than their counterparts in Japan, and cities like Toronto, Zurich, or Stockholm are possibly cleaner than most Japanese cities.

Golany also incautiously suggests that because so few of the authors include bibliographic references, "we introduced a comprehensive English bibliography on the Japanese environment [in this book]" (p. xxxv). Comprehensive is a big word, and although the bibliography itself claims only to include works from the 1990s, there are a number of surprising omissions. Mentioning only a few of the full-length books most relevant to the subject, and ignoring the large literature in refereed journals, it is surprising they did not include Barret and Therivel's *Environmental Policy and Impact Assessment in Japan* (1991), Ui's *Industrial Pollution in Japan* (1992), Haley and Yamamura's *Land Issues in Japan, A Policy Failure?* (1992), Noguchi and Poterba's *Housing Markets in the United States and Japan* (1994), Woodal's *Japan Under Construction: Corruption, Politics and Public Works* (1996), or Karan and Stapleton's *The Japanese City* (1997).

The papers by Japanese authors–the declared purpose for developing the project–are uneven in quality. There are several interesting contributions, particularly Hiroshi Mimura's essay, "Urban Conservation and Landscape Management: The Kyoto Case," which has an interesting discussion of traditional forms of Machiya development, and Yasuo Masai's "The Human Environments of Tokyo: Past, Present and Future, A Spatial Approach," which is also a good overview of the historical development and growth of Tokyo. In addition is the essay by Osamu Koide and Toshio Oyama, "Social Safety and Security through Urban Design," which provides a review of issues of crime and disaster prevention in Japan. The second section of the book, on the urban environment, provides several good examples of the kinds of the excellent, detailed empirical work that one so often finds in Japanese academic urban planning journals. Several essays deal with urban heat islands (Saitoh), urban forms to encourage cooling sea breezes (Katayama), building design to aid "thermal comfort" in cities (Kimura), the changing waterfront environment of Tokyo (Takahashi), and engineering approaches to efficient energy use in Japanese cities, particularly the use of low grade heat sources (Hanaki and Ichinose). All of these essays are interesting, but as a whole fail to provide the reader with a sense of what the current environmental issues of Japanese cities may be, or of the history of urban environmental problems in Japan. That is, the papers offer detailed studies of particular issues, particularly thermal issues, but fail to provide much in the way of context of

urban environmental issues in Japan.

That omission is not corrected by Golany's introduction, which briefly reviews the chapters and wraps up with the recommendation that "to synthesise the discussion of Part 2, the human quest for an ever increasing standard of living in modern times with urban dwellers in the national majority, will demand more and more urban outdoor comfort to be increased along with the thermal macro and microperformance in the cities." Golany further suggests that "here, the analysis offered by the five writers will be meaningful if it will be translated into effective tools and guidelines for urban designers, architects, policy makers, and other influential leaders, when an urban design master plan is in preparation" (p. 98). Although it is true that many Japanese cities become much too hot in the summer, just about anyone who has studied Japanese cities could come up with a long list of more urgent environmental issues than their "thermal performance," from continuing cramped and expensive housing, severe shortages of basic public goods such as local roads, sidewalks, parks and sewerage, to the high and increasing levels of invisible pollutants such as dioxins and furans to badly engineered and regulated garbage incineration plants. These basic issues are central to the urban environment, and the quality of life of urban residents, particularly of an aging society, yet they are not addressed here. Part 2 is however, the only section to address directly the "urban environment" in the narrow sense of the term.

Part 3, "Infrastructure of the Japanese Cityscape," does not rectify this shortcoming. The two chapters on subway development (Iwai) and urban transportation (Asano) are informative pieces on Japanese transport planning and systems, which are without doubt among the best in the world. The other two chapters, "Tokyo's Infrastructure, Present and Future" (Ojima) and "ÑInfrastructure Planning to Upgrade Social Quality of Life in Regional Districts" (Takabu et al), and particularly Ojima's suggestion for a deep-underground network of 312,088 meters (!) of combined garbage, sewage, electric, steam, oil distribution, communications and emergency shelter tunnels within the 23 ward area of Tokyo, are visionary engineering proposals for large scale infrastructure projects. Just the sort of grandiose, expensive, bubble economy style public works projects that many scholars would argue that Japanese cities desperately need to avoid.

Part 4 is worse. With the exception of the final chapter, "Nodal System Planning for a Medium-size City" (Watanabe), Part 4 is primarily a vehicle for the display of the futuristic urban engineering proposals of some of the largest Japanese engineering firms: Kajima Corp., Taisei Corp., Takenaka Corp., and Obayashi Corp. Written by employees of those firms, the four chapters unsurprisingly present an uncritical appraisal of the megaproject approach to urban planning. Worth singling out is the "Tokyo Laputa Plan" of Obayashi Corp (pp. 325-328) for a "platform city" for central Tokyo composed of many modules measuring 1km by 1km. Each designed to house 58,000 workers and 40,000 residents, the platforms would feature a green park-like environment on top, with lakes, paths, some detached housing in a park, tall towers in one corner for most of the housing, and seven levels under the platform for "factories, warehouses, recycling plants, sewage treatment plants and other facilities which would be automated and require a minimum of human intervention" (p. 326). This proposal thus firmly falls into the approaches to metropolitan redevelopment thoroughly discredited by the planning experience of the last forty years–such as the Corbusian tradition of the "Plan Voisin" for Paris, or the MARS Plan for London. Amongst other problems, this approach would be almost certain to eliminate some of the very best aspects of Japanese cities; their vitality, their strong neighbourhood-based communities, their heterogeneity, and their fine-grained mixture of differing land uses.

This book is thus particularly valuable in that it faithfully reproduces one important stream in Japanese urban planning thinking, the engineering/technocratic approach. The favoured approaches to solving Japanese urban problems depicted in the book have a strong flavour of late 1980s hubris and damn-the-cost approach to building public infrastructure, with an emphasis on vast engineering projects that have little relationship to existing urban issues or built form, or to the people who would have to live in the cities created, and who would ultimately pay for their construction.

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