

Component 1, Part 4

Japan's Suburban Cultural Landscapes

Parts [1](#) and [2](#) provide specific examples of Mather and Karan's characteristics of the Japanese cultural landscape. Part 4 further examines the cultural landscapes of Japan through a focus on its suburban landscapes. This approach provides an opportunity to extend our analysis of Japanese cultural landscapes beyond Mather and Karan's characteristics. However, viewers are encouraged to look for evidence of these characteristics in the following images.

As stated in the introduction to this component, the landscapes of Japan are more congested, compact, and variegated than landscapes in the United States. This situation is also true of Japanese suburbs since they are much more crowded, dense, and mixed in their land use patterns than American suburbs. General views of suburban landscapes can be seen in Figures [4-1](#), [4-2](#), [1-1](#), [1-22](#), and [1-23](#)).¹

The commuter train station is the busiest part of the Japanese suburban landscape. These stations, like their urban counterparts, provide accessibility to the rest of the metropolitan area; therefore, the demand for space adjacent to them has increased densities. Each morning thousands of businessmen (or sararimen) arrive at the station on foot, bicycle, or car for the long commute into the city ([Figure 4-3](#)).² Nisshin Station ([Figure 4-4](#)) and Hirahari Station ([Figure 4-5](#)) provide good examples of higher densities around suburban train stations. Both stations are east of Nagoya (Hirahari six miles from Nagoya and Nisshin eight miles) on a commuter rail line heading toward Toyota City. In these images notice the parking lots (for bicycles and cars) next to and near the stations. The photo in [Figure 4-6](#) was taken from the Nisshin station platform looking east and shows several apartment buildings whose residents are within walking distance of the station. Other apartments within walking distance of Nisshin station are shown in [Figure 4-7](#). The area immediately surrounding Nisshin station is shown in Figures [4-8 through 4-10](#). Figures [4-11](#) and [4-12](#) show another suburban train station, this one in the southwest suburbs of Hiroshima. It is interesting to note that American suburbs have similar areas of high density (often referred to as "edge cities") but their locations are tied to highly accessible nodes along highway and/or interstate networks. In Japan, the locations of these "edge cities" are affiliated with the commuter rail network instead.

Of the many service establishments surrounding both suburban (and urban) train stations, one of the more popular ones are yakitori restaurants (yakitori is skewered chicken, see [Figure 4-13](#)). It is quite common in Japan for people to stop by a yakitori restaurant or stall on their way home from work for a quick bite (and beer). As a result, these restaurants are often found around suburban (and urban) train stations (Figures [4-14](#) and [4-15](#)). The animal in the sign in [Figure 4-14](#) is a tanuki, a popular figure in Japanese pop and traditional culture, and often used to advertise restaurants and bars. Tanukis are similar to a badger or raccoon and is depicted as having supernatural powers or being mischievous. Portrayed in cartoon form and statutes, these critters are a ubiquitous feature of Japanese suburban, urban, and rural landscapes ([Figure 4-16](#)) (for more about tanukis, see <http://www.onmarkproductions.com/html/tanuki.shtml>).

Other landscape elements common in Japanese suburbs include multi-level golf driving ranges with large nets (see [Figure 1-18](#)) and rice fields ([Figure 4-17](#)). Sometimes these elements are

found next to each other (Figure 4-18). Figure 4-19 is a restaurant in the suburbs of Nagoya and Figures 4-20, 4-21, and 2-6 show residential areas near this restaurant. It should be pointed out that while the above images represent most Japanese suburban landscapes and how they differ from American suburbs, in some places Japanese suburbs look strikingly similar to the American counterpart (see Figures 2-36 and 2-37).

1 For an excellent description of a typical day in a Japanese suburb read the short essay entitled "Mitaka, A Suburban Community" in Karan (2005, 279-280).

2 In 1990, the average commute into downtown Tokyo was 1 hour and 20 minutes (Karan and Stapleton, 1997).

References

Karan, P.P. 2005. *Japan in the 21st Century: Environment, Economy, and Society*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press.

Karan, P.P. and Kristin Stapleton, eds. 1997. *The Japanese City*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press.

Photos



Figure 4-1: Togo, suburb of Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)

This photograph, taken from Togo Junior High School, shows a view of Togo's skyline. A small hospital and elderly care facility is shown in the foreground.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 4-2: Togo, suburb of Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)

This photograph, taken from Togo Junior High School, shows a view of Togo's skyline. The large building to the left is part of an elementary school.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 4-3: Nisshin Station (looking west), suburb of Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)

This photograph was taken on a Sunday morning. Although there are only a few businessmen waiting for the train, on a weekday morning the numbers would be much greater.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 4-4: Aerial view of Nisshin Station, suburb of Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)
Nisshin Station (at the blue square and red rectangle) is along a commuter line about eight miles east of Nagoya, between Nagoya and Toyota City. Note the higher densities around the station including office and apartment buildings. Also, note the parking lots just to the south and east of the station, a land use not found near downtown train stations.

Source: Google Earth



Figure 4-5: Aerial view of Hirahari Station, suburb of Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)
Hirahari Station is the next station west of Nisshin Station heading into downtown Nagoya and provides another good example of the higher densities around stations and lower densities further away.

Source: Google Earth



Figure 4-6: Nisshin Station (looking east), suburb of Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)
A good example of apartment buildings clustering near train stations so residents can walk to the station to commute to work.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 4-7: Apartments, Nisshin, suburb of Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)
These apartments are within walking distance of Nisshin Station.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 4-8: Area surrounding Nisshin Station, suburb of Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)
This photograph was taken from the upper level of the station looking north.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 4-9: Area surrounding Nisshin Station, suburb of Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)
This photograph was taken from the upper level of the station looking north. Notice in the foreground the large bicycle lot for commuters.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 4-10: Area surrounding Nisshin Station (looking south), suburb of Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)

This photograph was taken from the ground floor of the station looking south.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 4-11: Miyajimaguchi JR Station, suburb of Hiroshima (Hiroshima Prefecture)
Note the tall apartment buildings near the station. This is the JR station nearest Miyajima Island.
Miyajima is famous for its water torii gate and Itsukushima Shrine.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 4-12: Miyajimaguchi JR Station, suburb of Hiroshima (Hiroshima Prefecture)
This is the JR station nearest Miyajima Island. Miyajima is famous for its water torii gate and Itsukushima Shrine.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 4-13: Yakitori, Nisshin, suburb of Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 4-14: Yakitori restaurant, Nisshin, suburb of Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)
This yakitori restaurant is across the street from Nisshin Station. Note the tanuki in the upper left corner of the sign.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 4-15: Yakitori restaurant, Nisshin, suburb of Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)
In many yakitori restaurants, patrons sit at bars across from the cook.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 4-16: Tanuki statues in a yakitori restaurant, Nisshin, suburb of Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)

The large tanuki is holding a sake bottle (rice wine) in his left hand. Do you think he's had too much sake?

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 4-17: Togo, suburb of Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)

Note the variety of land uses in this single scene, a school (large buildings in the background) residences, and rice fields.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 4-18: Suburbs of Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)
Golf driving range and rice field.
Source: photo by Alice Tym



Figure 4-19: Shell Tea Restaurant, Togo, suburb of Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)
Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 4-20: Residential area, Togo, suburb of Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)

This scene is a good representation of a Japanese suburban landscape. Note the greenhouse to the extreme right. If you turn around 180 degrees from this point you will see several other greenhouses growing rice seedlings (see Figures 1-26 and 2-21).

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing



Figure 4-21: Residential area, Togo, suburb of Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture)

This scene is rather unusual in that it shows some vacant lots in the densely-populated suburbs.

The two lots to the left and right are unused, but the lot in the center looks like a small, somewhat poorly-tended garden. This lot is not the backyard of the house in the distance, but is accessible by a gate seen to the extreme right. The geography of suburban land ownership patterns is often fragmented into small parcels in various locations.

Source: photo by Craig R. Laing