

Labyrinth of Pathways

By Paul R. Sorensen

I lived in the Museum District in Philadelphia prior to coming to Tokyo. For several years I walked 30 minutes from my apartment to the office, and being city-bound for the weekend without a car I often explored Center City. In addition to diversion and recreation, my walks provided me with many examples of how Philadelphia is a city that is usable and, above all, used. I would not say that everyday life or the physical form of Philadelphia is ideal or contains the essence of urbanism to which Tokyo should correspond, but some aspects of Philadelphia throw light on Tokyo.

In Philadelphia the north-south streets are numbered and the east-west streets are named after trees. After I had learned the sequence of trees I never had any problem finding my way around. Knowing the way was not based on experience gathered in previous walks, but was inherent in the very structure of the street grid. The properties of the grid made no one path better, though I did have preferred paths to get to work or to wander through the mixture of colonial era historic districts, public gardens, endless

rows of 19th century houses, and the modern downtown.

What has confounded me most in Tokyo is not the language barrier but the labyrinth of pathways: networks of streets, rail and subway lines, and the catcomb corridors of the subway stations.

In English-language writings Tokyo is portrayed as a conurbation of villages, essentially carrying forward traditional ways of life. The disparities, vagaries and eclecticism of modern life are said to be bound by traditional areas. Yet many see a threat to tradition-oriented life in the rapid development of Tokyo.

I recognize in Tokyo an order that comes from repetitious work rather than efficient labor. All over the city there are sites with signs of this work; housework, gardening, building, crafting, selling. I am surprised that the frenetic building has not organized individuals into community groups over issues and policies of development and preservation, and over the banal monotonous accumulation of architectural varieties.

In Philadelphia, as in other cities in the U.S., preservation movements have

started as a community reaction against policies which single-mindedly promoted growth. The city government and many businesses now recognize the economic importance of tourism and market Philadelphia's history to attract visitors. The focus of preservation has shifted from saving what is noteworthy or appropriate to today's needs, to what is marketable. Current buildings tend to conform in style and image to these pseudo-sensibilities.

Slogans like "Philadelphia: City of Freedom," or "Tokyo: My Hometown" cannot build cities, nor will ready-made phrases like "contextual urbanism" or "ecological urbanism" solve development problems. Fictionalizing the past will not relate a community to its surroundings, nor will the phantasmagoria of technology make the relation obsolete. We need to remember a Brechtian maxim: do not build on the good old days, but on the bad new ones. ■

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In the Capital's Shadow

By Mike Meier

Kansai, with its ancient tradition of having been Japan's center for many centuries, has never really bowed to Tokyo's dominant position. It must often be wondered why foreign enterprises think first of Tokyo when it comes to Japan.

Kansai's economy is almost as large as Canada's, or about double that of the Netherlands. Of course, Tokyo has long been the administrative center and thus also became the economic center of Japan. But considering Kansai's importance as an economic factor, it seems that it has not been given adequate consideration in recent decades. Moreover, Tokyo's strength may at times appear as its weakness.

The concentration in Tokyo implies a certain vulnerability in the sense that a large part of Japan's vitality is concentrated there. This does not so much refer to the danger of a major earthquake, but

rather to the disproportionate development of the entire country. Furthermore, decentralization of power also affects "control." If the decision-making power is concentrated in just one center, other parts of the country are at a disadvantage both politically and economically.

As the number of businesses in Tokyo increases, the possibilities for developing new enterprises decrease by the same amount. The most obvious result of this ongoing process is the skyrocketing of rent and real estate prices. These prices have reached a level where they constitute an undue burden for investors and may render it difficult or even unprofitable for foreign businesses to enter the Japanese market. Bearing in mind that the increasing density of businesses further limits opportunities, this process may literally "squeeze" businesses out of Tokyo.

The choking concentration in Tokyo has a considerable impact on corporate structures. A large part of Tokyo's business corporations are considering moving all or part of their head offices out of Tokyo, as a recent survey of the Federation of Economic Organizations (Keidanren) set out. Tokyo's businesses often face a limit to their expansion, since they cannot find adequate and affordable office space or land for new construction. In turn, in Kansai there is still space for expansion, both for offices and business.

Considering the size of its economy, it is surprising that Kansai has been in Tokyo's shadow for so long. ■

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