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Types of Spatial Structures

We now turn to examine landscapes as spaces composed of topographical features, to discover what sort of spaces exist, what the character and significance of each type of space are, and what constitutes the spatial structure of the spaces under consideration.

As Norberg-Schulz has pointed out, space exists on several different levels.¹ At the most intimate level comes the interior space of houses and other architecture. Next there is composite space—urban space, for example—formed by buildings and gardens or buildings and buildings. Determining the foundation for such space is landscape space, composed of elements in the natural terrain.

In the past, when human beings were enveloped by nature and subject to its whims, the character of the natural terrain played a decisive role in determining the spaces in which they lived. Even their religious beliefs were governed by the geographical features surrounding them, which overawed them and moved them to worshipful acts and attitudes.

But as man lost his religious feeling toward nature, as he acquired the power to change the natural features around him, he gradually ceased to take deep consideration of the terrain. In his cities houses were crowded together, superhuman structures were raised, and the environment was mechanized; the natural lay of the land was to all intents and purposes forgotten.² Insensitivity toward nature led to the deformation of nature.

Yet, though we have lost our deep regard for the terrain, it continues to exist as the ground on which our architectural contrivances are founded. It continues, as it were, to speak to us in terms having spatial significance. If we do not have the ears to hear, we shall doubtless go on despoiling and denuding the land on which we live.

In Japan, which is largely mountainous, the typical natural setting is likely to involve a wealth of variety—elevations and depressions,

winding contours, lakes, and forests. In contrast to great plains or deserts, such settings have great significance with respect to spatial composition. Instead of serving merely as the ground or backdrop for man's activities, they tend to function as spatial designs.

In discussing Japan's ancient shrines and temples, farming and fishing villages, or old imperial capitals, it is impossible to describe the spaces involved without reference to the natural terrain. The spatial composition of the Ise Shrine, for example, cannot be explained without taking the surrounding mountains and the Isuzu River into account, any more than Kyoto can be explained without mentioning the mountains on the east, west, and north, and the Kamo River.

In the ensuing pages, we shall deal with a number of landscape types that the Japanese of the past chose as living spaces—spaces where imperial capitals, Shinto shrines, Buddhist monasteries, burial mounds, or gardens were constructed. Our concern will focus on the spatial composition of the terrain and on its significance in the lives of the people. The aim is to discover just how the natural topographical features functioned as part of the spatial environment.

From documentary evidence and direct observation, we have abstracted seven classical types of landscape spaces, for which we have tried to analyze the compositional features and spatial elements:

1. The Akizushima-Yamato type. A valley is enclosed on all sides by green mountains rising in layers. In the valley is a broad, fertile meadow, watered by a clear stream. In Japanese mythology, Jimmu, the first emperor, carried out a military campaign to the east and established his capital in "a beautiful land, surrounded on all four sides by green mountains." Called Akizushima, this area represented a utopian ideal of the ancient Japanese. It was a haven protected from invasion by the mountains and suitable for the cultivation of rice in wet fields.

2. The eight-petal lotus blossom type. In the Womb Mandala, held in particularly high regard by Esoteric Buddhists, the Cosmic Buddha is seated on an eight-petal lotus blossom representing the womb of the universe. A number of Japanese Buddhist establishments are situated in highland valleys which, together with surrounding peaks, suggest the lotus blossom configuration. The great priest Kūkai (774–835) spoke of such a setting as a "secluded plain, surrounded by high peaks and untrod upon by man." The type differs from Akizushima-Yamato in that it is high in the mountains and remote from the everyday world.

3. The Mikumari Shrine type. A river or rivulet flows down through the mountains. At the point where water is first drawn off for use in the wet rice fields below, which normally coincides with the point where the steep slope of the mountains gives way to the gentler slope of foothills, there is a shrine to the god who distributes water. Fields spread out in the basin below in a relatively narrow meadow bordered on each side by mountains. The river divides the fields from the sacred ground occupied by the shrine. This is a classic Japanese image of a small farming community in the mountains, a type of landscape that to most Japanese seems familiar and nostalgic.

4. The secluded valley type. A river flows down through a narrow valley with relatively high mountains on either sides. The inner recesses form a secluded space, which is apt to have a mysterious, otherworldly atmosphere about it. In the past settings of this sort were often regarded as the home, or the approach to the home, of dead spirits.

5. The *zōfū-tokusui* type. The name signifies literally "storing-wind acquiring-water," and the concept, current among ancient Chinese and Japanese geomancers, was of a site where "the vital energy that flows throughout the earth is confined by water and not scattered by the wind." In practical terminology, this amounted to a plain with mountains on the north, hills to the east and west, and open land to the south, with rivers flowing down from northeast and northwest and converging south of the plain. The classic example in Japan is Kyoto, which was the nation's capital

from 794 to 1868, but the same pattern is found in many other Japanese settings. Geomancy aside, a site of this type has certain obvious advantages.

6. The sacred mountain type. A small mountain rising from a plain or projecting into it from a more distant mountain range was often regarded as sacred by the Japanese of the past. Since a mountain of this type can be seen from any point on the plain, it provides focus and order for the surrounding space.

7. The domain-viewing mountain type. As in the case of the sacred mountain type, a small mountain is situated near a plain or juts out into it from other mountains. The difference is that the sacred mountain type is looked up to as an object of worship, whereas the domain-viewing mountain serves as a vantage point from which to look down on the surroundings.

Japan has steep, rugged mountain ranges, down whose slopes run thousands of short, rapidly flowing streams. The roughly 30 percent of the country's area in which the people choose to live are the valleys, basins, and plains through which these waterways run. The characteristics of these flatlands form what the Japanese people regard as proper, or even ideal, places to live.

Our studies have led us to the discovery that the spatial patterns observed in such homelands can be grouped in a definite number of types. Among these the Akizushima-Yamato and eight-petal lotus blossom formations are more or less round basins surrounded by mountains, described in Japanese as tray lands (*bonchi*); the Mikumari Shrine and secluded valley settings are narrow valleys or gorges; the *zōfū-tokusui*, sacred mountain, and domain-viewing mountain terrains lie at points where basins or plains meet the skirts of mountains.

The significance and spatial composition of each of these types are discussed in the following chapters, and an attempt is made to analyze the environment created by each of them. These seven types are considered to be fundamental to the Japanese terrain. Nearly every topographical space in Japan is either a variation of one of these types or a combination of two or more of them.