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Machi

Neighbourhood and Small Town—The Foundation for Urban Transformation in Japan

Carola Hein

In 1854, American navy ships under Commodore Matthew Perry appeared off the shores of Japan and pressured the formerly secluded nation into accepting a treaty that included opening some ports to American ships and the beginning of trading (Reischauer and Craig 1989).

With this opening to outside influences, Japanese professionals began to study, among other subjects, modernizing European and American cities in search of models to implement at home (Hein and Ishida 1998). When they applied new principles, Japanese practitioners tweaked the original ideas to make them fit their own changing cultural backgrounds, local needs, experiences, and practice. One element in their particular reading of foreign form was and continues to be their understanding of urban space in terms of neighbourhoods and small towns, both of which are called machi in Japanese. The word itself captures themes in national and local identity and different perspectives on urban living, density, and transportation, and evokes—at least in some of its meanings—specific socioeconomic structures and urban development. As machi appears to be a foundation of Japanese urban thought, a closer look at the term and its multiple meanings may well be useful to foreign observers and scholars interested in Japanese planning, urban form, and thought.

In the early years of contact with Japan, foreigners repeatedly criticized modernizing Japanese cities and planners for the apparent discontinuity of urban space and lack of planning principles (Taut [1937] 1958). Western scholarly interest in the Japanese city and comparative studies grew in the 1960s with the translation into English of Japanese books. Of particular importance among these were the works of the sociologist Yazaki Takeo, who, while intent on comparison and classification, highlighted the need to keep in mind distinct patterns of change and continuity (Yazaki 1963 and 1968).

By the 1970s, Western scholarly discussion saw a number of publications that celebrated a unique Japanese urban form—particularly visible in the capital, Tokyo—based on continuities between the traditional and the modern city (Befu 1993; Berque 1984, 1994 and 1999). This shift during the past three decades, from criticizing the city to celebrating it, is visible in the changing metaphors that Japanese and foreigners have deployed in urban projects, architecture, and publications to describe and ‘re-script’ Tokyo: as the British geographer Paul Waley puts it, in their views, Tokyo has gone ‘from ugly duckling to cool cat.’ (Waley 2006). The ‘most persistent cluster of metaphors,’ Waley says, is the theme of ‘Tokyo (...) as a city of villages,’ or ‘Tokyo as something smaller than the sum of its parts.’ (Waley 2006 and Smith 2006). Indeed, as the American historian of Japan, Henry Smith has pointed out, the village metaphor has long been a theme in foreign writings about the city (Smith 2006).
The notion of a metropolis as a cluster of villages is not new or limited to Japanese cities. During the past century, visitors and researchers have described many cities, including Berlin, London, Los Angeles, Toronto, and even New York as composed of unique units. In 1929, the American planner Clarence Arthur Perry stated that 'every great city is a conglomeration of small communities. For example, Manhattan—New York’s oldest borough—contains sections like Chelsea, Kip’s Bay and Yorkville.’ (Perry [1929] 1974). It is thus not surprising that the distinctive patchwork character of small and imaginatively used units in Japanese cities has captured the imagination of foreign practitioners. During the past three decades, these practitioners have looked to Japanese approaches for ideas about designing increasingly chaotic, albeit comprehensively planned, European, American, and Australian cities; they are intrigued by local initiatives that allow parts of the city to change flexibly according to different rhythms and varying principles (Shelton 1999).

In particular, the concepts of the neighbourhood (machi) and community building (machizukuri) have evolved into a central concern for contemporary Japanese and foreign researchers and practitioners of urban and built form, as well as for those interested in social organisation (Fiévé and Waley 2003; Karan and Stapleton 1998; Sorensen 2002; Sorensen and Funck 2007). In Neighborhood Tokyo, the American anthropologist Theodore Bestor points out that ‘Tokyo neighborhoods are geographically compact and spatially discrete, yet at times almost invisible to the casual observer. Socially they are well organized and cohesive, each containing a few hundred to a few thousand inhabitants.’ (Bestor 1989). Inhabitants generally refer to the machi as a place of a particular lifestyle and a social community. The Japanese idea of neighbourhood offers identity to its citizen to a larger extent than does the overall design of the city—much in contrast to the European concept of urban identity. Longstanding social practices, such as festivals (matsuri), help bring the community together at regular intervals in preparation and celebration and temporarily transform the existing urban spaces (Ashkenazi 1987; Kumagai 1996; Moriarty1972; Sadler 1969, 1970 and 1975). In form and function, these urban neighbourhoods are heterogeneous, a reality that perhaps finds a source in land ownership patterns and urban laws. For example, there are neighbourhoods in which a large landowner leases part of the land to individuals, who build both homes and rental apartments. Neighbourhoods can thus host a diverse group of owners, leasers, and renters, all of whom have rights (for example) in the case of an urban renewal project.

If we abstract design and planning concepts, these traditional multifunctional Japanese neighbourhoods provide a life-environment, with inspiring features in regard to sustainability, liveability, and community planning (Sorensen and Funck 2007). Tokyo, for example, is an easy-to-live-in metropolitan area of about 12.5 million inhabitants (as of 2005) inside its administrative boundaries, totalling about 35 million in the continuously built-up area. It is composed of a multitude of high-density, multifunctional neighbourhoods that offer a mixture of different residential types, from private houses to small apartments, integrating different social groups. Following an investigation of historic and contemporary meanings of machi, and its particular spatial and socioeconomic forms, this text argues that the Japanese tradition of machi has influenced the ways in which modernizing Japan picked up foreign concepts through the nineteenth and particularly in the twentieth century. It is crucial for those looking at Japanese neighbourhood organisation, city life, and urban form today to understand machi as a key concept in their analysis of Japanese urban form and function.

**Machi as neighbourhood**

The term machi can be used to describe units inside a Japanese city, even various and often very diverse ones (Ishida 1996). Thus, the term *shita-machi* describes the low-lying and usually working-class areas of Tokyo and other cities as distinct from the *yamanote* areas, the wealthier highlands (Ishida 1996 and 2002; Hein and Ishida 1997; Pelletier 1994). The map of the city
of Edo (the name of Tokyo before the Meiji restoration), home to the shogun and namesake of the Edo period, also highlights the socio-spatial division of the city into various units, de facto small towns, which were under the control of the military class, temples and shrines, or the townsmen, each with their own regulatory and even police powers [FIG. 1].

Monofunctional districts for samurai and their retainers or for merchants, but also the geisha district (for example, Kazue-machi, Kanazawa) or a shopping district, can be called machi (with the Chinese character 町 sometimes pronounced chō). Craft communities originally settled into residential areas according to specialties, such as blacksmiths (kajiya-machi), dyers (konya-machi), or carpenters (daikuchō) (Yazaki 1968). Neighbourhoods have taken different forms over time, with streets as boundaries between them. However, some machi called ryōgawa-chō were centred on the street and included buildings on both sides. These were typical for Kyoto and visible in the street plan of Edo in the seventeenth century, as the Japanese architectural and urban historian Tamai Tetsuo has shown (Tamai 1986). Geographic features, such as slopes or valleys, can shape the spatial dimensions of machi and building lots, as the architectural historian Jinnai Hidenobu shows in an analysis of neighbourhoods and the residences of feudal lords (daimyō) in Tokyo (Jinnai 1995).

Thus, the form, size, and definition of urban machi have varied over the centuries. Different social classes—samurai (the military nobility), temple folks, and commoners—occupied distinct areas, but their governance structure was similar. In Edo, and similarly in other cities, each class was governed separately: by a city magistrate (machi bugyō) for the commoner areas (machi-chi), by a temple magistrate (jisha-bugyō) for the temple areas (jisha-chi), and directly by central authority (Bakufu) or local rulers (daimyō) for the samurai areas (buke-chi) (Sorensen 2002). As a result, a large urban area, such as Edo, was ruled in bits and pieces by various authorities with certain degrees of local authority, but there was no single metropolitan government (McClain and Wakita 1999; Sorensen 2002). Today, machi continue to be important administrative and planning units (Iyori 1994). The term still has multiple meanings in the Japanese city: it can be used to indicate a district that tries to revive the feel of an earlier era, such as Showa no machi; an urban unit of the postal system; or a residential area centred on a shopping street.

Although the term and urban form of machi have a longstanding history and actuality, the Japanese city’s postmodern and post-occidental order introduced a break with the past, as the French geographer Augustin Berque has argued. And as Bestor has also pointed out, there are no continuous links between contemporary urban neighbourhoods and preexisting villages and their lifestyles; today’s machi are not simply administrative units or the expression of bygone social structures and lifestyles (Berque 1994; Bestor 1989).
Nonetheless, the concept of neighbourhood activity underlying the idea of machi has roots in earlier forms and continues to flourish today. The formal division of the city into units, for example, was partly derived from traditional China, where cities were divided into sections with strict social hierarchies and control structures (Yazaki 1968). Yazaki, writing about medieval Kyoto, calls these subdivisions ‘towns’ and notes the importance of Kyoto local organisations: ‘All subdivisions of Kyoto thus developed as towns. One block surrounded by larger streets consisted of five or six chō (townships), and several of such chō units formed oya machi, or larger townships. The townspeople, machishū, were mainly merchants and their helpers, craftsmen and some deposed nobility. Money-lenders and sake brewers generally held dominant positions in the management of town affairs and security, which, in any case, the townspeople managed themselves. The townships were organized into larger autonomous bodies, machigumi, which, again were brought into even larger unions of the Kamikyō, Nakakyō, and Shimkyō (upper, middle, and lower sections of Kyoto) (Yazaki 1968).

Special neighbourhood organisations, composed of local citizens (mostly landowners and merchants), continue to administer many neighbourhoods in Japan, which is to say that they are responsible for organising neighbourhood events and other activities, as well as establishing, for example, rules for waste disposal (Nawata 1994 and 1997). They have long been the primary partners of local government. Even today, the local government may ask local institutions, such as traditional self-governing neighbourhood organisations, the chōnaikai, for advice before deciding on controversial projects such as the construction of a new street or the implementation of urban renewal projects; it may request the chōnaikai to find out about the needs and ideas of the inhabitants so as to be able to organise emergency services or to preempt opposition movements. Traditional neighbourhood groups also head the organisation of festivals. Although recent years have seen a concerning decline in the numbers of participating members and their relevance to community life, the practice of civic activity is still alive, and the growth of new local groups gives hope for the continued vitality of the neighbourhood. These neighbourhood organisations and other local groups reappear in the analysis by the German anthropologist Christoph Brumann of the conflict over the 1996 proposal by the Kyoto mayor to build a copy of the Parisian Pont des Arts footbridge over the Kamogawa River (Brumann 2006).

While such associations are based in the neighbourhood and build on strong traditions of local self-governance and self-management, they are also part of strong vertical hierarchies, from neighbourhood to district, ward, and prefecture, as the Canadian geographer André Sorensen has demonstrated (Sorensen 2002 and 2007). Sorensen convincingly argues, their structure can funnel demands and protests from citizens as well as top-down directives and cooperation from above. The close relationship between chōnaikai and established institutions throughout Japan contributed to the rise of new and diverse social, political, and design processes based in small areas rather than the larger scales of the entire city or region, referred to since the 1960s as machizukuri (literally, ‘making a neighbourhood’ or ‘making a community’). Machizukuri generally aims at improving liveability, management of ‘shared spaces’ as Sorensen calls them, and urban form (Sorensen 2007; Watanabe 1997, 1999, 2006, 2007; Evans 2002; Hein 2001; Hein and Pelletier 2006; Hohn 2000; Sorensen and Funck 2007; Vogt 2001). Such movements have made an appearance all over Japan during the past few decades, and local administrations have started integrating their activities into their frameworks.

It is important to point out that these readings of machizukuri rely on the perception of urban units as small towns and as such build on traditional elements of urban form.

Machi as small town

The term machi thus refers to an urban unit inside a city but also to a small town. Japan traditionally has had a large network of small towns fulfilling different purposes (Kornhauser 1976; Sorensen 2002; Wheatley and See 1978; Yazaki 1968). Following
periods of multiple fiefdoms lasting into the middle of the first millennium, the establishment of a centralized system and new capitals modelled after Korean and Chinese examples (such as Nara, founded as Heijōkyō in 710 A.D., and Kyoto, founded as Heiankyō in 794 A.D.), a feudal system emerged after 1180. This system included urban settlements, labelled machi in conjunction with a special function and location, such as around temples (tera-machi), below fortresses (jōka-machi), or next to ports (minato-machi). The policy of mandatory alternate attendance at court for regional rulers in the Edo period (1603–1868), called sankinkōtai, further increased the number of regional cities: people established post stations to offer accommodation to travellers along the old highway system and other businesses and houses settled next to them (shukuba-machi). Other examples are hiroba-machi (market towns) or onzen-machi (spa-towns). In contrast to European cities, where fortification surrounded the whole urban area, in Japan, walls surrounded only the actual castle, highlighting the town as an independent unit. Centralisation after the country’s opening, in 1854, led to a sharp decrease in the number of municipalities from more than 71,000 by 1883 to slightly more than 14,000 in 1898. After a second municipal amalgamation in the 1950s and 1960s, their number was down to slightly more than 3,000 (Mabuchi 2001; Rausch 2006). Later amalgamations have further reduced the number of municipalities, with government aiming for the target number of approximately 1,000, again for easier administration and stronger local governance (Jacobs 2004). These sharp declines in the number of municipalities indicate a strong move toward centralisation that seems to contrast the declared desire of the Japanese government to promote decentralisation (Ishida 2006). Some scholars, such as the sociologist Andrew J. Jacobs, have argued that the Japanese situation is more complex than the term centralized usually connotes, as some municipalities (notably the big cities) retain more power than others (Jacobs 2003; Hein and Pelletier 2006; Steiner 1965). In their discussion of complexity and interdependence between central and local governments in terms of central control and local initiative, the American sociologists Richard Hill and Kuniko Fujita show that local power has grown despite a largely centralized national budget (Hill and Fujita 2000). It is clear that the mega-cities (seirei shitei toshi 政令指定都市 or seirei shi 政令市, especially Tokyo, have almost as much power as the prefectures, while the wards of Tokyo (its administrative units) each have as much power as an average city (Nakabayashi 2006).

Machi and the import of foreign ideas
As Japanese practitioners carefully examined foreign examples after 1854, their cultural background influenced their selection of ideas (Hein 2003; Hein and Ishida 1998). Concepts that dominated planners’ thinking in many European countries, notably those revolving around aesthetic concepts, failed to excite their interest, as the case of the rebuilding after a major fire in 1872 shows. The Tokyo governor decided that reconstruction in the Ginza area should set an example for fireproof residential construction. He retained the English engineer Thomas J. Waters, who designed the entire district along lines common in European cities at the time: with brick buildings, a unified streetscape, and the separation of traffic [FIG. 2].

![FIG. 2 Ginza Avenue, shown in an 1873 photograph, features a European-style streetscape with continuous building lines, pedestrian walkways, and street lamps](image-url)
The plan also called for widening streets and rearranging and replotting some blocks, mostly following the traditional urban layout. Nonetheless, Tokyoites perceived the buildings as expensive, damp, and not earthquake-proof. Many of the buildings remained empty for years, the project had no followers, and the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake proved the critics right: it destroyed the brick district (Ishizuka and Ishida 1988). With many planners around the world, Japanese professionals and bureaucrats viewed attempts at deconcentrating the city, such as the garden city, with great interest. Here their understanding of cities as composed of specific urban units may have influenced their thinking (Howard [1898] 2003; Howard and Osborn [1902] 1965; Watanabe 1980). In 1918, Fukuda Shigeyoshi, a technical officer of the City of Tokyo, developed the visionary New Tokyo Plan for a deconcentration of Tokyo during the next fifty years.

**FIG. 3**  Fukuda Shigeyoshi designed the New Tokyo Plan in 1918, proposing a deconcentration of Tokyo and the creation of new centers in the west connected to each other and the existing city

**FIG. 4**  Ebenezer Howard's Diagram number 5, 'Illustrating Correct Principle of a City's Growth, 1902' may have served as a reference to Fukuda's New Tokyo Plan
In the plan, he limited the city’s size to ten kilometres (a one-hour commute at the time) and proposed the development of sub-centres and satellite cities [FIG. 3]. Fukuda’s proposal resembled Howard’s diagram number 5 of city growth, with open country nearby and rapid communication lines, but Fukuda used the idea for a large metropolis instead of a town of 55,000 inhabitants and proposed decentralizing commercial functions—rather than residential—to the rim of the existing city [FIG. 4]. Fukuda’s plan remained only on paper until 1923, when the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 destroyed large parts of Tokyo and Yokohama and led to a major drop in the population of the city of Tokyo as people fled to the suburbs and the countryside (Nakabayashi 2006). Gotō Shinpei, an important actor in Japanese urban planning who was mayor of Tokyo at the time, took up the deconcentration ideas of the New Tokyo Plan. But through the 1920s and 1930s, unrestrained growth spread around Tokyo. The Kanto National Land Plan attempted in 1936 to create green belts, removing industrial functions from central areas into satellite towns—a move that was also supported by the 1937 Air Defence Law and the 1939 Tokyo Green Space Plan (Ishida 1987; Nakabayashi 2006). During this time, Japanese planners continued to monitor Western discussions and to consult with practitioners in Europe and America. Fukuda, for example, discussed the rebuilding plan for Tokyo after the Kantō earthquake in 1923 with the German planner Fritz Schumacher, and Ishikawa Hideaki (1893–1955), at that time an engineer in the Ministry of Home Affairs assigned to the town planning of Nagoya, consulted Raymond Unwin during his trip to Europe in 1923 to seek advice on his city’s master plan (Shoji 1993). Ishikawa’s writings and urban plans were a major conduit of planning ideas from the West to Japan. He reflected on Western planning ideas and influenced emerging practice through readings and interpretation of foreign planning examples including German principles from the 1920s and 1930s, notably the works of the geographer Walter Christaller and professor of planning Gottfried Feder (1883-1941)(Schenk and Bromley 2003). Japanese interest in British and American planning ideas was similar to that of other countries, but their interest in the two Germans, especially Feder, highlights a distinctively Japanese approach to the creation of small units that is comparable to the German attitude of solving the problem of big cities. The German idea of Stadtlandschaft (urban landscape), developed since the nineteenth century in conjunction with Anglo-American ideas, sought to transform existing cities by creating smaller neighbourhoods separated by green areas. It seems to have resonated with Japanese planners who appropriated German ideas according to their own lights, requirements, and culture—and constraints, also given the fact that they had few legal tools to implement large-scale plans and they faced widespread opposition to any attempts at comprehensive planning. For all of these reasons, their preference was for small-scale, machi-like patterns (Durth and Gutschow 1988; Osborn [1946] 1969).

The works of Christaller (discredited partly later because of the use of his ideas by the Nazis) echoed the desire of the Japanese planners to make regional, metropolitan, and urban plans. Christaller, whose writings were first introduced in Japan in the 1930s, analysed urban services in regional context and pointed to a regularity in the distribution of specific functions that could be used in the location and planning of new cities [FIG. 5] (Christaller [1933] 1969; Christaller and Ezawa 1969).

![FIG. 5 Walter Christaller’s theory of central places found great interest in Japan and was published in Japanese](image)
FIG. 6  Hideaki Ishikawa’s sketch for regional planning, published in his 1942 book War and City, shows a hierarchy of urban places bearing resemblance to Christaller’s ideas.

FIG. 7  Ishikawa proposed a land-use plan as part of his Reconstruction Plan for Tokyo (1946). His plan advocated deconcentration and lower population numbers than before the war.

FIG. 8  Ishikawa included proposals for regional planning in the Kanto area as part of the Tokyo Reconstruction Plan.

FIG. 9  Ishikawa’s regional planning ideas included the larger capital city area and aimed at deconcentration on a regional scale.
Building on this, as well as on Fukuda’s and other earlier proposals for a deconcentration of functions in Tokyo, Ishikawa developed a visionary and all-encompassing plan for post-war Tokyo starting in October 1944. He took up British examples, notably the Greater London Plan of 1944, but also specifically recommended the creation of new specialized centres around the city, which would function as a regional network reminiscent of Christaller’s work. With his first textbook on urban and regional planning, in 1941, Ishikawa had proposed his own regional planning ideas and had laid them out more extensively in a section on planning for defence in his 1942 book War and City. His scheme had divided the city into multiple small units according to daily, weekly, and monthly needs and strongly influenced his proposal for the post-war reconstruction of Tokyo [FIG. 6/7] (Ishikawa 1941 and 1942). A sketch from 1946 for the Kanto region highlights the specific connections he envisioned between Tokyo and satellite cities such as Ōta, Utsunomiya, or Mito; he also translated this concept into a schematic drawing based on his regional planning concepts in 1963 [FIG. 8/9] (Nakabayashi 2006; Ishikawa [1946] 1993 and 1963).

Both Ishikawa and Nishiyama also carefully examined the inner workings of a city, focusing on aspects of foreign planning that revolved around the idea of small cities and on urban units as the basis for metropolitan planning. They drew especially on works of the American planner Clarence Perry and Thomas Adams, as their proposals for the creation of largely independent units are close to the division of Japanese cities into independent units [FIG. 10] (Adams 1934; Perry [1929] 1974).
The degree to which Western planning influenced Japanese thought is well illustrated in the works of the Japanese planner Takayama Eika, who in 1962 founded the first urban planning section in Japan at Tokyo University, for the Manchurian city Datong in 1939, where he modelled his neighbourhood plans on Detroit designed in 1931 ([FIG. 11/12/13]) (Hein 2003). The Japanese were thus aware of worldwide discussions, but they appreciated German planner Feder, whose work built on historic and contemporary examples including Anglo-Saxon concepts, featuring among others a preliminary plan for Greenbelt, Maryland (Feder 1939). It is possible that due to the political and military context of the 1940s, German ideas received more Japanese interest than the proposals of other countries, but the post-war influence of Feder’s ideas raises questions as to whether there was a specific reason for the sustained Japanese interest in this planner and the selective import of his work.

Since the 1940s, Japanese urban planning textbooks have given Feder’s *The New Town* a prominent place in a lineage that includes Howard and Perry, and Japanese planners often refer to it in interviews (Toshikeikaku kyōiku kenkyū kai, Toshikeikaku kyōkasho 1987, 1995, 1996; Akiyama 1980, 1985, 1993; Higasa 1977, 1985, 1986, 1992, 1993, 1996; Ishikawa 1951; Katsura, Adachi and Zaino 1975, 1988; Takei 1960, 1958). Ishikawa’s 1941 textbook on urban and regional planning illustrates his knowledge and interpretation of international planning examples, displaying—after Howard—images by the German planner Paul Wolf (mistakenly spelled Worf by Ishikawa) for the formation of a metropolis from 1919, the French architect Le Corbusier’s city for three million inhabitants (1923), and Feder’s *The New Town* proposal, a selection that Ishikawa maintained even in later editions (for example 1951, 1954, 1956, and 1963), some of which are considerably revised ([FIG. 14]). In general, though, Japanese textbooks provide little detail about Feder’s ideas. The planner Akiyama Masayuki, for example, refers to ‘Gott Feder’ and explains only the detail that he suggested multifunctional areas for daily living for about twenty thousand inhabitants, separated from each other and from industrial and other areas.
FIG. 13 A garden city neighborhood in Detroit designed in 1931 that served as inspiration for the neighborhood design in Datong by Utida Yosikazu, Takayama Eika, Utida Yosifumi

FIG. 14 Ishikawa republished the schematic representation of a metropolis by Paul Wolf (misspelled Worf), displaying his knowledge of Western planning concepts

by one hundred- to five hundred-meter wide green belts that incorporate small parks, footpaths, and sports facilities, as the basis for new town planning (Akiyama 1993). It is clear that a certain ignorance of the book’s contents existed; meanwhile, German- and English-language publications largely ignore the book (Schubert 1986; Hall 1996; Mumford 1961; Taylor 1974). In the political context of the 1940s, when Nishiyama wrote his article, such a genealogy might have been comprehensible, as the project was new and needed to be explained in detail. In regard to contemporary analysis of the history of town planning, this insistence on Feder may suggest that the book resonated with Japanese planners and planning principles as a technical introduction to urban planning rather than a politically motivated theory. Nishiyama, educated as an architect between 1930 and 1933, and one of the rare Japanese planners whose proposals are based on a comprehensive and long-term concept of society, was a major instrument in importing Feder’s ideas (Nishiyama 1975, 1976, 1980). In 1942, he was examining the problem of the big city as a locale for a concentrated workforce, trying to find a new organisational form for the Japanese city. In this connection, he analysed the major urban planning discussions in the West. He chose material to present without regard to the political context that engendered it, whether capitalist America, socialist Russia, or fascist National-Socialist Germany. He compiled his findings and interpretations in an article titled ‘The Structure of Life-units (or Spheres)’ (Seikatsu kichi no kōsō) (Nishiyama 1968). In that text, first of all, he refuted urban concepts featuring skyscrapers and higher density of population in the cities, as had been advocated by Le Corbusier or Hilberseimer, calling the first a simple reorganisation of the city without seeking solutions to the density problems and the second a transposition of the capitalist American cities. He also rejected Beaux-Arts projects like the plan for Canberra as purely aesthetic concepts. Although it is not mentioned in this particular article, Nishiyama further objected to the monumental National-Socialist urban design proposals by Albert Speer and others (Kishida 1943).
Nishiyama was looking for a concept that could be applied both to new and to existing cities, and in this regard he very much appreciated Feder’s ideas outlined in his book *Die neue Stadt* (The New Town), published in 1939 (Ishikawa 1943; Feder 1939). Feder proposed urban units for twenty thousand inhabitants divided in nine autonomous units and surrounded by agricultural areas. Based on a lengthy survey of existing cities, he listed all institutions necessary for a small town, creating a kind of guidebook to city building. *The New Town* was published in January 1939. Six months later, on June 1, 1939, it was already on the shelves of the administrative library of the city of Tokyo, demonstrating the interest given to the publication by the Japanese. It cannot be assumed that *The New Town* was read and understood by all planners, but it provoked enough interest to be partially translated by the Chamber of Industry and Commerce (Shōkokaigisho) by May 1942. At about the same time, several Japanese planners commented on the text in different articles. Itō Goro, officer at the building police section of the Metropolitan Police Board in Tokyo mentions it in his articles on Nazi Germany (Itō 1942 and 1943). Ishikawa refers to it in his article 1943 and Nishiyama discusses it in his study on the neighbourhood (Itō 1942 and 1943; Ishikawa 1943; Nishiyama 1942). Nishiyama’s reference to Feder’s book seems to have had a lasting influence on the Japanese interpretation and analysis of the Western history of town planning. Most Japanese textbooks explain Feder’s concept as a hierarchy of daily/weekly/monthly centres. These are the words first used by Nishiyama and appear mainly in connection with a single illustration in *The New Town*. This suggests that Japanese planners picked up Nishiyama’s translation or that few authors returned to the original document (Feder and Rechenberg 1942). The same is true for the choice of the illustration: in fact, apart from one book, the *Toshi keikaku kyōkasho*, which is also the only one to correctly describe the contents of the Feder text, the design printed is always the same. It is the one chosen by Nishiyama, which refers to daily/weekly/monthly centres and which was in the original and not included in the translation. As Nishiyama correctly mentions, this particular drawing, referred to in many books as the ‘Feder-plan,’ was actually created by Heinz Killius, one of Feder’s students [FIG. 15]. Feder had initiated a student project on the topic of a new town for twenty thousand inhabitants and included five student proposals in his book. While praising the Killius plan for its attempt to create an organic settlement, he also criticized it as too rigid. Among the other projects were proposals for satellite cities, one designed by Günther Hahn in Feder’s seminar, the other created under the guidance of Professor A. Muesmann at the Technical University in Dresden [FIG. 16/17]. Both proposals highlighted the possibility of applying Feder’s ideas to new as well as existing towns, a possibility that Feder stressed in his book.
Feder considered this technical project to be connected with the art of city planning, as shown in the subtitle of his book, *Essay on the Creation of a New Art of City Planning, Based on the Social Structure of Its Inhabitants*. However, the aesthetic part of this project and the reference to European medieval forms were not appropriate to Japan, and Japanese planners therefore largely ignored them. It appears that the notion of adjoining centres that catered to all daily needs while being linked into a larger network of central places appealed to the Japanese perception of machi-like urban units and the flows between them. Another connection may exist between the Japanese and the German interpretation of urban units as small towns: the German word *Siedlung* (settlement) can apply to a newly established village or town but has also been used notably since the 1920s for a residential district within the city. Ishikawa seems to have grasped this similarity, as he uses the term *Siedlung* when writing about Feder’s new town project as well as when he refers to the apartment block complex Leipzig-Loßnig and others (Ishikawa 1941, 1951, 1963; Hein 2010b).
Nishiyama also developed several projects concerning the organisation of the city in decentralized, self-governed neighbourhoods (in the tradition of machi), which he called ‘life spheres’ or ‘life units.’ Just like his Western counterparts, he opposed unnecessary traffic and suggested the creation of small urban units. However, he did not criticize the big city itself. On the contrary, and this is typical of Japanese planners, he tried to find a way to maintain the multifunctionality of big cities while making them more liveable. He stressed the need for equilibrated growth and the existence of an appropriate number of workplaces, welfare facilities, and the like to prevent sprawl [FIG. 18/19] (Nishiyama 1971). Japanese planners, such as Nishiyama and Ishikawa, thus appropriated Western ideas—and particularly selected German concepts—according to their own lights and used them to develop concepts for the transformation and modernisation of the Japanese cities. Their selection of foreign ideas appears to reconfirm their own understanding of the organisation of cities in small units, decentralisation, and deconcentration and made them highlight the development of cities as a conglomerate of neighbourhoods.

Machi as neighbourhood and lessons for the west
Newly introduced planning techniques added a new facet to Japanese urban form and planning concepts. They did not overtake and restructure Japanese cities but rather contributed to and continued the patchwork character of Japanese cities (Hein 2010a). City characteristics, reflecting particular geographic contexts; national and local traditions of politics, economic development, and social interaction; traditions of land ownership and planning tools; urban form; and architectural design continue to actively shape urban form and planning.

In turn, Japanese ideas about machi resonate with planning ideas from other countries. The concept of the neighbourhood unit is a central theme of twentieth-century planning, intimately tied to the name of Clarence Perry. Residential neighbourhood units, often organized around cul-de-sac streets, have been central planning features in many countries around the world, meant to allow child’s play and community interaction. Many of these projects failed, however, and the result of modern neighbourhood planning in the United States and elsewhere
(as in the example of Levittown) have been residential subdivisions for single-income brackets that have rapidly degraded. Researchers widely analysed the decay of the social interaction of traditional neighbourhoods, and in the 1960s, a new group of planners emerged in response to the writings of Jane Jacobs, defending community interaction, or New Urbanism. The current promoters of these ideas have once again taken up the topic of small-scale neighbourhoods.

Thus, today it is the patchwork character of Japanese cities, the multitude of local identities, of different perspectives of urban living and the strength of social networks in traditional, non-planned, neighbourhoods—some of the same characteristics that earlier observers condemned—that attracts foreign researchers. They seek inspiration in the densely built, functionally and socially mixed residential areas with shopping streets, educational facilities, and public transportation within walking distance and feature narrow and irregular paths that require cars to drive carefully and allow room for neighbourly talk and children's play. There is a special quality to the neighbourhood, its social and functional diversity, and its meaning for the Japanese in terms of identity that is distinctive of the traditional machi, which have the feel of small towns and a certain feeling of local governance freedom. In fact, their interest tells us as much about Japanese cities as it does about the authors utilizing the metaphor, their home culture, and specific experience of urban space.

Please refer to the full version of the article for the complete list of references, published in: *Journal of Urban History* 35, no. 75 (2008); or to the online version: http://juh.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/35/1/75.
Kyoto’s Landscape

A close look at the Meirin District

Marie-Thérèse van Thoor