

Japan-ness + Gaijin-ness: Critical Explorations in Culturally-Sensitive Holistic Design in Urban Tokyo

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Tokyo is the world's largest, utmost complex and arguably most livable city. With a metropolitan region housing more people than Canada, Tokyo proves enigmatic – despite overwhelming size it's walkable, attractive, resilient, safe + dynamic. As a living laboratory for study of Architecture, Planning and Urban Design, Tokyo is second to none. The present research, critically considering & imaginatively exploring pedagogy, culture and competency, focused on an annually-offered Japan-based innovative/immersive study abroad initiative for environmental design graduate students. Urban design is at the core of the three-month study abroad venture. Lying at the nexus of Architecture & Planning, Urban Design in this amazing city is rich, diverse, creative and highly successful. In a city with daunting complexity quality of life is astounding, richness of milieu is remarkable, and design boldness unparalleled. The term abroad is structured with two intertwined course offerings – design studio and urban theory class. Both studio and theory class engage in intense critical analysis of city and components. The three month period is organized into three related phases: Characterizing Tokyo; Urban Ideation, and Urban Design Intervention. Threading through of these aspects is overarching interest in urban typologies. Key to learning is development of self/world views, including sensitivities around Japan-ness (local) versus Gaijin-ness (foreign) perspectives on design. From a learning perspective few vehicles are as potent as study abroad. The research, focused on development/analysis of a Tokyo graduate studio, proffers an innovative model for studio-based education and offers lessons surrounding potent ways to prepare design students for the realities of more complex, demanding and internationally intertwined futures. The present paper is exploratory in intent and extent – it examines a unique study abroad venture and novel teaching approach that is in many ways speculative, preliminary, unconventional and provocative. The paper reveals key dimensions of pedagogy, encounter and education that open fascinating doors and call for richer and more rigorous study.

Keywords: Japan, architecture, planning, pedagogy, holism

INTRODUCTION

*"Major cities around the world today are caught up in intense and complex competition. The stakes in these processes of global inter-city interaction are extremely high."
Global Power City Index, Institute for Urban Strategies - Mori Memorial Foundation (2015)*

Education is a powerful vehicle across a spectrum of realms, subjects and possibilities. Professional education, and design education, assume unique spaces within the greater ethos of higher education. Certainly a chief role of higher education is to instill knowledge, while concurrently developing skills to translate said knowledge into action. However, a higher mission of higher education involves the cultivation of wisdom – that is, the coupling of head and heart – that empowers students to embrace a world in need with greater compassion, with heightened empathy, and with an ability to connect the pieces in potent + meaningful ways. Simply to educate around facts and figures is insufficient. Facts are commonly equated with truths. That said, facts shift based on the power of technology, the strength of instrumentation (e.g., seeing closer, reaching father) and the efficacy of prevailing theories. In other words, it is inappropriate to rely solely on conventional tools and accepted mindsets as the basis for educating a next generation of professionals, designers, leaders and citizens. Rather, given the turbulent times we live in, it seems essential to equip our students with unprecedented, unbridled and unlimited ways of seeing, thinking and acting. Without question design education stands apart in the landscape of higher education, in large measure through its adoption and adaptation of compelling studio methods. Also of note in higher education is the undeniable value of taking teaching and learning 'on the road' via study abroad initiatives. Removing students from the safe and at-times sanitized milieu of campuses and classrooms, and moving them into the in-situ unvarnished environments of foreign countries, cultures and contexts, proves transformative and profound. The present paper highlights research and practice aimed at aggressively colliding these two rich teaching and learning approaches – that is, studio education and study abroad. The theories, strategies,

pedagogy and practices deployed in the present project have been developed in partnership of the two authors – a lead instructor (Canadian-born, English mother-tongue), who is an experienced educator, architect, administrator and researcher together with a support instructor (Japan-born, Japanese mother-tongue), who is a seasoned artist, teacher and study abroad professional.

TERM ABROAD OVERVIEW

“Appropriate solutions to some of our most daunting problems will arise through the concerted efforts, open dialogue, and collective wisdom of the wide array of stakeholders, professionals, politicians, decision makers, and citizens (both engaged and disenfranchised) who have the will and wherewithal to make a difference and to make the world safer, healthier, and better. It seems vital for us to critically examine, and question, our belief systems and their connections to the ways we define, refine, and realize progress”. Sinclair, 2015, Cybernetics + Systems

Study abroad, as a pedagogical approach, is exciting, engaging and intensely educational. To extract a student from the often conservative confines of the campus, and to relocate the curriculum from the predictability of classrooms to the uncertainty of the field (often a world away) is often riveting and usually life-changing. In the eyes of the present researchers the more foreign the field (culture, landscapes, language, cuisine, costumes, etc.) the more effective the learning encounters, experiences and outcomes. For example, educating North American students within English speaking nations abroad, while unquestionably worthwhile, does not tend to have the same impacts (personal and professional) as immersing these same students in places where there is little that is familiar. While it is disconcerting for newcomers to struggle with new languages, customs and conditions, this struggle is fundamental to greater growth. Such growth is not merely about academic issues and book knowledge, but rather is enlarged to envelope qualities of tolerance, understanding, empathy and respect.

Research in the present Tokyo Study Abroad involves precedent examination of Western/Eastern exemplars, detailed case studies of Japanese projects, literature investigation on spectrum of topics, and ongoing design development, iteration, critique and refinement. A fundamental pedagogical objective was to cultivate/ensure an integrated, holistic (*sogoteki*) & balanced learning experience. Set within the context of professional graduate programs (Environmental Design), the Japan semester acknowledges outstanding opportunities presented for cultural exposure, local living and rich learning. While professional competencies are vital from a teaching vantage point, equally weighted are cultural qualities/nuances that define Japan through both historical & contemporary lenses. On the cultural side students encounter local festivals, food, communities and context. They partake in sumo, kabuki, zazen and other activities that inform daily life, influence values and inspire design. Structurally the interdisciplinary studio centered on an urban design project within greater Tokyo. Students, working in pairs, are given wide latitude concerning site, size and scale of design. Pedagogically this strategy is important – through a non-prescriptive approach students build upon their interests and are fueled by their passions. Projects range in scale from modest residential developments on small sites to kilometer-long infrastructure-heavy urban passageways. Housed in dramatic space in the Toranomon district of Tokyo, the studio is organized similar to a design practice, with regular office hours interspersed with field study, cultural activities, guest lectures, factory tours, government meetings and project visits. Critical reflection through the term permits real time adjustments/refinements to pedagogy. Sustainability, broadly defined, proves an underlying responsibility to all interventions.

Study abroad is not simply moving curriculum from one place to another, as is often mistakenly assumed by educators not familiar with the pedagogical potential and practices. Instead it is a deep reinterpretation of the curriculum with a novel society and fresh situation front-of-mind. It is not about imposing home values onto the new destination, but rather involves listening to and learning from the host nation. Study abroad, from an administrative perspective, involves a remarkable level of pre-trip preparation and yet demands a tremendous amount of improvisation, give & take and accommodation in the field. There are inevitable uncertainties at hand and unknowns at play – if the initiative is well-planned and the educators well-prepared, then levels of nimbleness, agility and resiliency will contribute to positive and profound outcomes despite any adjustments necessitated and shifts realized.

TEACHING + LEARNING IN NIPPON

“Emptiness does not merely imply simplicity of form, logical sophistication, and the like. Rather emptiness provides a space within which our imaginations can run free, vastly enriching our powers of perception and mutual comprehension.”
Kenya Hara, 2008, Shiro

The present study abroad venture, based in Tokyo, is offered annually to graduate students from Architecture + Planning, with a maximum cohort size of twenty. The program has been developed and is led by a professor of Architecture (former chair + former dean), working in concert with an accomplished study abroad professional with experience in many countries globally. The term in Tokyo includes two mandatory courses – an Urban Design Studio and an Urban Systems class. These two core offerings are tightly interlaced to ensure leveraged learning and optimization of effort, resources, time, etc. In addition to these required courses students typically pursue one or more directed study (independent explorations led by a

supervising faculty member), most often topically connected to the host country & culture. For example, a directed study course in Tokyo might examine uniquely Japanese approaches to space, design + meaning.

TOKYO

Tokyo was set at the main destination for the Asian study abroad trip due to a number of positive features of the municipality. Tokyo is the world's largest urban settlement. It is complex, rich, diverse from a design perspective and, from an institutional perspective, politically stable, well managed + personally safe.

The following quote (Sinclair, 2017) paints a colorful & convincing picture of the city:

"Tokyo is a remarkable urban conurbation, with intense population, compact development, extraordinary character and an exceptionally high quality of life. With an urban population exceeding that of Canada, the Tokyo Metropolitan Region embraces a rich array of features key to a well-crafted, well-designed and highly-functioning city. Tokyo is regularly acknowledged as a leading global city, with metrics underscoring rich amenities, walkable streets, diverse neighborhoods and extraordinary attention to design + planning. From a world-class multi-modal transportation system and vibrant mixed-use communities to pedestrian-oriented fabric and design innovations, Tokyo demonstrates how an urban centre can be colossal and complex while proving demonstrably dynamic, accessible and livable. For those looking from outside the city Tokyo proves a paradox – it is massive in size, and incomprehensible in scope while functioning at high levels, running smoothly and relatively free from serious problems. Amenity is high, crime is low, efficiency is unprecedented, design is pervasive and a sense of community is ubiquitous. Tokyo's success is in many regards without parallel. As an urban phenomenon it is worth critical examination, not only to cull out reasons for such achievement but also to better grasp the features and facets of the city than contribute to its Gestalt. In many regards Tokyo affords environmental design theoreticians and practitioners an outstanding exemplar for study, for experimentation, for inspiration and for best practices."

The following is a brief description of the present study abroad venture, provided by the lead instructor to potential students in the recruitment phase. "Japan is a nation rich in history, steeped in tradition, complex in character and innovative in design. For a full semester, three months of immersion, will be exploring architecture, planning and urban design, both historical and contemporary, across all corners of the dynamic & robust greater Tokyo Metropolitan area. Our travels will take us from monumental sacred sites such as Meiji Shrine + Asakusa to the dominant grounds and structures of the Imperial Palace. We will be visiting iconic buildings of seminal Modern architects such as Tange, Maki, Isozaki, Ando and Kurokawa as well as touring works of leading cutting-edge contemporary designers such as Kuma, Ito, Ban, Yamanashi, Watanabe, Aoki and others. From fish & food markets to Buddhist temples & Shinto shrines we will be connecting to the essence of Japan. From the reclaimed lands of Tokyo Bay to the soaring towers of Roppongi Hills we will witness bold urban experiments that challenge the status quo. We will be connecting with leading Tokyo designers & planners with a goal to grasp the complexity, challenges, approaches and outcomes of the urban ethos. In addition to environmental design aspects, we will be encountering first hand Japan's extraordinary culture, sub-subcultures, spirituality, traditions, values, shopping, nightlife and, of course, cuisine. From sunrise to sunset, and well beyond, utilizing the region's unprecedented and dazzling multi-modal public transit system, our activities will introduce new experiences and novel encounters, serving to open eyes and minds to a very magical, mysterious, design-oriented + highly-functional society. From the centering of Zen and the discipline of the Art of Tea to the creativity of the Metabolists and the pulse of Harajuku our itinerary will be intensive & extensive. Kampai!"

PRIMARY PEDAGOGY

The approach to the Tokyo Study Abroad initiative was, first and foremost, directed at an intense immersive interdisciplinary collaborative enterprise. In Japan there is a term, '*sogoteki*', which captures the nature of the pedagogy deployed in this scheme. *Sogoteki* is a full and comprehensive way of tackling a problem or looking at a subject. It aims to collect all aspects into the equation, such as in this case teaching and learning. The present curriculum was fully contextualized within the unique environment of the city, considering such matters as historical, regulatory, geographical and cultural nuance. From a teaching and learning vantage point, the overseas term followed closely the philosophic posturing and practices of the lead instructor (i.e., first author). This original approach has been developed over many years of administrating and teaching in design schools in many jurisdictions, including the USA and Canada.

Teaching is a tremendous privilege that encompasses both opportunity and obligation. With regard to opportunity, an educator is afforded the chance to shape minds, incite passion, and build knowledge. With respect to obligation, and especially in light of today's perplexing problems, an educator has a deep responsibility to foster citizenship, encourage volunteerism, and aid in the development of values that can change our world for the better. Post-secondary education is complex, diverse and demanding. Shifting expectations, shrinking resources and a sense of urgency tend to move the academy in new directions. In such a milieu the importance of teaching effectiveness, innovation and creativity is underscored. Design education is somewhat unique in that it finds itself at the nexus of science, technologies, art and humanities. Designers speak of 'wicked' problems – those daunting challenges that are complicated and perplexing. Design, as both mindset and method, affords modern society with a very potent means of tackling such 'wicked' problems. In recent times universities, and the world beyond, have placed increasing emphasis on

the power of design, including paying closer attention to studio teaching as a model for education well beyond the borders of Architecture & Planning. The lead instructor's philosophy on teaching, and his pedagogical approach, while centered on design education in the primary instance, is relevant and applicable to many disciplines. His background is quite novel in that it spans from science (brain research) to arts (architectural design) -- building a strong knowledge base across disciplines as well as a deep appreciation for more inclusive & integrative ways of seeing, thinking and acting. His perspective is systems oriented, driven by an understanding of the need for more interdisciplinary means of coping with complexity and addressing contemporary challenges. Rather than building walls and containing fields the teaching approach pushes students to transcend conventional borders and to imagine in unknown directions.

Teaching Philosophy Components

To best convey the aforesaid philosophy of teaching four inter-related components are presented that together fuel and drive the pedagogical efforts: 1. Holism, 2. Balance, 3. Respect, 4. Community. The following sections delineate and elaborate on these notions.

1. Holism:

Having operated on both ends of the science-art spectrum, the lead instructor has come to realize that many modern problems have arisen through fragmentation, separation and isolation. The momentum for heightened specialization, in the academy and beyond, while understandable on some levels is also problematic on others. With regard to design education and studio teaching, a much more integrated, interdisciplinary and holistic approach is vital. This teaching approach strives to build in students a strong appreciation for the wide array of means and methods required to solve modern problems. This emphasis on systems thinking and holism is captured effectively in the lead instructor's "Holistic Framework for Design & Planning" (see Sinclair, 2009) which has been developed over many years of teaching, research, consulting and service. This model, which informs and inspires teaching efforts, comprises the inter-connected aspects of Agility, Fitness, Diversity and Delight. This approach stresses the need for designers (and students of design) to carefully attend to a series of key issues when problem solving. These issues reach from very technical and scientific features to more artistic and intuitive qualities. In the model all of the issues need to be addressed in the interests of arriving at optimal solutions. As part of the teaching philosophy this model fosters a much more complete consideration of the many variables acting upon a given situation and, in the end, leads to better considered and hopefully more appropriate solutions.

2. Balance

Related to the previously noted holistic framework, but in many ways residing above it, lies an intense belief in seeking and realizing balance and harmony in teaching. It is imperative to encourage broad engagement and inclusive learning within the classroom and studio. Balance is essential. Balance of the poetic with the pragmatic. Balance of telos and techno. Balance of research and design. Balance of analysis and synthesis. Balance of reason and intuition. Balance of thinking and feeling. As teachers we must not only impart knowledge but more critically must instill wisdom. Wisdom is the coupling of head and heart. Again a crucial balance, or harmony, must be sought and attained. In our modern world it is easy to be pulled into a level of specialization and segmentation that can be counter-productive to the needs at hand – for example, addressing endemic problems such as poverty, climate change and pollution. In order to cope with complexity, and especially within the ethos of design, many dots must be connected. CP Snow, in his 1957 essay entitled 'The Two Cultures', cautioned of the risks and perils of an increasing gap between the sciences and the humanities. In many ways Snow's forecasts have manifest, with many incomprehensible modern problems ushered in and amplified by such disjunction. A part of our role, as teachers, is to illuminate such issues and facilitate better understanding. With more comprehensive awareness of problems come greater possibilities for more enlightened, effective and appropriate paths forward. Balance and harmony are valuable pursuits to such ends.

3. Respect

A cornerstone of the lead instructor's teaching philosophy is the affording of respect. Respect is a very precious quality in our modern world – often lacking but always essential as pertains the rich relationships present in classrooms and studios. While the authority of the educator is an undeniable aspect of the teaching milieu, this in no way lessens the need for deep respect to be extended in both directions – teacher to students and students to teacher. In the study abroad venture the value of and need for respect is paramount. If students fail then the instructors too fail. If students succeed then that is indeed also the instructors' success. When respect is extended to students there are a wealth of benefits that follow, including greater motivation, more attention to outcomes, a more fulsome engagement in learning, and heightened esteem. Respect does not lessen the expectations and demands around performance – rather it builds a very strong bond between teacher and student that propels performance in critical directions. Related to respect are concepts of tolerance, mindfulness, charity and grace – which, while arguably seen as 'old-fashioned' in some circles, serve to motivate, guide and reward teaching activities. Also connected to this ingredient of respect is empathy – that is, the ability to see through the eyes of another. As a

psychologist the lead instructor endeavors to truly understand the individual journeys each student pursues. Such journeys have high and low points, opportunities and obstacles, nuance and spin that are individualistic and special. As teachers it is our job to endeavor to understand the unique needs and capabilities of students, and to adjust/temper efforts in ways that realize + optimize the potential of students.

4. Community

A final and essential aspect of the lead instructor's teaching philosophy is a commitment to engage community. While such engagement is beneficial for all disciplines in a university, it is essential for professional programs. Architecture and Environmental Design are fundamentally concerned with people and environments – as such it is vital to position design education within the realities of the marketplace. In attempting to understand design problems, and to find appropriate design solutions, students must truly grasp the many forces at play. Designers speak about zeitgeist, or the spirit of the times. Sustainability concerns dictate a solid knowledge of both local and global parameters, coupled with a profound commitment to place. In order to educate students in the most effective manner possible, it is valuable to take them into the city and bring the city to them. Such efforts manifest in an array of teaching/learning possibilities. To ensure balance in the teaching approach, an engagement with community ensures that book-learning is blended with street-smarts, that theory is countered with practice, and that academic perspectives are juxtaposed with business concerns. In pursuing Architecture & Design education, including through the vehicle of studio, grounding students in culture + context is rewarding, wise and responsible.

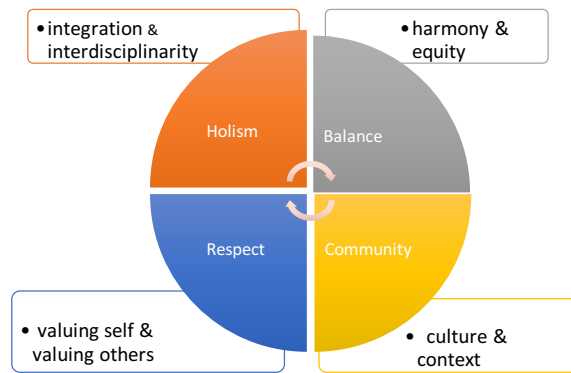


Figure 1: Sinclair Holistic + Tactical Pedagogy

It is very important to stress that the aforesaid dimensions of this teaching philosophy are highly inter-related and inter-dependent. In day-to-day work in classrooms and studios these dimensions need to be invoked both implicitly and explicitly. Effective and innovative teaching demands great vigilance, constant refinement, critical self-examination, and ongoing testing and verification of potency of methods. In keeping with a strong commitment to holism, balance, respect and community, teachers must constantly assume the role of the student. Teachers need to always be learning – this demands an open mind, abundance of energy, presence of humility, and an unswerving devotion to the well-being, progress & success of students.

STUDIO

DESIGN:

*To create, fashion, execute, or construct according to a plan.
To conceive and plan out in the mind; to have as a purpose; to devise for a specific function or end.
To indicate with a distinctive mark, sign or name.
To make a drawing, pattern or sketch.*

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (10th Edition)

Architecture, Planning and Urban Design are powerful and limitless vehicles for realizing positive change in our world. The disciplines of Environmental Design (e.g., Architecture, Planning, Landscape Architecture, Urban Design, Interior Design, Industrial Design, etc.) are increasingly focusing attention on the capacity and capability afforded through interdisciplinary practice and integrated design processes. Without question architecture, planning and urban design are potent forces that need to be understood, developed and deployed in our efforts to heighten the quality of life in our communities.

The world is now more urban than rural, with significant implications for the design disciplines. Coupled to growing urban realms is our increasing awareness of climate change and its many implications. Cities and buildings stand as major contributors to such phenomenon. However, they also loom as tremendous instruments to change directions. Architecture, Planning and Urban Design hold fundamental places in our society. Architects, Planners and Urbanists have real obligations and opportunities at the present juncture. "Urban Tokyo | Urban Typologies | Urban Design" (Tokyo Studio) presented us with a lens through which pressing dilemmas could be critically considered and meaningfully explored. Political dialogue, social change, intercultural sharing and 'seeing through the eyes of the other' all presented rich possibilities for

contemporary development, professional advancement and international harmony. A major objective of the present studio was to explore urban conditions, analyze urban dimensions and synthesize urban responses that, while proving professionally competent and viable, also pushed our understanding concerning the potential of architecture, urban design & planning to make a difference to a world in need. The studio project presented a unique opportunity to explore how planning, urban design and architecture serve as potent vehicles to acknowledge, reflect and celebrate the identity and culture of place while concurrently providing opportunities for understanding more universal concepts and constructs.

The interdisciplinary studio, based in Tokyo, intertwined cultural, spiritual, social and design experiences in the field with more time-honored studio-type learning. Each week the class was walking around the Tokyo metropolitan region, visiting projects, participating in events, working with local environmental design professionals, and critically considering the city, its districts and its buildings. A key goal was to take advantage of the 'city as laboratory' and to critically consider many aspects of architecture, urban design and planning that contribute to Tokyo's premier position as one of the planet's most intriguing, dynamic, pioneering, walk-able and livable urban centers.

Studio projects were conducted in small interdisciplinary teams. The studio focused on a single project over our time in Tokyo – namely "Urban Tokyo | Urban Typologies | Urban Design". In our time in Japan we moved from an open exploration of city and region, to a critical analysis of space delineation & utilization, through to the conceptual development and delineation of urban responses (that encompass the street, the landscape, the site, and the building).

TYPOLOGY:

*noun: typology; plural noun: typologies: * a classification according to general type, especially in archaeology, psychology, or the social sciences. * study or analysis using typology. * the study and interpretation of types and symbols Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (10th Edition)*

The Japan-based Senior Interdisciplinary Studio considered the rich, complex and multifarious urban realm of Tokyo – the planet's largest urban settlement. Students, working in teams of two were engaged in observation and study of the city's fabric, with an initial goal of gaining some familiarity and comfort with space and place. Following from this base overview, teams conducted more detailed analyses of selected areas of the metropolitan region, with a particular emphasis on districts and sites in proximity to major waterways and bodies (river, canal, lake, sea, etc.). Critical analyses, coupled with study of international precedents, revealed some common features and design dimensions that characterize 'typologies'. Some typologies reflected commonly accepted space/place types (e.g., streets, squares, parks, etc.) while others charted new ground. The objective of this analytical component of the studio was to gain, as a broader cohort comprising all teams, a deeper understanding of approaches to urban design and development in the greater Tokyo area. Building from this shared understanding, individual teams considered one or more interventions into the urban fabric, with a goal to synthesize, propose and delineate a conceptual urban design response. The intervention was not a detailed design of a building nor the shaping of a finite plan, but rather demanded a more holistic, creative, comprehensive and integrated urban design proposal that considered figure and ground, solid & void, streets, landscapes + buildings, and space & place at an preliminary conceptual levels. The urban design responses found a healthy balance of people/place, process/product, creativity/innovation, context/culture, integration/provocation and viability/ sustainability.

The emphasis of the Tokyo Studio was especially on the cultural, social and environmental (i.e. sustainability) potential of explorations and interventions of and in the urban fabric. The studio explored the relationships between the public realm, architectural form, compelling landscapes, cultural identity and sense of place. The basic curricular objectives incorporated a deep and meaningful exploration and analysis of the complex fabric of Tokyo as well as taking steps to develop one or more interventions that prove challenging, effectual, meaningful and appropriate. Consideration was given to user needs and human dimensions, including environmental perception, symbolism and meaning, ergonomics and adaptability, cultural sensitivity and place-making.

URBAN SYSTEMS

THEORY:

Analysis of a set of facts in their relation to one another. Abstract thought. Speculation. The general or abstract principles of a body of fact, a science or an art. Belief, policy or procedure proposed or followed as the basis of action. An ideal or hypothetical set of facts, principles or circumstances. A plausible or scientifically acceptable general principle or body of principles offered to explain phenomena. A hypothesis assumed for the sake of argument or investigation. An unproven assumption. A body of theorems presenting a precise systematic view of a subject. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (10th Edition)

Cities are complex phenomena that present remarkable opportunities, and daunting challenges, for an increasing percentage of our planet's population. Our world is now more urban than rural, a fact that warrants the attention of Environmental Designers and calls for sound and effective decision making in order to heighten our quality of life. Cities prove rich in amenity, diversity, composition and character. They concurrently pose unique obstacles concerning infrastructure, order, management and harmony.

The urban design theory course was intended to present an overview to theories, principles and practices in both an historical and contemporary sense. Being closely connected to and interwoven with the Tokyo Studio, the course aimed to support and reinforce encounters, explorations and experiences in Tokyo. Structurally the course included lectures, video-taped talks, office visits, project tours and field studies which illustrates and reinforced the interplay of theories and practices. Several assignments, coordinated with studio, examined, delineated and demonstrated urban design theory in play in the city.

The Asia study abroad initiative brought together Architecture and Planning students in a rich interdisciplinary milieu. Urban Design, residing at the nexus of Architecture and Planning, affords an extraordinary vehicle through which to investigate and understand the city. Through its dynamic and three-dimensional quality, urban design approaches vital questions concerning how we inhabit and utilize the spaces and places of urban settlement. It addresses the significant realm between buildings and considers how landscapes, built and natural, operate and contribute to the mix. The course bridged between the specific and the general – accepting that Environmental Designers need to focus on the competent execution of the particular while respecting broader systems. Consideration of scale and scope proved essential (e.g., the project), while simultaneously responding to the larger ethos (e.g., the neighborhood, the district, etc.). Subscription to holism and the pursuit of synergies were paramount.

SYSTEM:

A regularly interacting or interdependent group of items forming a unified whole. An organized set of doctrines, ideas or principles intended to explain the arrangement or working of a systematic whole. Organized or established procedure. Harmonious arrangement or pattern. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (10th Edition)

The Urban Design Theory course considered most notably the rich, complex and multifarious urban realm this remarkable city. Tokyo is an amazing city that needs to be understood on its own as well as in comparison to other urban centers. While on one hand there are common qualities that often shape, define and determine city form and function, on the other hand the unique dimensions of place, including geography, history, context and culture, serve to make indelible differences. We examined and explored Tokyo while critically considering analyses and understanding other cities (including selected examples from North America, Europe and elsewhere). Our studies of the city were manifold, looking into broader systems & assemblies while digging deeper into more tightly demarcated and nuanced precincts, projects & parameters. Aspects that were covered included urban evolution, urban culture, urban space, urban politics, urban planning, urban innovation and, crucially, urban place-making.

Urban Design Theory surveyed a fundamental base through which to approach analysis and synthesis, from an Environmental Design perspective, in the city. Our understanding of the principles and practices of Urban Design afforded us a potent lens through which we approached both problem-seeking and problem-solving. In the instance of Tokyo, especially considering its complexity and density, it was essential that we operated with sound strategy as we planned, designed, intervened, altered and inserted. The objectives of the course included:

- ✦ Develop the means, methods and mindset to critically consider, compare and evaluate cities.
- ✦ Develop knowledge and skills concerning the planning, design and development of urban space and form.
- ✦ Develop understanding of the historical evolution of cities, their present circumstances and their emerging trends.
- ✦ Develop the ability to be able to research, assess, interpret and advance dimensions of urban design of cities.
- ✦ Develop more interdisciplinary, imaginative + team-based approaches to research, planning, design & communication.
- ✦ Develop world & self-views concerning urban design and its potential impact on planning, design, people & place.

PEDAGOGICAL PUZZLE: ON THE GROUND ACTIVITIES

"Cities are made of scenes. Those scenes have a syntax." Urban Code, Mikoleit & Purckhauer (2011)

The approach to three months in Tokyo was divided logistically into three phases, roughly each a month in duration. The first month was dedicated to exploring the city, becoming familiarized with getting around, and coming to terms with being comfortable in a dauntingly and incomprehensibly complex metropolitan center. The second month was aimed at critically analyzing aspects of the city that proved of great interest and relevance to the design challenge of studio. The third, and final, month was focused on refinement and resolution of an urban intervention, including critical examination and rationalization of the project's 'Japan-ness'. While a fresh perspective (Gaijin-ness) was welcomed and appreciated by the hosts and reviewers, a need to connect meaningfully to place (i.e., Tokyo and Japan) was judged as non-negotiable. Over the three months in Tokyo the students met with government officials, sang karaoke, grasped Western influences, conversed with architects and planners, studied Zen meditation, attended Sumo matches, enjoyed university talks, watched Kabuki theatre, danced in street festivals, downed sake with locals, went on factory tours, heard from real estate experts, visited shrines & temples, struggled with Japanese language, explored iconic buildings, journeyed to distance towns, consumed novel cuisine, and generally worked, lived and played as residents. Formal school time was carefully managed, with the studio operating as a firm – with access provided only during proper business hours. Students typically had evenings and weekends free. Reviews were all scheduled away from our home studio, typically in dramatic spaces found

in unique areas around Tokyo. In many ways the three months abroad provided students with a special opportunity to complete a jigsaw puzzle – to slowly but surely put the pieces in place that would make sense of their new home, that would give meaning to their design efforts, and that would add immeasurably to their development as professionals and as people.

LESSONS LEARNED

"The Japanese society approaches much of life with a similar respect for space and a critical eye to efficiency. Take clothing, for example: kimonos are designed to be folded then stored flatly, tightly, and efficiently. The bento box for food is another example where the focus is on space: attention to delivery, designed presentation, concern for aesthetics, and no waste. Cemeteries are another example of high efficiency, effective use of room, and the appreciation for scale, mass, surface, and space. As regards design and space, Japanese culture so often places tremendous value on beautiful functionality, on quality, on keeping, on maintaining, on preserving, on innovating, and on appreciating."
Sinclair, 2015, *Cybernetics + Systems*

While the present paper conveys many rich and inter-related aspects of an environmental design study abroad venture located Asia, it is the pedagogy and the outcomes that warrant the most attention. In the eyes of the researchers, study abroad is tremendously valuable regardless of individual, major or destination. That said, the particular tactics for the venture described in the present paper stands unique in their aggressive reconsideration and imaginative re-conceptualization of study abroad in light of the peculiarities of Tokyo and the distinctive character of architecture and planning. Attending with resolve to the pursuit and attainment of Japan-ness, in both personal and professional ethos, is vital to the equation. Also foundational is the unswerving subscription to the Japanese notion of 'sogoteki', the inclusive, broad and comprehensive approach to teaching and learning. Many of the strategies and much of the posturing presented in the current paper, including the embrace of holism, balance, respect & community, prove relevant and applicable to study abroad more generally, and especially as pertains environmental design education.

CONCLUSIONS | IMPLICATIONS

"Nothing is harder, yet nothing is more necessary, than to speak of certain things whose existence is neither demonstrable nor probable. The very fact that serious and conscientious men treat them as existing things brings them a step closer to existence and to the possibility of being born." Hesse, *Glass Bead Game* (1972)

Study abroad proves a powerful and dramatic manifestation of teaching and learning within higher education. Taking students out of their zone of comfort, and immersing them in a totally unfamiliar realm, provides unparalleled chances for academic and personal development. With regard to Environmental Design education, few places on earth offer the design and construction potential of Tokyo. A city with a long-standing record of architectural innovation, design creativity and urban courage, Tokyo affords an extraordinary living laboratory for students to hone their skills, sharpen their minds and open their hearts. Deploying pedagogy developed by the first author, and reinforced through the cultural prowess of the second author, this collaborative study abroad initiative proved effective, efficient and meaningful across a spectrum of learning objectives. The deep embrace of 'sogoteki', or comprehensive problem-solving, was fundamental to the enterprise. A relentless commitment to seek understanding and demonstration of 'Japan-ness', coupled with an appreciation of Gaijin-ness, proved a hallmark of the study abroad venture. From the authors' perspectives minds were expanded, tolerance was fostered, respect was established and education was attained. Clearly and admittedly the work covered in the present paper is exploratory in character, initial in development and provocative in nature. Further research is needed, including methods that measure efficacy and assess impact, in order to advance the place, power and potential of such study abroad, and associated pedagogies, within the landscape of environmental design education.

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