

2 TOKYO, CITY OF . . . TEMPLES?

Why Tokyo?

The initial question a reader may raise about this book is, why Tokyo? Is it appropriate to begin a reflection on the meaning and significance of sacred space in Japan by focusing on the major city, which is marked nearly everywhere by modernism? It would seem that almost any other location might be more fitting than the capital, a sprawling megalopolis that represents the center of national political and financial power and is a veritable bastion of secularism and consumerism. Western commentators have often referred to Tokyo as an “ugly city” because of its pervasive power lines, train lines, overpasses, tall buildings, and other modern structures that block one’s view and prevent access to nature or a sense of mystery and awe for much of anything other than the Almighty Yen, as well as current electronic and fashion trends and antitrends. If characterized in a nutshell, Tokyo might seem to be a “secular altarpiece”¹—the city of *depaato* (department stores) and skyscrapers or of *konbini* (convenience stores) and transportation networks or of neon signs and maid bars . . . but surely not temples.

From a cultural standpoint, Tokyo is a storehouse of early history, especially in the aftermath of the four-hundredth anniversary of Edo festivities, which took place in 2003. However, these would seem to represent decidedly worldly rather than sacred designations. At first, it might appear that the closest one might come to religiosity is that there are a number of spots known as Fujigaoka, or “slope for viewing Mount Fuji,” and on a clear day from an upper floor of a high-rise office building or hotel this may even be possible. Tokyo appears to be anything but religious, and so one must ask, to what extent does the sacrality of space at temples and shrines play a role in today’s urban society?

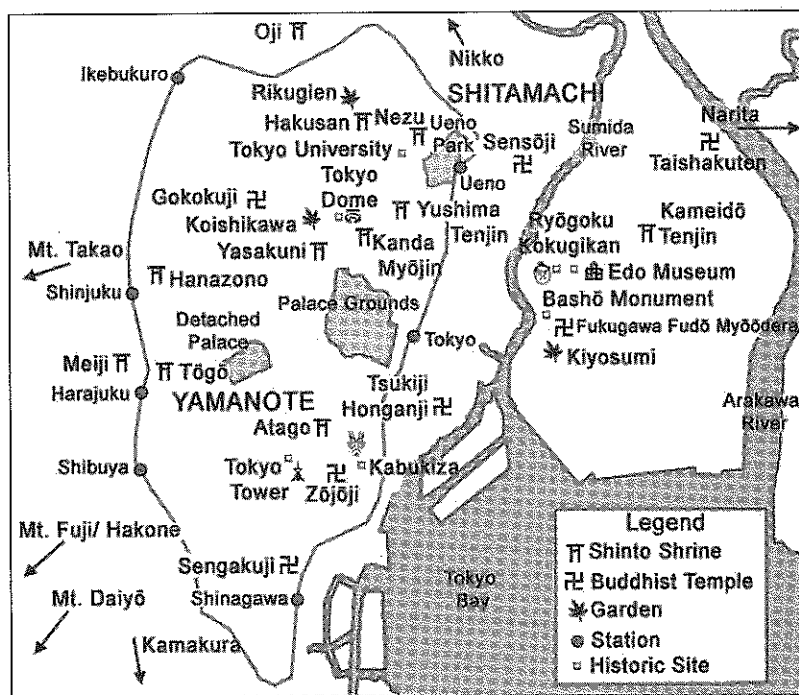
Further casting doubt on the value of studying sacred space in Tokyo is the fact that Japan is a country well known for its multitude of sublime religious sites, especially in nonurban areas, perched on mountain peaks, secluded in remote forests, straddling waterways, or occupying lush territory, which are attended by regular

devotees, inspired pilgrims, and streams of tourists; examples are the shrine that overlooks the spectacular Nachi waterfalls in Wakayama Prefecture, south of Osaka, which is also the home of the magnificent Mount Kōyasan; the main temple of the Shingon sect, founded by Kūkai in the ninth century; and the massive torii at Miyajime, which appears either in the water or on dry land depending on the tides.² A key to the beauty and utility of these sites, which makes them so attractive to ritual participants and casual observers alike, is a mystical communion with nature, either by blending in with the environment or by using wood and other elements to construct buildings that are at once aesthetic and efficient in embracing the qualities of minimalism and simplicity of design.

With regard to cities, no doubt Kyoto, with its verdant geographical location in a valley surrounded by mountains on three sides amid the flow of pristine rivers, canals, and hillside streams, would seem to be the city of wondrous religious sites, which are everywhere apparent and epitomize the meaning of sacred space in an urban setting. Kyoto could be considered one of the world’s premier “sacred cities,” along with Rome, Mecca, Jerusalem, and Benares, where religious institutions are at the core of the urban center’s *raison d’être*.³ In each of these locales, visitors can easily seek out and find the institutional centers at the heart of the respective traditions and also realize that they cannot avoid seeing at least some sign of the sacred, such as shops that sell amulets, in nearly every area of the city, including the seemingly secular. Kyoto is smaller than Tokyo and easier to get around, and its environs on Mount Hieizan and at Lake Biwa are also replete with some of the most impressive examples of Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines.⁴

Returning to the case of Tokyo, several sites located in the countryside that are accessible yet far removed from the city center stand out for exhibiting a mystical quality in the midst of beautiful natural surroundings, including the esoteric temples at Mount Takao to the west of Shinjuku, Mount Narita in Chiba Prefecture, to the east of Ueno Station near the airport, and Saijōji temple outside of Odawara, a little to the west of Yokohama on the Shinkansen train route. However, discussing these places in no way captures the full picture and should not dissuade us from acknowledging the profusion of sacred spaces within the heart of Tokyo. As indicated by the Map 2.1, in addition to the renowned and frequently visited Sensōji or Asakusa Kannon and Meiji Jingu at the northeast and southwest gateways to the city, respectively, numerous notable sites appear throughout the metropolitan area.

Some of the main examples of Tokyo’s sacred sites to the north of the palace grounds include the following:



Sacred Sites in Tokyo

MAP 2.1

- Gokokuji, the oldest surviving temple in Tokyo, dating from the seventeenth century
- Hakusan Jinja, which commemorates the deity of Mount Hakusan, a snow-covered peak in northwestern Japan whose beliefs have spread throughout the nation
- Kanda Myōjin, the original protector of the northeast corridor
- Nezu Jinja, an Inari shrine with Buddhist syncretism known for its azalea festival held every summer
- Ōji Inari Jinja, which commemorates the area of “fox weddings” depicted in a famous *ukiyo-e* print by Hiroshige
- Yasukuni Jinja, which houses the war dead and is known for hosting controversial visits from various prime ministers that ignite protests from former opponents China and Korea
- Yushima Tenjin, near Yushima Seidō, a former Confucian academy located in the northeast. High school and university students come here to pray for good grades during the crucial “exam hell” period.

To the south of the palace stand the following sites:

- Atago Jinja, with its tall slope and steep steps to a high summit in the middle of town
- Sengakuji, which memorializes the famed forty-seven rōnin who committed suicide to avenge their warlord’s assassination in the Edo period
- Tōgō Jinja, a shrine near Harajuku Station dedicated to Adm. Tōgō Heihachirō, a war hero celebrated as a Shinto kami
- Tsukiji Honganji, a Pure Land temple rebuilt in the 1930s with continental Buddhist influence
- Zōjōji temple, which contains the Tokugawa clan mausoleums and stands in the shadow of the Tokyo Tower in Shiba Park, a pastiche of the Eiffel Tower; constructed in 1958, the temple houses a Shinto shrine on the second floor of the main observatory.

In addition, to the east of the Sumida River the following are found:

- Fukugawa Fudō Myōō, an aged Shingon temple affiliated with Narita temple and famous for its fire ceremony
- Kameidō Tenjin, one of the largest and most active shrines west of the Sumida River
- Taishakuten temple in Shibamata, home of the beloved movie character Tora-san.

Some other important sites that are not necessarily sacred but contribute greatly to the appreciation of traditional culture and spirituality include the landscape gardens of Kiyosumi, Koishikawa Korakuen, and Rikugien, all of which stem from the Tokugawa era and stand immaculately preserved in the shadow of modern buildings or, in the case of Kiyosumi, a Bashō monument near the area where he lived before setting off on the poetic journey that led to the creation of *Oku no hosomichi*; the area near Ryōgoku Station, which houses the Edo Historical Museum along with the Kokugikan sumo stadium; and Kabuki theaters, including the national theater at Higashi Ginza Station and smaller stages in the area of Ningyōcho, near the original locale of the performances held during the Edo period.

Does all of this make Tokyo a city of temples? The challenge underlying this question brings us face to face with the polarities of sacrality and secularity and of tradition and modernity, which occupy the urban setting. As Paul Waley comments on the role of Sensōji, unlike the case of Kyoto, where

many of the temples are rarified sites in the peripheral hillside away from and not really affecting the flow of everyday activity, Asakusa and other Tokyo shrines and temples are very much an integrated part of the fabric of ordinary life and yet are also able to stand out as something special and interesting.⁵ This minor comment in Waley's lengthy account of the capital city's neighborhoods is crucial for understanding the role of sacred space in Tokyo and the importance of examining religious locations that reflect seemingly commonplace, everyday concerns and habits.

One indication of the significance of the kinds of sacred sites being considered here is the popularity of guide books such as *Tokyo no otera/jinja: Nozo toki sanpo* [*Tokyo Temples and Shrines: A Stroll through the Mysteries*]⁶ and *Tokyo Goriryaku Sanpo* [*Tokyo Strolls to Temples/Shrines for Gaining Practical Worldly Benefits*],⁷ which, as the titles suggest, highlight the idea of strolling or ambling about (*sanpo*) various areas of the city to find an appropriate place of worship. Although the title of the first book mentioned does not refer specifically to seeking worldly benefits (*riyaku*), as does the second work, the material gains that are supposed to be provided by each site are listed for the several dozen places discussed. These are just two of the many such works available at local bookstores.

Another indicator of the pervasive effects of sacred space in Tokyo is the prevalence in many areas of the city of signs that point out for pedestrians "Scenic Spots and Places of Historical Interest Information," which include local shrines and temples, as well as other notable cultural sites, such as gardens, museums, and memorials. The presence and availability of so many kinds of books and street signs show that many neighborhoods contain clusters of sites, and the experience of touring them is highly valued. While the sites chosen for this work are but a very small sampling of what takes place throughout the city and are not necessarily the most important examples, and even though other neighborhoods could have been used, these are very much representative of Tokyo's complex socioreligious fabric.

The Shogun's City: Planned or Unplanned?

The juxtaposition and comparison of the Akasaka and Inarichō neighborhoods highlight connections and disconnections between two distinct parts of the city, whose origins in the Tokugawa or Edo period as discussed by Edward Seidensticker in *Low City, High City: Tokyo from Edo to the Earthquake*, greatly affect the nature of urban life, as well as the role of the sacred sites contained therein. These neighborhoods adapt city planning

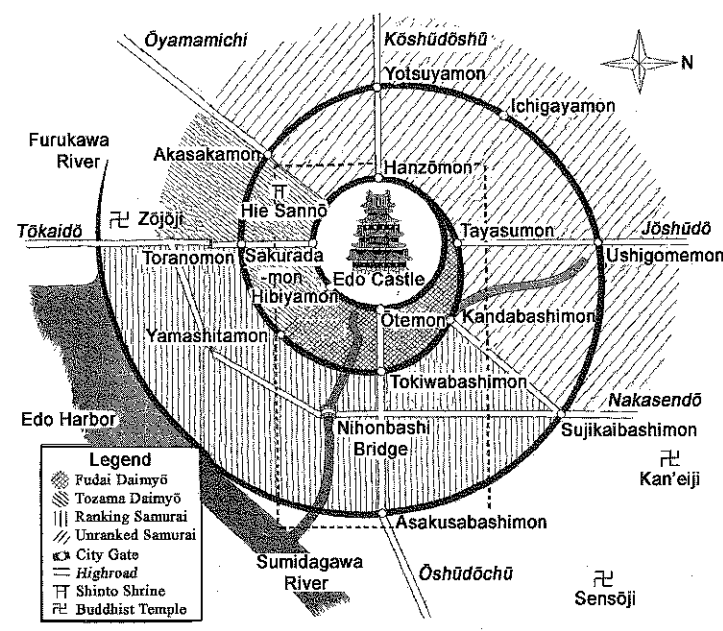
initially established by the shogunate for the purposes of maintaining military control and social-political supervision over the general population in the early modern period to the economic realities and lifestyle conditions of the world today. Where much has changed, a great deal has not yet been significantly affected. This ongoing process of preservation tinged with a considerable degree of alteration helps to keep alive the vitality and utility of traditional sacred spaces.

Tokyo can appear to be a confusing and chaotic city, an impenetrable swirl of streets and train lines that is so obtuse that even the Japanese, let alone foreign visitors, must frequently stop by a *koban* (police booth) to ask for directions to a particular address from a policeman who will probably need to draw a map. However, a surface impression that the city is disorderly is misleading because the shogun's meticulous planning has served multiple purposes in creating political authority and military presence, as well as fostering economic ties and commercial exchanges. The shogunate was able to take advantage of the local environment and transmute its apparent weakness as a swampy backwater region into an opportunity to develop complex waterways with landfills that furthered the basic aims of defending the fortress and accommodating the residency of both allies and rivals.

The fundamental division in the city's social landscape is rooted in the political economy and geography of the Tokugawa era, when the shogunate established its main base in Edo in the early seventeenth century, long before the advent of modernization and westernization two and a half centuries later. As the city of Edo was first being formed in the seventeenth century, according to Hidenobu Jinnai, it:

was built among a particular set of natural conditions that included frontage on the sea and a plethora of hills and rivers—a topography replete with variety. The Shitamachi, Downtown, area that developed along the shores of Edo Bay and the Sumida River was a "city of water" laced with a network of canals. On the other hand, Yamanote, the Upland, which emerged among the plateaus and valleys of the Musahino hills, could be called a "city of fields and gardens" wrapped in green. This dual structure, which developed in close collaboration with nature, is the major characteristic of Edo's urban space, and what makes this Japanese pattern distinctive.⁸

Thus, the shogun made a deliberate decision to construct an inner territory within the seven Musashino hilly sectors, barely discernible in the Tokyo of



Geomantic Design of Edo/Tokyo

MAP 2.2

today, of Ueno, Hongō, Koishikawa-Mejiro, Ushigome, Yotsuya-Kōjimachi, Akasaka-Azabu, and Shiba-Shirogane, which were separated by a maze of ridges and valleys.⁹ Within this area, as seen in Map 2.2, he built up the shogun's castle, which was encircled by a spiral system of canals marked by thirty-six massive checkpoints (the actual figure was thirty-two, but thirty-six was considered an auspicious number), each with an outpost or lookout (*mitsuke*) tower and fortified by a complex series of moats and protected bridges. One of these was Akasaka-mitsuke, the name of the subway station that serves today as the main point of entry into the Akasaka neighborhood.

Paul Waley's explanation is useful in clarifying the illustration of the original structure of early Edo:¹⁰

The scheme [the shogun] and his advisers hatched was the “*no*” plan, so named because it involved the construction of canals and moats and the use of existing rivers to form a continuous web of water like the

whorls of a fingerprint, or like the Japanese character “*no*” (の). Improvised and sinuous, so different from the stately, square Chinese grand plan, these whorls were crossed by bridges, many of which still exist, and guarded by fortified gates. The two inner whorls of water enclosed the castle itself and its dependent buildings, which included the palaces of family members and the residences of collateral families and senior administrators.¹¹

Jinnai further explains that “Edo lacked the walls that typically surrounded European cities and within its precincts, water, hills, and forests blended with city streets to create a special urban environment.”¹²

Beginning with the swirling, geomantically based design of the city in 1603, the central feature of Edo/Tokyo's cultural legacy has been that the shogun surrounded himself with powerful warlords and other samurai who were situated inside the precincts of the hills of Yamanote near the castle's central area. The more marginal citizens, along with various sorts of outsiders and outcasts, were assigned to the Shitamachi area, especially to the northeast corridor below the hills. In this way, the shogunate controlled all aspects of commercial and social interaction between classes and ensured that key civic functions were regulated in their appropriate districts.

The shogun placed the prominent *fudai daimyō*, or those provincial warlords who had demonstrated their allegiance and support, immediately to the east of the castle. The *tozama daimyō*, whose commitment to the shogun's leadership was suspect, were situated to the south. To ensure their loyalty and make certain that they would not plot against him, all of the daimyō were rewarded with large mansions near the source of power. As required by the policy of *sankin kōtai* (literally, “alternate attendance”), all of the daimyō were forced to make annual visits to the capital from their respective locales so that the shogun's troops could oversee their activities. The leading members of the samurai class were located farther east and south than the daimyō and enjoyed much of the finery of their superiors, while the rank-and-file warriors occupied the western and northern sectors of the High City in more cramped and inconvenient housing. It was the association with success and prosperity that apparently led to the formation, beginning in the Edo period, of Inari shrines in this part of the city, where upward social mobility gained through good fortune could be seen to prove the efficacy of prayer and demonstrate the rewards that the sacred sites offered to ritual participants.

The lowest-ranking members of the warrior class, who were not even allowed to own a horse and were known as the *kachigumi* (literally, “those

who walked”), were situated to the east of the castle and south of Ueno, right on the border between Yamanote and Shitamachi. This eventually gave rise to the name of the Okachimachi train station, located today near the electronics shops of Akihabara.¹³ The rest of society was distributed by the shogun into the outlying area east of the hills that was literally “below the [main part of] town” (*shitamachi*), referring to a flat, plains area downward from the hilly territory.

Shitamachi is sometimes translated as “downtown,” which is not inaccurate, but the term means something nearly opposite to the way the word is usually evoked in the West to refer to a city center with its confluence of banks, company offices, and civil or government buildings in addition to museums and cathedrals. In Tokyo, this meaning of the term *downtown* would apply best to the High City rather than the Low City. Shitamachi, however, refers to downtown Tokyo along the lines of the way the expression is used to indicate the fringe districts of Manhattan, which contain Greenwich Village and Chinatown. In other words, it is a locale somewhat off the beaten path that provides a desirable reprieve from the humdrum of daily life and has been able to establish its own brand of cultural vitality and social identity, albeit mixed with a sense of the melancholy of those who are dispossessed. Even though it retains a distinctive artistic flair and festive atmosphere, the Low City is distinguished from the classy uptown area in being occupied by a demographic sector that is poorer economically and weaker politically.

Japan underwent a prolonged phase of 250 years of isolation, while having little contact with the outside world other than in the port towns of Nagasaki and Osaka, which received some visitors from China in addition to Holland, who occasionally brought the latest advances from Europe. Once modernization was introduced at the end of the nineteenth century, even though the samurai tended to misunderstand and resist this development and even wore metal helmets to protect themselves from the deleterious effects of telegraph or electric wires overhead, technology was quickly adapted and perfected by Japanese entrepreneurs. For example, railways were not known to the Japanese until the 1860s, and then, within a decade of the opening of the first short line between Shimbashi Station in Tokyo and Yokohama in 1872, Japan had produced an efficient and comprehensive train system that was the rival of any in the world. The development of extensive rail networks had an enormous impact on the spread of urban neighborhoods, which became organized around a station as the center of economic activity, although for many reasons the fabric of traditional lifestyles remained more or less intact.

Empty Center

The layout of the High City, with the secluded castle at its core, is somewhat similar to the structure of Beijing, which harbors the Forbidden City at its center, as established by the Ming dynasty rulers, who wished to isolate themselves from contact with their minions and potential enemies. In an interesting contrast with major Western metropolises, the hub of financial advancement and political authority in Tokyo revolves around what modern French philosopher Roland Barthes calls an “empty center” in his trend-setting semiotic study of Japanese culture, *The Empire of Signs*, which was written after he returned to Europe from a lecture tour in Japan.¹⁴ Barthes envisions the vacant core as a kind of metaphysical void or living symbol of the Zen Buddhist notion of nothingness, which is often represented in calligraphy by a vacant circle (*ensō*).

As the maps in Figure 2.1 indicate—one from the Edo period and the other a contemporary subway locator—there has been and continues to be an empty city center, which reflects where once the shogun’s castle stood and

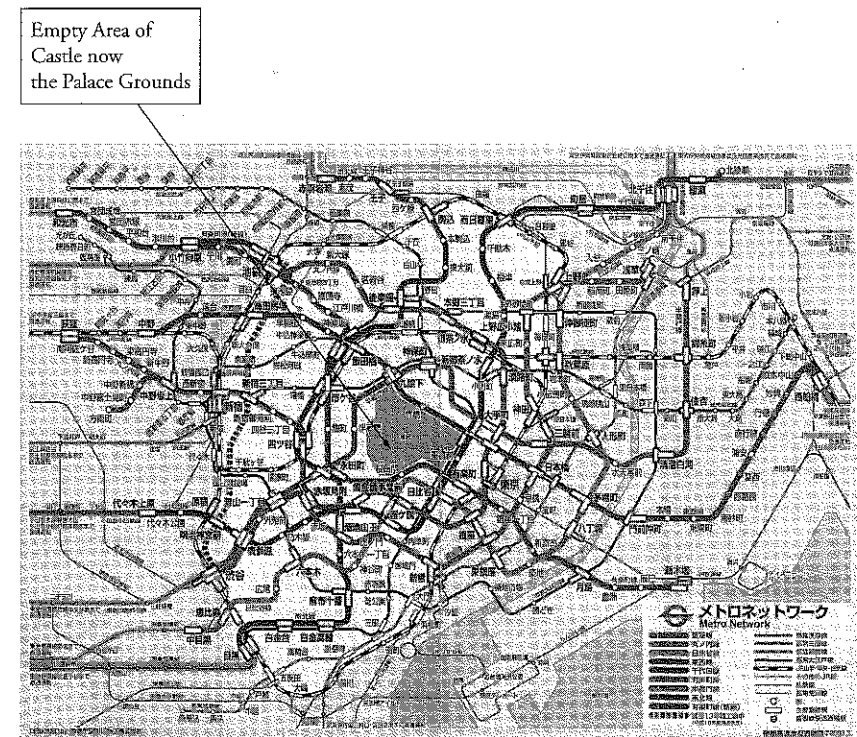


FIGURE 2.1 Modern Transport Map Revealing the City’s “Empty Center”

today the imperial palace stands. Barthes is correct that the empty center remains the key element of urban geography, prime real estate that has been left undeveloped and hidden from view in that it is open to public visits only on special ceremonial occasions. Because of this urban structure, the main buildings of governance and commerce are kept on the sidelines, and the largest temples and pagodas, such as Ueno/Asakusa and Meiji Jingu, are located on the periphery of the city in the northeast and southwest, respectively.

Barthes' approach has been criticized as an Orientalist fantasy or a romanticization of tradition that contributes to masking the essentially political origins of the phenomenon since the empty space at the core of Tokyo has been the source of political power and authority. Nevertheless, Jinnai tends to agree with Barthes' contrast between Tokyo and the West by suggesting, "This pattern illustrates the motif of the interior (*oku*) that the architect Maki Fumihiko has identified as characteristic of Japanese urban and architectural spaces."¹⁵ Jinnai further remarks, "This manner of situating religious facilities in Edo was the exact opposite of the European pattern. In Europe a cathedral, as the religious center of a city, was located at the most prominent place on the square."¹⁶ Although Edo-period castles are an important exception, another striking contrast with the West is that the main buildings in Tokyo traditionally were low and caused the viewer to gaze downward to appreciate functionality and aesthetics rather than upward to admire majestic height.

As a way of further exploring a comparison between Tokyo and major cities in the West, it is notable that Joseph Campbell has commented that in medieval Europe the center of a city featured a cathedral as the most prominent architectural triumph, as with the Notre Dame, one of the first of the great Gothic churches built in Paris during the late twelfth century. The East Asian version of this would no doubt be the pagoda, which, for example, dominated the urban landscape of Kaifeng, capital of Northern Song China. The Ueno and Asakusa pagodas were no doubt the tallest structures of Tokyo, although these were located on the periphery of town. In early modern times in Europe and the United States, the function of the central urban area was no longer based on a religious building but on the pinnacle of secular—especially civil—authority, as with the Eiffel Tower, which was opened in 1889 for the Universal Exhibition and Centennial of the French Revolution.¹⁷

An interesting case of civil authority being manifest in a central structure is the City Hall of Philadelphia, which was founded in the seventeenth century by William Penn, who strictly followed a grid plan of urban design. Standing right at the central intersection of the grid at Broad and Market streets, City Hall is an edifice that was constructed over the course of thirty

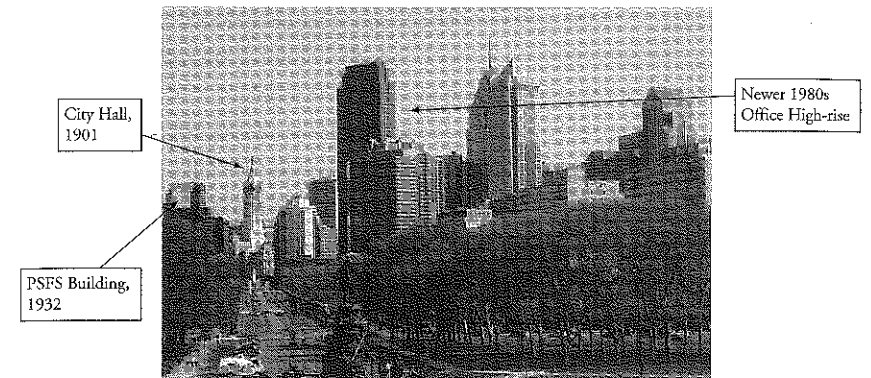


FIGURE 2.2 Center City in Downtown Philadelphia

years and was hailed as the tallest building in the world when it was completed in 1901, with a statue of Penn adorning its summit. After its height was surpassed by other buildings around the globe, by local custom City Hall remained Philadelphia's tallest structure (Figure 2.2), even dwarfing the major PSFS bank building (now converted to a hotel), which was opened in the 1930s as a symbol of economic power. This situation lasted until the 1980s, when City Hall was finally eclipsed by a new series of office buildings commissioned by the mayor, who was very eager to develop the town's commercial resources and felt it was high time that the unwritten law restricting development be broken.

On the Periphery

A distinction from the typical Western pattern is that the planning of Tokyo, based on the principles of Chinese feng shui, highlighted the importance of the corners of the city just as much as its hidden center. Jinnai comments:

As the city expanded, the cultural and amusement areas were uprooted, not only from the political and economic center but also from the daily life spaces of the city dwellers, and moved to the outskirts, where nature was plentiful and an atmosphere of freedom flourished. In contrast to the centripetal structure of European cities, which were integrated around a walled, symbolic center, Edo developed centrifugally so that the concentrations of energy, where residents gathered, drifted toward the fringes. To some extent, of course, *bakufu* policy was responsible for this, but it might be regarded as a tendency, intrinsic to

Japanese urban culture, to differentiate spatially between the everyday and the extraordinary.¹⁸

The northeast corridor of Tokyo was established with Buddhist temples in order to subdue the vulnerable demon's gate, where, according to the principles of feng shui, incorporated into Japanese yin-yang practices (*onmyōdō*), intrusion, malady, and misfortune would likely enter into an environment through the power of malevolent spirits, thus requiring a sacred site to provide purification. Kyoto was purposefully situated by its original city planners in a valley with the auspicious natural sites of Mount Hiei and Lake Biwa, located to the northeast, in order to offer spiritual protection. Mount Hiei became the site of Enryakuji and other temples and shrines primarily of the Tendai sect, which guarded the capital city and its rulers. In Edo, hilly Ueno with Lake Shinobazu and the Tendai temple of Kan'eiji, along with Asakusa's large Tendai site, Sensōji, performed a comparable protective function.

The shogun decided to use the demon's gate area as the location for all elements of society he considered unworthy of abiding in the inner domain of the High City, ranging from the commerce and trade of merchants to entertainment and prostitution, as well as execution grounds and burial mounds. In spite—or perhaps because—of the pervasive presence of various kinds of impurity in this area, hundreds of temples were built to provide mortuary rites. These sites represented an opportunity for relief and release, creating a unique ambience that was in part secular, in that the sites represented a place to congregate and mingle as a refuge from daily activity, and in part sacred because of the ritual functions they undertook in an effort to cleanse defilement.

Another example of the interfusion of sacrality and secularity in the northeast sector is Kaminarimon, or Thunder Gate, which stands at the entrance to the expansive Sensōji compound. Even though it has been rebuilt in recent decades, Kaminarimon still exhibits a dramatic, other-worldly façade in addition to serving as an entry to the temple and its holy environs, where devotees stand next to a huge incense burner and try to coat themselves with its smoke and aroma, as well as to leisure, commercial, and sensual pursuits in Asakusa, where pornographic theaters today stand next to shops that make handcrafted omikoshi shrines. This atmosphere inspired a famous haiku verse by Bashō, who, while listening from his abode in Fukugawa, a more southerly segment of Shitamachi, was intrigued by the sound of temple bells. The pealing of the bells served not only as ritual objects signaling ceremonial occasions but also as clocks by announcing the time of the day for general citizens.

In 1666 the poet wrote: "Cloud of blossoms—| Is that the bell from Ueno | or Asakusa? (*hana no kumo | kane wa Ueno ka | Asakusa ka*)."¹⁹

The residents of Edo-period Shitamachi included members of the three lower castes, or the peasants, artisans, and merchants. In the increasingly developed urban setting, as farmlands on the periphery quickly began to disappear, peasants who moved to the city often tried to go beneath their class status in order to gain social mobility. The shogunate considered farmers, who worked the land, more prestigious than artisans and merchants, who handled currency, but it was these groups that thrived economically and became collectively known as townsmen (*chōnin*). The skilled workers or craftsmen, who produced objects desired by the samurai, and entrepreneurial businessmen, who opened shops and other distribution networks, continued to gain financial strength and, thereby, social status during the course of the Edo period. Although their Low City homes were smaller and less spread apart than the estates of the daimyō in the High City, the townsmen were able to master new levels of economic growth and exhibit a significant degree of upward social movement.

Floating World

During the Edo period, the samurai were ever seeking pleasures that were forbidden in Yamanote by sumptuary laws and therefore offered only, sometimes legally and sometimes surreptitiously, in the off-limits district of the "floating world" (*ukiyo*), or the demimonde of Shitamachi. In addition to townsmen, the Low City was districted by authorities to contain other kinds of professional and social activities considered by the shogunate to be outside of the mainstream and alien to the interests and welfare of the general populace, yet necessary for society to endure. This included performers offering illicit gratification ranging from the occupants in the licensed quarters of the Yoshiwara to itinerant entertainers and Kabuki actors. Their ongoing nighttime activities marked Shitamachi as a wicked place (*akubasho*), or a taboo realm of impurity that was especially attractive to the samurai, who, no longer allowed to engage in swordsmanship or other forms of fighting in the peaceful days enforced by the velvet tyranny of the shogunate, had leisure time on their hands and an insatiable appetite for enjoyment.

An endless flow of samurai disguised their identity in the demimonde by wearing masks and hiding their topknots and swords. However, the warriors, who collected rice as payment from peasants working on their manors, were prohibited from handling cash, which was needed to acquire pleasures,

because it was considered impure and beneath their status. Many members of the samurai class became increasingly indebted to innovative members of the so-called underclass of merchants, who not only produced goods and products but also in many cases lent the warriors huge sums of funds that enabled them to complete the acquisitions of what they desired. Because they offered forbidden pleasures patronized by warriors, the townsmen “were well placed to take advantage of this samurai taste for luxuries. . . . Buoyed by the support of wealthy chōnin [who managed the city’s financial institutions and growing markets], both the Yoshiwara prostitution and the theater district—allowed to exist because the shogun recognized that people needed emotional release through artistry and sensuality—and reached their zenith as the two great central fixtures of Edo culture.”²⁰

The history of the Tokugawa era leading up to the rise of modernization was to a large extent marked by the extended decline of the overly refined samurai, who expended their resources unproductively while relying on an obsolete sense of elitism and privilege. Over the decades, the samurai were often cut off from resources and support and for various reasons drifted into the no-man’s-land status of the leaderless warrior, or *rōnin*, which literally means “wave person.” The era was also marked by the ascent of the merchants, who became the dominant power in society and in the Meiji era eagerly embraced modernity because it confirmed and greatly enhanced their approach to commercial growth. The eventual demise of the samurai class within a couple of decades after the arrival of Commodore Perry’s black ships in the early 1860s was inevitable, although many warriors managed to retool and reinvent themselves successfully in the new social conditions of industrialization by joining forces with the entrepreneurs. A prime example of the transition of warriors to merchants originating in the Edo period is the case of the Mitsui Company, originally a samurai clan that became one of the giant *zaibatsu*, or corporate conglomerates that dominated the Japanese economy before WWII.

At the same time that it offered excitement and appealed to sensual desires, Shitamachi was a melancholy place where the downtrodden and dispossessed dwelled, whether it be geisha who died in their teens of venereal disease or members of the outcast community, condemned to victimization and poverty through a life of social exclusion and invisibility. This group, once referred to by the derogative *eta-hinin* (filthy and nonhuman), was designated *burakumin* (literally, “village people”) in the Meiji era, when legislation outlawing discrimination was passed in the 1870s. Marginal and exacerbated people were treated inequitably by the harsh shogunal authoritarian regime, not par-

ticularly known for practicing human rights, although the *bakufu* (shogunate) acknowledged the need to allow some behavioral leeway since repression could foster rebellion. Furthermore, in Shitamachi the elements of death and dying were prominent. Situated there were the official execution grounds and the notorious Bridge of Tears (Namidabashi), which prisoners were forced to cross en route to their capital punishment while well wishers were left behind to bid farewell and grieve; the district also contained crematoria and cemeteries for disposing of the bodies of the deceased, considered impure and taboo.

Many Buddhist temples were located in Shitamachi. These were populated with priests who performed rites of passage for the spirits of the dead. Priests were considered irregular members of what was an essentially Confucian-oriented society that stressed family values, as well as the power and refinement of class status based on education in language and the fine or literary arts; these key factors sustained the social hierarchy.²¹ The clerics of the Low City served in the midst of the realm of impurity to help purify and preserve the spiritual status of the departed by providing a proper Buddhist funeral, which was delivered on behalf of the soul of the deceased regardless of social status or the cause of death. Itinerant preachers often engaged in oral storytelling or streetside dramatic recitations of morality tales as a persuasive way of evangelizing. These recitations tended to blame a person’s problems not on personal flaws but on the ability of demons to possess and corrupt those who were vulnerable to seduction or betrayal due to ethical lapses, such as considering a path of disloyalty to one’s wife or warlord.

Priests also claimed to be able to produce the magical effect of exorcism in order to rid one’s spirit, even after death, of spiritual intrusion and restore purity to the soul, which sought to reside in the realm of the ancestors. This approach resonates with the Japanese worldview shown in Noh theater and other cultural expressions, which indicates that one must experience the depths and agonies of hell so as to claim the heights and benefits of heavenly reward. According to this perspective, wickedness or evil itself is not spiritually lethal but can paradoxically serve as the gateway to nirvana (*aku soku nehan*). According to a famous dictum by celebrated iconoclastic Zen poet Ikkyū, who regularly and purposefully bypassed the Buddhist precepts to pursue enlightenment through a life of transgressions, including illicit love affairs, “Entering into the realm of the buddhas is easy, but entering into the realm of the demons is difficult.”

Therefore, funerary rituals were necessary to create an avenue toward redemption for those who struggled mightily with temptation and sin but

were condemned to a life of suffering due to an unjust and corrupt social system. In the Low City, long-standing associations with misfortune and death, which involved karmic retribution and were accompanied by cleansing and spiritual attainment through Buddhist rites offered by the multitude of Shitamachi priests, helped to cause the multitude of butsudā shops to be located in Inarichō. The altars and implements provided by these stores served as a vehicle for facilitating rites of repentance offered by the living, who hoped to attain spiritual release and redemption for the deceased next of kin.

Disorderly Order versus Orderly Disorder

Based on a complex social history, a twofold level of approach/attraction and avoidance/repulsion functioning both within the Shitamachi and Yamanote districts, respectively, and in terms of the interrelations has long existed between the two main districts of the shogun's city. Inside the world of the Low City, which housed hundreds of temples alongside the Yoshiwara district, which originally was walled off to disallow traffic, a creative tension prevailed between the sacred and the secular, "religion and the sensual,"²² or "prayer and play," to cite Nam-lin Hur's work on the role of the Sensōji temple dedicated to Kannon in Asakusa, where these oppositions were interwoven in multifaceted ways.²³ As Hur says of its contradictory aspects of purity and impurity:

Sensōji developed into a remarkably large, diversified temple ground which became a place for *taberu* (eating), *kau* (buying), *miru* (watching), and, eventually, *asobu* (playing). Visitors to Sensōji were fascinated by the abundant choices of pastimes, which ranged from street markets, noodle shops, restaurants, storytelling halls, theaters, circuses and other street arts, and archery halls to the attractions of toothpick shops and teahouses.²⁴

As a complement to secular delights, Sensōji's Buddhist halls provided a cornucopia of religious offerings, and a towering pagoda enabled one to worship all kinds of Buddhist deities, including Jizō, Fudō, Yakushi, Fugen, Benzaiten, Enma, and Seishi, in addition to Kannon. Sensōji also hosted Shintō branch deities invited from the Fushimi Inari, Kumano, Atago, and Tenmangu shrines and became a center of local pilgrimage for the cult of Shichifukujin (Seven Gods of Happiness).²⁵ Despite its festive, celebratory atmosphere, Sensōji, in addition to other temples in Shitamachi, was also very much involved in catering to the mortuary needs of geishas, outcasts, criminals, and the

executed, whose spirits would otherwise have been neglected and might have been able to haunt those who had caused their suffering. This created a melancholy atmosphere of resignation toward inevitable decline and decay, which was somehow tempered by a sense of compassion and an appreciation of the value of the souls of the downtrodden.

In the Low City the basic polarity between the forces of sensual and artistic pleasure, or Eros and aestheticism, in creating a carnivalesque atmosphere that sometimes led to gluttony and spectacle, and the forces of regret and repentance, or Thanatos and asceticism, in fostering a heightened sense of remorse that sometimes led to disillusion, reclusion and shame, was mirrored by comparable conceptual polarities taking place inside the High City. The main polarity in Yamanote involved the tension between success and failure, or the prosperity, prestige, power, and the finer things of an elitist life and the price that had to be paid for regulating social hierarchy, which was an overly strict and frequently harsh sense of order and control enforced by the authoritarian Tokugawa regime.

To a large extent, the Edo period's sense of the High City's being held under a powerful command has endured in the modern era due to the power exerted throughout the twentieth century by the successive forces of Meiji nationalism, prewar militarism, and postwar corporatism. However, even during the early modern period, a sense of social order frequently broke down precisely because the regime simply could not prevent its elite members from succumbing to the appeal that the illicit gratification of Shitamachi offered. For the samurai, whom philosophers encouraged to develop a refined sense of self-cultivation but nonetheless felt constrained and unfulfilled in their daily existence, the anxiety caused by the polarity between order and disorder often led to an unchecked impulse for self-destructive pursuits in seeking out the contradictory, forbidden interplay of Eros and Thanatos in the pleasure quarters.

Structure and Antistructure

Therefore, the polarization between activities in Yamanote and Shitamachi involved a conflict between forces of structure and antistructure, authority and irregularity, or rectitude and transgression. In Japanese culture, these sorts of divergences are generally encompassed by the terms *tatemae* (face) and *honne* (true feeling), or *ura* (front) and *omote* (back), which imply that every coin has two sides, Janus-like, and that the face that one shows to the world may be at odds with inner feelings that remain hidden from view but

consume a person's heart and mind. Depending on the particular situation and parties involved, one may experience either an overwhelming feeling of fundamental contradiction between outer expression and inner feelings or a joyous sense of harmonious complementarity reconciling these dimensions.

In this sociocultural context, Yamanote represented a realm of disorderly order in that it was basically a place of structure yet harbored inherent anti-structure for those who tried to break free of its confinement despite all of the restrictions and precautions taken by the regime to prevent disorderliness from breaking out. Shitamachi, on the other hand, was exemplary of orderly disorder in that it was at heart a place of antistructure that held its own brand of organization for those who tried to take advantage of either spiritual or sensual offerings found within its confines. People who thrived on their cultivation of *en*, relations or substantial social connections and associations, which primarily benefited the citizens of the High City, suffered (or in some cases were redeemed) when they entered the perplexing domain of *muen*, a state without relations or the arena of tragic disconnections, which primarily took place in and around the Low City.

In other words, while the behavioral trends in each of the two main urban realms encompassed their opposite side or inversion of attitudes, in considering the relation between High and Low cities, there was also a basic contradiction. Yamanote served primarily as the domain of *giri* (duty, obligation, or responsibility) in terms of upholding a fundamental commitment to obeying and preserving social hierarchy and class distinctions. People knew their place and acted in accordance with expectations and requirements. Shitamachi, on the other hand, represented the realm of *ninjō* (human emotions, love, or passion), where people often visited from Yamanote in the pursuit of freedom and fulfillment. This reflected a deep longing that often led to transgressing the societal order by trying to override class and resulted in punishment or retribution.

As Table 2.1 indicates, when viewing the relation between the two districts of Tokyo in terms of their respective emphases on particular social classes and religious worldviews, we find that a sense of the mutual attraction-repulsion of mirror-opposite behavioral ideals functions at each and every discursive level. Contradictory elements continually interact at the cultural crossroads, where the upstanding citizens of Yamanote seek to enter the so-called wicked place of the floating world, for which Sensōji's Kaminarimon has long functioned as the symbolic gateway, in order to find sensual pleasure, as well as sacred respite from the constraints and restrictions of life in the High City.

Table 2.1 High City vs. Low City

Yamanote	Shitamachi
Tatemae/Ura	Honne/Omote
<i>Society</i>	
shogun	chōnin
daimyō	entertainers
samurai	itinerant priests
rōnin	Eta-hinin
<i>Religion</i>	
Shinto	Buddhism
giri	ninjō
life	death
en	muen

The polarity leading to a somewhat hopeless sense of contradiction and conflict between *ninjō* and *giri* is epitomized by double suicide or love suicide (*shinjū*, literally, "within the heart") theatrical dramas, in which a samurai who has fallen in love with an outcast geisha must choose between his responsibilities to family and society and his passion for a forbidden lover. Such samurai often suffered the humiliation of being unable to afford to buy out their romantic partner's contract from a merchant, who was their wealthy "inferior" on the social ladder; in that polygamy was not necessarily restricted, the transgression was more a matter of loss of face than immorality. According to the *bunraku*, or puppet theater, Romeo and Juliet-like tragedies written and staged in the early eighteenth century by famed playwright Chikamatsu, who is considered Japan's Shakespeare because he also penned historical epochs, taking one's life with honor in the hope of attaining eternal redemption in the land of the Buddha was the only admirable reprieve for those who were so oppressed by excessive social order that they could not help but give in to an excessive manner of disorderliness.

This form of taking one's life in order to redeem transgression complemented *seppuku*, or ritual suicide, which occurred out of a samurai's sense of dishonor based on betraying rather than fulfilling his loyalty to his challenged or slain warlord. While both types of suicide represented a concern for shaming those left behind, double suicide also held the promise of attaining buddhahood and eternal spiritual rebirth on an eternal lotus blossom in Buddhist

paradise by reciting the *nembutsu* chant (Namu Amida Butsu) at the time of death and receiving the saving grace of Amida Buddha. Yet, even though this act generally included an acknowledgement of the need for expressing respect and a sense of responsibility for the warrior's jilted wife and disrespected family, double suicide was construed by the shogunate as an antiauthoritarian thumbing of the nose at its enforcement of hierarchical order while proclaiming the merits of an alternative lifestyle (or, ironically, way of dying). As a result, the performance of Chikamatsu's plays was restricted or even banned during the Edo period.

With the rise in the popularity of various forms of suicide, ritual death for misbegotten or bereaved lovers or for wayward warriors, as well as the unfortunate demise through execution of those accused of insubordination or disloyalty, occurred when the social, financial, and legal pressures exerted at the proverbial crossroads between the High and the Low City—or the realms of maintaining social connections and giving into a life of disconnections—became unsustainable. However, the situation in Tokyo was not always so bleak since the gap between Yamanote and Shitamachi often resulted in a harmonious interplay of opposites that was celebrated in festivals, performances, and many other examples of productive cultural interaction through communal activities shared by citizens of both districts.

Tokyo Rising or Setting?

Although the original city planning was rooted in Edo-period political and economic objectives, the polarity between High City and Low City has been readily adapted to modernization and continues to govern and greatly affect nearly all aspects of Tokyo's current development and social functions, including the role of sacred spaces and their interplay with an otherwise increasingly secularized world. This is because the urban divisions, as initially created, retain a remarkably fluid and flexible ability to adapt and adjust to ever-changing circumstances, particularly the transition from a warrior society, where commerce was frowned upon, to a vigorous commercial enterprise, referred to at the peak of the postwar economic miracle as "Japan, Inc."

According to famed architect Yoshinobu Ashihara's notion of "the hidden order" underlying the labyrinthine construction of the "amoeba city... with its amorphous sprawl and the constant change it undergoes, [Tokyo is] like the pulsating body of the organism. And as with an amoeba, Tokyo demonstrates a physical integrity and the capacity for regeneration when damaged.

Whether the amoeba city is good or bad, it does persevere."²⁶ Furthermore, Ashihara argues, the nature of the city is reflected in the structure of its dwellings. Inside traditional Japanese houses, "permanently installed dividing walls were minimal, with most of the space portioned with sliding removable panels. This gave the interior space a singularly fluid quality and profoundly affected Japanese lifestyles and ways of thinking."²⁷ In addition, outside walls traditionally made of wood or paper slid open to allow easy access to the garden areas outside the main structure. The fluidity between the interior rooms, which helps connect inner and outer realms of the abode, symbolizes an ongoing and free-flowing, albeit contradictory, back-and-forth movement also found in the relation between the once lushly forested and watery realm of the High City and the flat, commercialized division of the Low City, as well as the conceptual, social, and cultural worlds each of the districts represents.

High City

Since the inception of the Meiji era, the Yamanote district has been able to maintain its prestigious status and assert itself as the center of political authority and commercial power, which is the main indicator of success and progress. The shogun's castle has been transformed into the imperial palace, and the elite class of samurai has more or less turned into white-collar professionals or blue-suited executives and salarymen, whose lives, both public and private, are now mainly dictated by the strict rules of corporate culture, with its relentless pursuit of high GNP, instead of a domineering and demanding warlord. The gates and bridges that served as openings and/or barriers for the hilly topography of Edo are still apparent in the transportation system of Tokyo; as noted, for example, the gateway to the Akasaka area is the Akasakamitsuke Station, located at what was once one of the lookouts for the shogun's inner dwelling place.

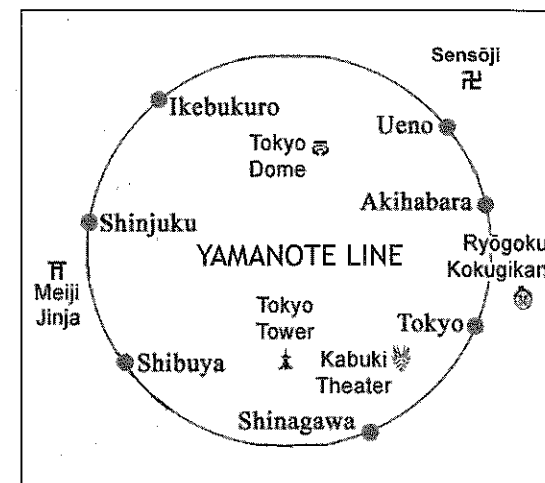
Many of the Yamanote neighborhoods, especially in the central area near the palace and Tokyo Station, exude a feeling of prosperity and sense of well-being even in the tougher postbubble economic times. The High City has been at the heart of international trends in fashion and etiquette, particularly in the areas near Harajuku and Aoyama in the southwest corridor. Harajuku ironically gains some of its luster not only because it is near the magnificent Meiji Jingu but also because it was an American colony during the period of occupation after WWII. The takeover lasted until 1963, when the nearby Yoyogi Park became a centerpiece for the Olympics, which were

held a year later. The train station at Harajuku still resembles a New England commuter stop. The promenade leading to the Meiji Jingu along a grand boulevard referred to as Omotesando (literally, “path leading to [a shrine]”) is as swanky as any elegant urban shopping district in the world today. In this vicinity, Aoyama nightlife has been at the core of recent influential literary styles, especially prominent novels in the 1980s by younger authors who documented a lifestyle of thrill seeking accompanied by existential despair.

The Yamanote railway system, the high-speed train line inaugurated in the late nineteenth century, conveniently connects all of the major areas of the High City while still demarcating a division with the Low City. The Yamanote Line has six major stations, including the following (see Map 2.3; stations are listed clockwise):²⁸

- Tokyo Station, Japan’s central train station with a nearby post office situated to the east of the palace and the Nihonbashi bridge, which in the Edo period allowed access to the castle grounds
- Shinagawa Station, gateway to the Shinkansen train line, which parallels the old Tokaido route leading to Tokyo from Kyoto and the western provinces (this was the pathway traveled by the daimyō, who were required to make regular visits to Edo)
- Shibuya Station, one of the primary entertainment districts, especially for the youth pop culture near Harajuku, and gateway to the western suburbs
- Shinjuku Station, with its relatively new city hall and other towering high-rise buildings, in addition to watch stores and entertainment areas
- Ikebukuro Station, a major shopping and commercial district that has been developed in the north-central area of the city
- Ueno Station, which houses a park, a zoo, and museums and also serves as the northeast sector’s gateway to Shitamachi

The complex web of social and commercial activities taking place in the vicinity of these stations, each of which has distinctive characteristics and its own kind of personality, indicates that the High City remains the vital core of the city. The stylized, iconic diagram of the Yamanote Line in Map 2.3, which is based on what is often found in various sources, including a pamphlet, a guidebook, and a subway ad that feature oval, rectangular, and circular shapes, transforms what is the much more irregular shape into a perfectly neat symmetrical design. Even though the main sacred sites such as Meiji Jingu and Sensōji stand outside the borders of the High City, temples and shrines abound throughout Yamanote neighborhoods and are keys to understanding the cultural functions of every one of these areas.



Yamanote Line as a Circle

MAP 2.3

Low City

The Edo period’s legacy and sense of social identity also continue to endure in contemporary Shitamachi, which offers sumo tournaments at the Kokugikan stadium, as well as the creations of craftspeople and artists near Sensōji as some of its major tourist attractions. Throughout the modern era, the Low City has been the residence of renowned literary and cultural figures. Its “who’s who” list of writers includes Mori Ōgai (who has a hotel named after him in Yanaka) and Okakura Tenshin (for whom there is a memorial park in Yanaka), in addition to Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, Kawabata Yasunari, Kōda Rohan, Mishima Yukio, Natsume Sōseki, Takamaki Jun, and Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, among many other illustrious names. The literary giants of Shitamachi also include a couple of writers who specialized in tales of the denizens of the Low City, Nagai Kafū, who wrote of the lives of outcasts, and Higuchi Ichiyō.

Higuchi, known as the “modern Murasaki” (author of the *Tale of Genji*), is considered the first prominent female author of the Meiji era. She turned down marriage and moved to Shitamachi in order to write novels and stories about the hardship of geishas in the Yoshiwara quarters. Higuchi became famous for her first novel, published at age twenty in 1892. “In a story called *Growing Up*, she describes the children who live in the shadow of the Five Streets and the festivals of the quarter—the annual summer carnival and the Tori no Ichi—and the gang fights of the children.”²⁹ However, Higuchi became ill and died tragically in her relative youth just a few years later. An Inari shrine and small

museum dedicated to her memory stand less than a mile north of Inarichō, and her visage has adorned the Japanese five-thousand-yen banknote.

The neighborhoods of Yanaka, Nezu, and Sendagi, near Nippori Station, north of Ueno, are particularly well known for art galleries and gardens, although these areas are now located inside the confines of the Yamanote train line in Bunkyo ward. Yanaka, which along with Aoyama, near Akasaka, houses one of the four largest cemeteries in Tokyo, is rich in Buddhist temples since many were moved into this area outside of the Yamanote district during the Edo period. This transition was first initiated after the widespread destruction caused by the Meireki fire of 1657, when temple buildings that were made of wood and susceptible to combustion were relocated from the heart of Edo to outlying areas. The dense cluster of Buddhist sites in the northeast sector helped to bolster the spiritual protection of the inner city from the supposedly deleterious effects of the demon's gate. Still known today as a temple town, Yanaka retains much of the old-world, artistic charm.

The Ya-Ne-Sen area, as Yanaka-Nezu-Sendagi is called by its inhabitants, is said to resemble the "the real Japan" of *Madame Butterfly*, one of the few areas in Tokyo that escaped the fire raids of 1945, and thus still has the traditional wood-frame buildings, some from the Meiji era, fine old houses with their gracefully weathered, broad semi-clapboard siding, each of which elegantly complements the vast Yanaka Cemetery and the brood of Buddhist temples that make Yanaka an enchanting borough of the past.³⁰ Here, the Shitamachi of old remains as compelling as it always was in preserving local customs, such as bon-odori dances, cherry-blossom-viewing parties, omiko-shi-carrying festivals, and rice-cake-making events. The area features many antiquated shops that sell traditional items, such as tofu, rice crackers, calligraphy brushes and paper, and bamboo ware nestled alongside izakaya restaurants, soba shops, and sentō (public baths), as well as shops that specialize in work shoes (*tabi*) and shirts. In addition, Yanaka houses the Okakura Tenshin Memorial Park, dedicated to the revered Meiji era intellectual who wrote the influential and still-popular *Book of Tea* in English in the early days of the twentieth century and also campaigned for pan-Asian unity (with Japan taking the lead). In addition, there are smaller museums showcasing tradition in their bronze figurines, calligraphy, and Edo utensils.

An interesting example of how the traditional gets linked to the modern is SCAI the Bathhouse, a contemporary art gallery since 1993, housed in an old, unassuming public bath facility—the 200-year-old Kashiwa-yu bathhouse once used by prominent authors who occupied Shitamachi, including Kawabata Yasunari and Ikenami Shotaro, among others. The structure's high

ceiling is ideally suited to exhibiting examples of art, while the façade, along with the roof tiles and chimney of the original building, remains for the most part unchanged from the time of their Edo heyday.

The traditional form of entertainment known as *rakugo*, a kind of improvised stand-up comedy with slapstick that draws on cultural humor or is a combination of comic storytelling and pantomime, in which the storyteller sits on a cushion and without any prop except his folding fan tells familiar stories and acts out common situations, can be still be found in Shitamachi and is performed extensively in clubs throughout Yanaka and Asakusa.³¹ This atmosphere is shown in Figure 2.3, which evokes a contemporary beatnik flair with a stylized pagoda depicted in the background. Near this street sign, a mechanical portable shrine graces the exterior of an office building and draws nearly as many admirers as a real festival procession, while a rickshaw man (another old-fashioned custom that is not an oddity in Shitamachi) advertises his services with his business card.

In many ways Shitamachi has thrived economically over the years—for example, the first subway line in Tokyo is the Ginza Line, which was originally built in 1927 to connect Ueno and Asakusa. However, much of the traditional atmosphere has gradually deteriorated as the area, which was rebuilt after the devastating effects of the 1923 earthquake and war bombing in the first half of the twentieth century, continues either to decline or to be gobbled up by urban development. The area also preserves the underside of Edo



FIGURE 2.3 "Rhythm & Jive" on "Beat Street"

culture, such as pornography as a legacy of Yoshiwara even after prostitution was outlawed in 1957, as well as the poverty and degradation of migrant workers and the homeless, who live in the wretched day-laborers' warren of San'ya.

The More Things Change...

In the past couple of decades, some commentators have expressed a sense of loss and nostalgia for the fading history and vanishing unique traits of Shitamachi. According to Edward Seidensticker's remarks in the foreword to a book on the history of Tokyo neighborhoods:

For all the newness of the surface, Tokyo goes on being a conservative city in ways that are important. Hilly Yamanote, to the south and west of the palace, has grown enormously in wealth and importance this last century. It quite overshadows flat Shitamachi, the plebeian eastern parts of the old city, which were the center of the pre-modern mercantile culture. Once the guardian and progenitor of the best in Edo, Shitamachi can scarcely be said to have a culture of its own these days... Yet it goes on being different from Yamanote, and the difference must be seen as a survival from an earlier day. Yamanote is by comparison chilly and scattered. Shitamachi is warmer, cozier, chummier.³²

Because of the efforts of Seidensticker and many others who have pointed out that Shitamachi is not just a place defined by geography or a physical border but also represents a state of mind, way of life, or cultural attitude, a sustained renewal of interest in salvaging the atmosphere and revitalizing the legacy of the Low City has recently been launched. Recovery efforts have led to the opening of several museums and the rezoning of the area around Sensōji so that it remains vital. In appreciation of the cultural heritage of the area, it is said of the third-generation resident of the area that he "displays a number of premodern qualities and thinks of himself as being open, generous, hot-tempered, quick-witted, inquisitive, generous, and quick to offend and quick to forgive. He is spontaneous and impulsive, both traits one does not associate with the modern Japanese."³³ These are qualities supposedly lacking in the more restrained behavior of the citizens of Yamanote and therefore in dire need of being salvaged.

However, the situation in Shitamachi remains fluid as social conditions are perpetually changing in contradictory ways. On the one hand, the price of

real estate is escalating, and signs of gentrification, including high-rises and highways trumpeted as "revitalization projects," intrude on (or enhance) the traditional cityscape. Even Minami Senjū Station, next to the old execution grounds, is experiencing an upscale development trend with the construction of new condominiums. At the same time, urban decay counters efforts to revive the past. A compelling counterpoint to the nostalgia expressed for lost Edo is the "gritty, firsthand account of life for day-laborers in Tokyo's shunned ghetto, San'ya," which is provided in the vivid yet despondent account by Edward Fowler in *San'ya Blues: Laboring Life in Contemporary Tokyo*.³⁴ Fowler's book demonstrates that there is no escaping the turmoil and challenges faced by the itinerant and homeless residents of San'ya, traditionally an area inhabited by the former outcast community, which is near the infamous Bridge of Tears (Figure 2.4). This designation still appears on street signs and represents an inverted gateway for the troubled and tormented that ironically reveals a kind of holiness or access to sacrality since there are several historically important temples in the area that once specialized in funerals for the downtrodden.

In recent years, with an increasing recognition of and concern for the tormented life of the homeless and decrepit migrant workers who fill the streets of San'ya, the local government has developed new policies and practices in an effort to provide at least temporary social service shelter centers as a halfway house and an avenue to return to mainstream society. One such site is the Taitōryō, which was constructed next to the famous Kan'eiji temple in Ueno Park, where there was some free space just to the other side of the Yamanote Line, although after a few years it was dismantled. However, as Tom Gill notes:

One of the Tokyo SSCs is Taitōryō, located very close to Ueno Park, facing the famous Kan'eiji temple. It has 104 beds and an annual budget of 180 million yen. There was powerful NIMBY opposition to opening the Centre. Consequently it has no nameplate to reveal its function, is surrounded by fences, and outside stairs are concealed behind plastic covers. As one of the staff dryly remarked, people do not want to be reminded of gloomy matters like homelessness when attending funerals at the temple.³⁵

This social pattern ensures that San'ya is still imbued with a muen focus, which complements the en focus that is evident in Ya-Ne-Sen. Not far from San'ya, several temples remain clustered between the Minami Senjū and Minowa

stations on the Hibaya Line, discussed in greater detail in chapter 4, which once offered respite for prostitutes and criminals who died prematurely, in large part due to living a life of submission or being perceived as insubordinate toward an unjust, authoritarian regime. At Enmeiji temple, built in the 1667 next to Kotsukappara, a statue of the Neckchop Jizō (Kubikiri Jizō), as seen as Figure 2.5, stands amid signs of modernization, as well as urban decay.³⁶ The 3.6-meter-high statue was erected in 1741, when it was the only consolation available to some of the more than two hundred thousand people who were condemned to execution between 1651 and the late 1800s and were not allowed to receive comfort from the clergy in their final moments before death. A large engraved stone in the foreground of the icon bears the cursive characters “Namu myōhō renga kyō” (Hail to the *Wondrous Lotus Sutra*), the main prayer of the Nichiren sect.

The prominence of death-related religious sites in Shitamachi contributes to a sense of preserving the past while revitalizing the present but without effacing the complexity and authenticity of the melancholy or the tragic as it stands contradictorily alongside the comic, transcendent, or life affirming. In this way, “The city is saved by the inner resilience and the hardened fatalism of its residents, their ability to sustain periods of almost Buddhistic non-attachment and an unshakeable optimism, the belief that a better world follows natural upon destruction.”³⁷



FIGURE 2.4 Sign at Intersection at the Bridge of Tears



FIGURE 2.5 “Neckchop Jizō” at Enmeiji Temple

NOTES

1. In a very different cultural context, this phrase was coined to characterize the existential painting *The Scream*; see Uwe M. Schneede, *Edvard Munch: The Early Masterpieces* (London: Schirmer Art Books, 1988).
2. Comparable examples abound; to name just a few: Izumo Taisha, the second most important shrine in the country, located in western Japan; Toshogu, the lavishly decorated shrine complex and Tokugawa mausoleum at Nikko, north of Tokyo; the Eiheiji temple, home of the Sōtō Zen sect, founded by Dōgen in the remote mountains of Fukui Province; the Itsukushima shrine in Miyajima, famous for its large torii gate standing in the sea part of each day until the land dries with the tide; and two of the Daibutsu, or Great Buddha statues, one of Vairocana at Tōdaiji temple in Nara, which originated in the eighth century, and the other of Amida at Kōtokuji temple in Kamakura, stemming from 1253.
3. Other, more minor examples in the West might include Salt Lake City, home to the Mormons, or Canterbury, which houses the main cathedral for the Anglican Church.
4. The central city of Kyoto contains the Heian shrine, which commemorates the origins of the imperial capital, the Tōji temple, founded by Kūkai, and the Honganji temples of the Jōdo shin sect. The peripheral areas include notable Zen temples Kinkakuji, Myōshinji, and Ryōanji to the northwest and Daitokuji in the north, as

well as the stilted pavilion of Kiyomizu temple on a lookout peak in the southeast and Sanjūsandendō temple and Fushimi Inari shrine in the south. The outlying districts include Enryakuji temple on Mount Hieizan, which serves as the protector of the demon's gate on the peak northwest of the city, and its rival, Onjōji, on the shores of Lake Biwa in the valley below. Other cultural highlights of Kyoto include the quaint cobblestone streets of the medieval Gion Corner area, which feed into the Yasaka Jinja at the gateway to Maruyama Park. The park houses what may be the world's largest cherry tree, which blossoms in April, auspiciously around the same time as the Buddha's birthday. Another highlight is the Philosopher's Walk, a picturesque path along a cherry tree-lined canal meandering through the base of the Higashiyama (eastern mountains) area from Nanzenji to Ginkakuji, two of the foremost Zen temples (the path was trod every day by renowned early twentieth-century philosopher Nishida Kitarō, who contemplated on the way to his office at Kyoto University).

5. Paul Waley, *Tokyo Now & Then: An Explorer's Guide* (New York: Weatherhill, 1984), p. 207; the caption reads, "Unlike some of the temples of Kyoto, Asakusa Kannon is very much a part of its city." Also, Edward Seidensticker comments that Asakusa is to Tokyo as "St. Paul's is to London, or Notre Dame to Paris," said American Orientalist W. E. Griffis in the late nineteenth century. It was a place that fascinated most foreigners, even Isabella Bird, who did not for the most part waver in her determination to find unbeaten tracks. Griffis was right, though Asakusa was more than a religious center—or rather it was a Japanese sort of religious center, one which welcomed pleasure to the sacred precincts"; in *Low City, High City* (Rutland, Vt.: Turtle, 1984), p. 207.
6. Kishino Seiryū, *Tokyo no otera/jinja: Nozo toki sampō* (Tokyo: Koseidō, 2008).
7. See Ian Reader and George J. Tanabe Jr., *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common: Religion of Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), pp. 247–249.
8. Hidenobu Jinnai, "The Spatial Structure of Edo," in *Tokugawa Japan: The Social and Economic Antecedents of Modern Japan*, eds. Chie Nakane and Shinzaburō Ōishi (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1995), p. 124.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
10. For the source of this see Akira Naito, *Edo: The City That Became Tokyo: An Illustrated History* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2003), pp. 34–35.
11. Paul Waley, *Tokyo: City of Stories* (New York: Weatherhill, 1991), p. 17.
12. Jinnai, "Spatial Structure of Edo," p. 124.
13. Those samurai who did not serve the shogun did not receive the honorific *o* before their name; see Jean Pearce, *Foot-Loose in Tokyo: The Curious Traveler's Guide to the 29 Stages of the Yamanote Line* (New York: Weatherhill, 1976), p. 37.
14. Roland Barthes, *The Empire of Signs* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).
15. Jinnai, "Spatial Structure of Edo," p. 131.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

17. See James L. McClain, John M. Merriman, and Ugawa Kaoru, eds., *Edo and Paris: Urban Life and the State in the Early Modern Era* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994).
18. Jinnai, "Spatial Structure of Edo," p. 137.
19. There were nine bells in Edo that were rung in *ittoki* intervals, or about every two hours according to modern timekeeping.
20. Masakatsu Gunji, "Kabuki and Its Social Background," in *Tokugawa Japan: The Social and Economic Antecedents of Modern Japan*, eds. Chie Nakane and Shinzaburō Ōishi (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1995), p. 205.
21. Buddhist clerics received education but renounced family life, yet often duplicated its relational structure in the brotherhood of the temple environment, or instead broke the precepts and married surreptitiously.
22. Jean Pearce, *More Foot-Loose in Tokyo: The Curious Traveler's Guide to Shitamachi and Narita* (New York: Weatherhill, 1984), p. 56.
23. Nam-lin Hur, *Prayer and Play in Late Tokugawa Japan: Asakusa Sensōji and Edo Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, Harvard University Press, 2000).
24. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
26. Yoshinobu Ashihara, *The Hidden Order: Tokyo through the Twentieth Century* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1989), p. 59.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.
28. The Map on the left side of the three includes two more stations on the Yamanote Line, Takadanobaba Station and Akihabara Station.
29. Waley, *Tokyo Now & Then*, p. 206.
30. Lawrence Rogers, ed. and trans., *Tokyo Stories: A Literary Stroll* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
31. Pearce, *More Foot-Loose in Tokyo*, pp. 61–62.
32. Edward Seidensticker, "Foreword," in Waley, *Tokyo Now & Then*, pp. x–xi.
33. Edward Seidensticker, "Foreword," in Pearce, *More Foot-Loose in Tokyo*, p. 7.
34. Edward Fowler, *San'ya Blues: Laboring Life in Contemporary Tokyo* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996); taken from the back cover blurb by the *Publisher's Weekly*.
35. Tom Gill, "Whose Problems? Japan's Homeless People as an Issue of Local and Central Governance," in *Contested Governance in Japan: Sites and Issues*, ed. Glenn D. Hook (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), p. 202.
36. There are other such statues in Japan constructed for occasions when Jizō came to the spiritual rescue of victims of war or violence. Also, Tokyo's other main execution ground was in Shinagawa.
37. Stephen Mansfield, *Tokyo: A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 254.