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UNDERSTANDING TOKYO'S LAND USE

THE POWER OF MICROSPACES

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Abstract

This paper explains how history, economics, public policy, and culture have combined to make Tokyo a city full of microspaces and how those microspaces shape Tokyo's land use possibilities. Today's Tokyo is a "new" city, having been largely rebuilt from scratch after wartime devastation, and its land use is deeply shaped by that history. As for regulation, Japan's combination of hierarchical zoning and progressive taxation policies encourage an entirely different mix of land use in Tokyo's urban core than what is found in most American cities. Tokyo's postwar profusion of small landowners coexists in tension with its major corporate conglomerates, which combine real estate development with commuter railway infrastructure and consumer businesses on a scale unheard of in the United States. When ambiguities and disputes regarding land use arise, in practice they are mediated outside of courtrooms by local citizen-governance bodies and the powerful yet under-resourced Tokyo police, both of which play a unique role in these communities. By exploring these countervailing forces and explaining the mix of formal and informal actors shaping them, this paper aims to help policymakers, researchers, and activists in America's cities better understand what lessons can (and cannot) be drawn for American urban policy from Tokyo's microspaces.

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Understanding Tokyo's Land Use: The Power of Microspaces

Joseph McReynolds

Introduction

Tokyo is widely considered to be one of the world's best functioning metropolises. Thanks to its low crime rates, world-leading transportation network, and affordable rents, Japan's capital has consistently been ranked among the most livable cities worldwide, even through periods of economic crisis and natural disaster. For urbanists and travelers alike, Tokyo stands out as an aspirational ideal of what a city can be; its gleaming commercial cityscapes and its tranquil residential neighborhoods each inspire their own sense of wonder.

Despite the sheer scale of the city, Tokyo is striking for its profusion of intimate and idiosyncratic *microspaces*, ranging from tens of thousands of cozy microbars and restaurants to the tiny mom-and-pop shops that occupy the ground floors of many traditional houses. Some are as small as 5 square meters, little more than alcoves hidden in the recesses of Tokyo's larger urban environment. Many microspaces in Tokyo are commercial, but others are used as public or residential space—in fact, one of their fundamental characteristics is their flexibility, allowing them to be converted between uses with relative ease as time passes. Having so many microspaces across the city available at affordable rents enables a nearly limitless variety of highly personal and often experimental businesses that couldn't exist at larger scales, resulting in vibrant urban life that offers a stark contrast to the increasing homogenization and displacement seen in cities such as San Francisco and New York.[1]

[1] For a book-length treatment of New York's recent evolution, see Jeremiah Moss, *Vanishing New York: How a Great City Lost Its Soul* (New York City: Dey Street Books, 2017).

However, if one seeks to move beyond the awed gaze of the tourist and begin to treat Tokyo's microspaces as an object of study, asking pointed questions about why and how they exist, things quickly become trickier. Information about Tokyo's land use practices in English is limited, and the international press's reporting on the city is awash with orientalist stereotypes that treat the city as an outgrowth of ineffable Japanese cultural practices. This unfortunate state of affairs denies urban policy researchers an opportunity to draw lessons from what is arguably the world's premier megacity. Tokyo's urban development defies both easy categorization and the traditional battle lines of urban politics in America; by examining its microspaces, we can glimpse new and exciting possibilities for urban policy in our own local contexts.[2]

This paper aims to explain how history, economics, public policy, and culture have all combined to make Tokyo a city full of microspaces, as well as how those microspaces shape Tokyo's land use possibilities in turn.[3] Architecturally speaking, today's Tokyo is a "new" city, having been largely rebuilt from scratch after the devastation of World War II, and its land use is deeply shaped by that historical context. In some respects, Tokyo's resulting postwar development path has more in common with low-income informal neighborhoods in India or Nigeria than the global cities of America or Europe.[4] Meanwhile, in the realm of regulation, Japan's combination of hierarchical zoning and progressive taxation policies encourages an

[2] A brief methodological note: much of the research for this paper is contained in our laboratory's new book, Jorge Almazán, Joe McReynolds, and Naoki Saito, *Emergent Tokyo: Designing the Spontaneous City* (Novato, CA: Oro Editions, 2022), and our research methodology includes everything from extensive fieldwork to reviews of Japanese urbanist literature and Tokyo Metropolitan Government official records. The graphics in this paper were generated largely using geospatial land use data supplied directly to the laboratory by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, which were then combined with architectural surveys.

[3] One common question that arises is whether Tokyo is unique within Japan. In short: some, but not all, of the causal factors discussed here are also present in other Japanese cities, "Tokyo urbanism" and "Japanese urbanism" are overlapping but distinct ideas, and hard boundaries are difficult to draw. At any rate, this paper is concerned specifically with understanding Tokyo, rather than with Japanese urban policy writ large.

[4] Matias Echanove and Rahul Srivastava, "When Tokyo Was a Slum," Rockefeller Foundation's *Informal City Dialogues*, August 1, 2013, https://nextcity.org/informalcity/entry/when-tokyo-was-a-slum.

entirely different mix of land use in Tokyo's urban core than what is found in most American cities.[5] The city's postwar tradition of small landowners coexists in tension with its major corporate conglomerates, which operate the majority of the city's commuter railway lines. Far from sticking to transport, their modus operandi combines real estate development with railway infrastructure and consumer businesses on a scale unheard of in the United States.[6] And when ambiguities and disputes regarding land use arise, in practice they are mediated outside of courtrooms by both local citizen-governance bodies and the powerful yet under-resourced Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department, an arrangement that reflects the unique role that local police play in Tokyo communities.[7]

By exploring these countervailing forces and explaining the mix of formal and informal actors that shape them, we hope to help policymakers, researchers, and activists in America's cities better understand what lessons can (and cannot) be drawn for American urban policy from Tokyo's microspaces. Some aspects of Tokyo's approach to land use could be transplanted wholesale to American cities with obvious benefits, if only the political will existed; others would be nearly impossible to replicate outside of their original context. Nevertheless, such possibilities can only be explored if America's urbanists have concrete information about Tokyo to compare and contrast with their own local situations.

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[5] For zoning, see Japan International Cooperation Agency, *Urban Planning System in Japan*, 2nd ed., March 2007, 20, https://moc.gov.vn/Images/editor/files/Trunghan/2020/Urban%20Planning%20System%20in%20Japan_EN.pdf. For inheritance tax policy, see National Tax Agency, *The Trajectory of Inheritance Tax Policy Over 100 Years*, April 2005, https://www.nta.go.jp/about/organization/ntc/kenkyu/backnumber/journal/01/pdf/03.pdf (in Japanese).

[6] Takahiko Saito, "Japanese Private Railway Companies and Their Business Diversification," *Japan Railway & Transport Review* (January 1997): 2–9, https://www.ejrcf.or.jp/jrtr/jrtr10/pdf/f02_sai.pdf.

[7] For more information, see Frank Leishman, "Koban: Neighbourhood Policing in Contemporary Japan," *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice* 1 no. 2 (2007): 196−202, https://academic.oup.com/policing/article-abstract/1/2/196/1561516.

Tokyo Is a City Shaped by Its Postwar History

Tokyo was almost entirely destroyed twice in the 20th century—in 1923 by the fires of the Great Kantō Earthquake, and then during World War II by Allied firebombing. As a largely wooden city immolated twice over, there are few buildings still standing from either the prewar Meiji modernization period or the more distant Edo-era past. The reconstruction efforts of Tokyo's early postwar period formed an enduring foundation that defines much of Tokyo even today, including many of its microspaces, and they are where any effort to understand the city's land use must begin.

After the devastation of World War II, enacting an all-encompassing master plan for Tokyo's reconstruction was an organizational and financial impossibility. As the Japanese government attempted to rebuild their ruined capital city after the war, they drafted but subsequently discarded a comprehensive reconstruction plan, concluding that they lacked the budget to carry it out.[8] What limited funds were available ended up largely allocated toward restoring the city's rail and road transportation grid, which connects Tokyo radially to its vast suburbs across the Kantō plain. Beyond this, the city embarked on citizen-led, small-scale redevelopment simply because it had no choice. In areas where neither the government nor the country's real estate and transportation megacorporations could properly fund reconstruction efforts, whole neighborhoods instead rapidly rebuilt themselves as best they could.[9]

All across Tokyo, family businesses and individual residents scraped together their meager resources to erect small buildings on modest plots of urban land, relying on little more than their collective grit and inventiveness. These neighborhoods were not initially planned,

[8] For an introduction to Japan's postwar urban development, see André Sorensen, *The Making of Urban Japan: Cities and Planning from Edo to the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

[9] Echanove and Srivastava, "When Tokyo Was a Slum."

per se—they *emerged* from the bottom up, and their ramshackle, spontaneous spirit can still be felt today when walking Tokyo's backstreets. The inhabitants of these neighborhoods had their scattershot property rights regularized and formalized by the government after the fact, resulting in an unusually large share of Tokyo's urban core consisting today of plots owned by individual working-class homeowners. This approach was adopted out of harsh necessity, but the resulting neighborhoods have over time developed a striking charm: intimate townscapes with exceptional vitality and livability, featuring a fine-grained urban fabric made up of numerous small buildings. These dense low-rise neighborhoods often have narrow, labyrinthine streets and lack public space, but their built environments have proven unusually flexible and adaptable.[10]

In the realm of commerce, meanwhile, "black markets" (闇市 or *yami-ichi*) full of microentrepreneurs sprung up around Tokyo's major train stations amid the city's postwar rationing.[11] The black markets rapidly became a driving force of the local consumer economy, growing to an estimated size of 60,000 merchant stalls across the city.[12] Despite the ominous tone of the name and their hardscrabble surroundings, Tokyo's black marketeers were for the most part simply ordinary merchants attempting to make a living amid widespread hardship. They supplied everything from food to daily household necessities, although organized crime and sex work were also present.

Efforts to rid Tokyo's transit hubs of black-market stalls began in 1949, through the passage of a law shutting them down.[13] Crucially, however, these measures did not treat black-

[10] More information on this can be found in Heide Imai's excellent *Tokyo Roji: The Diversity and Versatility of Alleys in a City in Transition* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

[11] Masazaku Ishigure (石榑 督和), "戦後東京と闇市 [Postwar Tokyo and the Black Markets]," (Tokyo: Kajima Institute Publishing, 2016).

[12] Edward Seidensticker, *Tokyo Rising: The City Since the Great Earthquake* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 153.

[13] Known as the *roten seiri rei* (露店整理令).

market merchants as a criminal element to be pushed out of society, but rather as a group worthy of reasonable accommodation that could be integrated into plans for the next stage of the city's postwar development. Under the new law, many former black-market merchants were relocated from outside train stations to other nearby areas, where they were handed newly constructed stalls under a common roof on tiny plots of land they now formally owned. To cater to the changing needs of the times, from the late 1940s onward, these market stalls gradually began to transition into offering snacks and drinks—the birth of Tokyo's now-iconic *yokochō* alleyways full of little bars and restaurants (discussed in detail later).[14] The city also began taking fuller advantage of the dormant undertrack spaces created by Tokyo's elevated railways, allowing former black-market merchants as well as returnees from Japan's lost overseas imperial colonies to convert them into commercial spaces.[15]

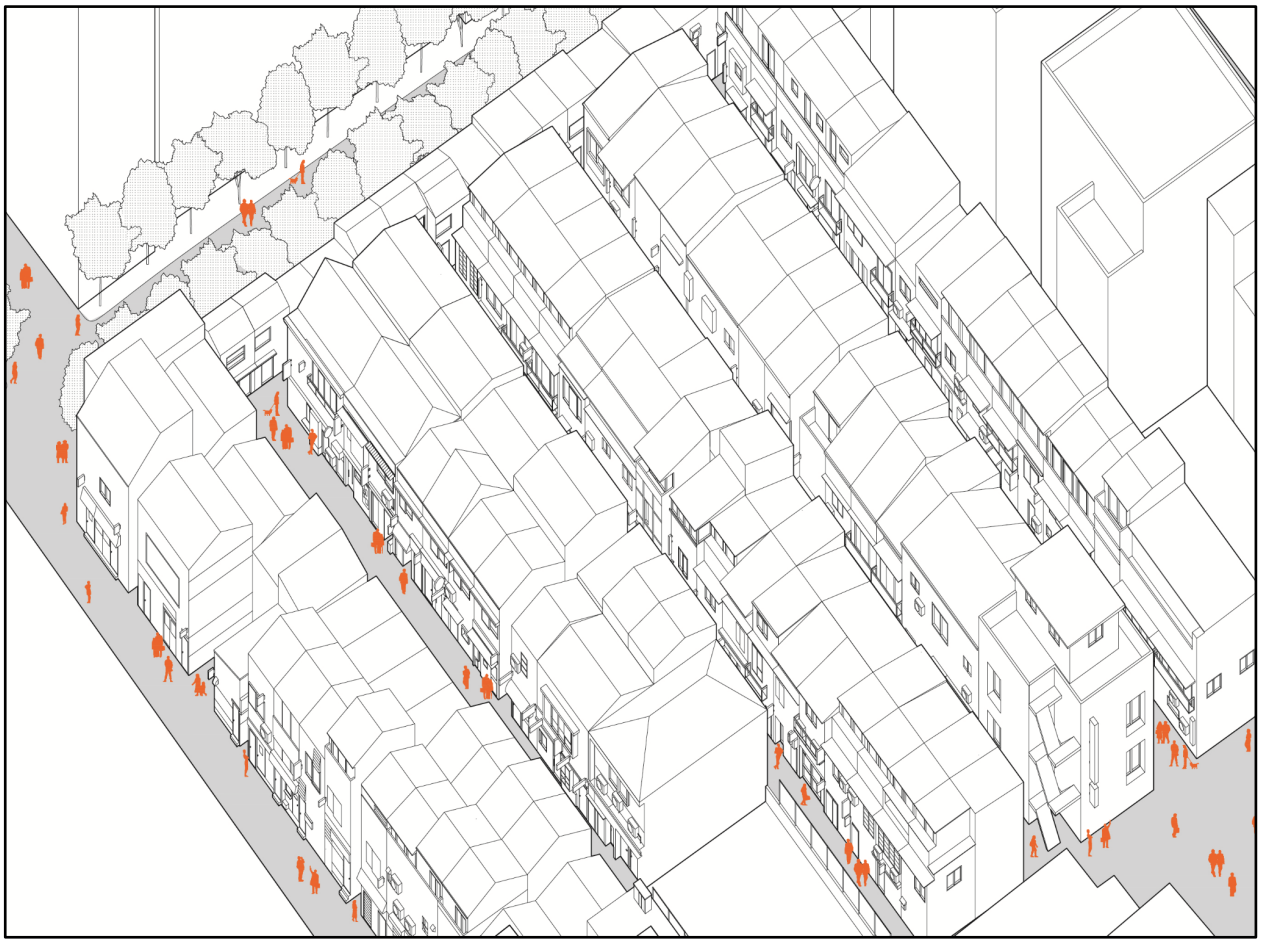
During Japan's rapid economic growth period, running from the late 1950s through the 1970s, the city grew dramatically in terms of both population and wealth. Developers began converting land plots around stations into large office and commercial buildings whenever possible, but the fragmented ownership of these former black marketeers' buildings made redevelopment difficult: property rights in postwar Japan are incredibly strong, and in many cases nearly every proprietor in a complex with hundreds of stalls would have to be convinced to sell their lot in order for redevelopment to begin. During the subsequent "bubble era," this meant that some of the most valuable real estate in the world was occupied by little ramshackle pubs,

[14] See Ino Kenji, ed., *Tokyo Yami-ichi Kōbōshi* (Tokyo: Sōfūsha, 1999, 1st ed. 1978); Matsudaira Makoto, *Yam-iichi Maboroshi no Gaidobukku* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1995); Hatsuda Kohei, "Sengo Tokyo ni okeru barakku nomiyagai no keisei to henyō: sensai fukkō-ki, kōdoseichō-ki ni okeru eki-mae saikaihatsu ni kan suru kōsatsu," *Journal of Architecture and Planning*, no. 579 (May 2004): 105−10; Hatsuda Kohei, "Sengo Tokyo no maaketto ni tsuite: Yami-ichi to senzen no ko-uri ichiba, roten to no kankei ni kan suru kōsatsu," *Journal of Architecture and Planning* 76, no. 667 (September 2011): 1729–34.

[15] Takayuki Kishii, "Use and Area Management of Railway Under-Viaduct Spaces and Underground Spaces near Stations," *Japan Railway & Transport Review*, no. 69 (March 2017): 7.

such as in Shinjuku's famous Golden Gai microbar district, rather than corporate office space (figure 1). Developers, at times working in tandem with organized crime, exerted enormous pressure to force landowners out, in some cases even resorting to arson and extortion.[16] The yokochō alleyways and other black-market-derived commercial districts that have survived to the present day are the ones that have successfully developed layers of economic, regulatory, and practical insulation that enable them to resist such pressures.

Figure 1: Shinjuku's Golden Gai



Sources: Visualization generated using Tokyo Metropolitan Government geographical information system (GIS) data (2020). All graphics adapted from Jorge Almazán, Joe McReynolds, and Naoki Saito, *Emergent Tokyo: Designing the Spontaneous City* (Novato, CA: Oro Editions, 2022).

[16] Megumi Kinugawa (衣川 恵), "日本のバブル [Japan's Bubble]" (Nihon Keizai Hyoronsha: 2002).

As the years progressed, Tokyo's postwar spontaneity gave way to more methodical planning measures designed to impose at least some degree of order on the city's development. In doing so, however, authorities made little effort to alter the character of these postwar residential and commercial neighborhoods. In many cases, they still retain not only their original architectural form but also their classic communal atmosphere. Tokyo is often dismissed by historical preservationists as a city with little in the way of long-surviving architecture, but when it comes to its postwar urban heritage, there is an argument to be made that Tokyo is actually a global leader. A visitor to New York who wants to experience the gritty yet venerated urban subcultures and countercultures of the city's 1960s and 1970s, and not merely view the old buildings that once housed them, will largely come away empty-handed.[17] By contrast, Tokyo is filled with classic neighborhoods and nightlife districts where the rhythms of life from half a century ago are still deeply felt. Thousands of "old Tokyo" businesses across dozens of neighborhoods still operate much as they have for decades, and they do so as a matter of simple continuity rather than as an exercise in retro kitsch.

For urbanists abroad, the areas of Tokyo defined by their postwar evolution thus offer an alternative paradigm of urban planning—one which combines light planning from above and self-organizing emergence from below. Of course, light planning brings a range of challenges as well; these classic neighborhoods have historically lagged the rest of the city in open spaces and infrastructure and have been less prepared for major natural disasters. Some Tokyo scholars such as Matias Echanove have gone so far as to argue that the challenges facing these areas have historically overlapped more with issues facing the informal urban communities of Mumbai or

[17] Moss, *Vanishing New York*.

Nairobi than with the development paths of Paris or Rome.[18] Despite these difficulties, the combined effect of decades of incremental transformations on Tokyo's fine-grained postwar urban fabric has enabled the creation of a cityscape with an unparalleled degree of adaptability and spontaneity.

A Field Guide to Tokyo's Microspaces

When we say that Tokyo is unusually filled with microspaces, what exactly do we mean? Tokyo's microscale land use comes in four main varieties: yokochō alleyways, dual-use residences, undertrack infills, and multitenant *zakkyo* buildings. Each type of microspace has its own history, regulatory framework, and land use context, but there is a degree of fungibility between their commercial uses; a microbusiness that resides in a yokochō alleyway could often just as easily operate out of a zakkyo building. The scale of Tokyo's overall microspace ecosystem is thus every bit as important as the rising and falling popularity of any given type of microspace.

Tokyo's best-known microspaces are arguably the laneway commercial clusters known as yokochō—warrens of lively, microscale bars and restaurants centered on tiny alleys and backstreets, often in the shadow of one of the city's established commercial districts or transit centers.[19] A yokochō bar may have as few as two or three seats; entering one can feel as intimate as being invited into someone's living room.

[18] Echanove and Srivastava, "When Tokyo Was a Slum."

[19] For more on yokochō in this context, see Jorge Almazán and Rumi Okazaki, "A Morphological Study on the Yokochō Bar Alleys: Urban Micro-Spatiality in Tokyo," *Journal of Architecture and Planning* 78, no. 689 (2013): 1515–22; and Jorge Almazán and Nakajima Yoshinori, "Urban Micro-Spatiality in Tokyo: Case Study on Six Yokochō Bar Districts," in *Advances in Spatial Planning*, ed. Jaroslav Burian (Rijeka, Croatia: InTech, 2010).

As with so many other unique aspects of Tokyo's modern cityscape, yokochō originated from the black markets that appeared around major train stations after Japan's wartime defeat.[20] Many small-scale black-market entrepreneurs eventually became squatters, building makeshift structures on any unoccupied space they could find. At the end of the black-market period, these spaces were regularized and often relocated as part of the city's redevelopment, with thousands of former black-market sellers gaining formal property rights to new spaces in cramped commercial warrens. Illegal market stalls transformed into bars and restaurants (and sometimes brothels and gambling parlors), and through the government's relocation policies these microcommerce districts shifted outward from the city's station fronts and into surrounding neighborhoods.

Because of their gritty past in the black markets, yokochō long held a popular reputation as being old-fashioned, unsafe, crowded, or populated with dubious characters. Increasingly, however, yokochō are widely beloved as prime settings of informal public life, owing to their small scale and relaxed yet intimate atmosphere. In Tokyo, there is a growing interest in yokochō as a phenomenon, not only among architects and urbanists but also among ordinary citizens. They are regularly featured in print and online media as either "unknown" spaces of interest to be "explored," beckoning the city's residents to "discover" the "dark" or "deep" side of Tokyo, or alternately as nostalgic relics of the Shōwa period (1926 to 1989, the reign of the eponymous Shōwa emperor), catering to a burgeoning desire among Tokyo's youth for a taste of "Shōwa retro" atmosphere and aesthetics.[21]

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[20] For more on the black markets as a general phenomenon, see Kohei Hatsuda et al., "The Nationwide Formation and Spread of Yami-ichi (Black Market) After World War II and Government's Involvements," *Architectural Institute of Japan* 82, no. 733 (2017).

[21] For some examples, see Fujiki TDC and Kawakami Buraboo, *Maboroshii Yami-ichi* wo *yuku, Tokyo-no Ura-roji "futokoro"* (Shoku-kikō Mirion, 2002). Also see these Japanese websites: Tokyo Deep Annai, http://tokyodeep.info; Information Design Lab, http://asanoken.jugem.jp; Kōji, roji-ura, yokochō, http://yaplog.jp/emjp; and Tōkyō

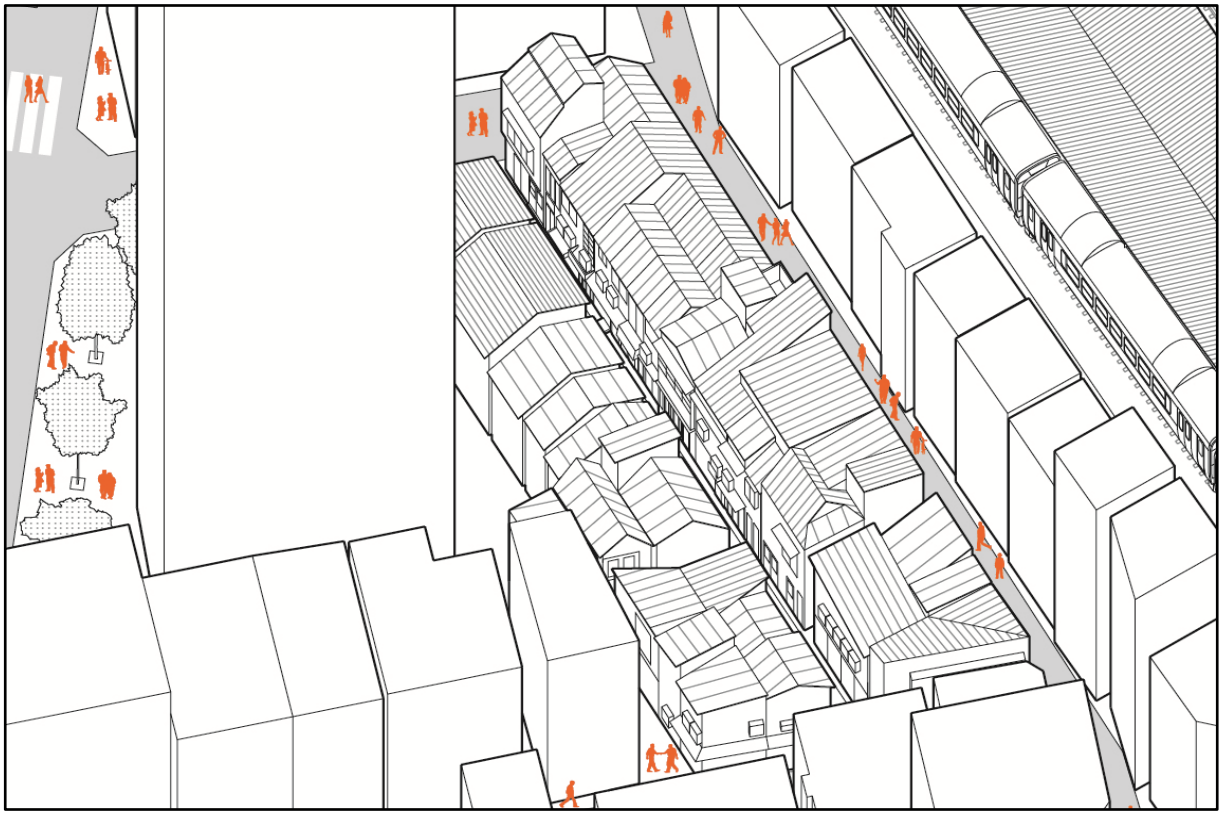
As much as yokochō add character to the city, from a strictly economic perspective they are often a low-rise, economically inefficient use of some of the most valuable real estate on the planet (figure 2). As such, they are frequent targets for redevelopment pressure, and over the decades many have been replaced with high-rise office towers and other such corporate developments. The yokochō that have survived often rely not only on Japan's strong property rights regime but also on various means of preventing individual landowners from defecting and selling to developers. Methods of self-preservation range from pooling land ownership in a nonprofit organization to filing a mutually binding nondevelopment pact (a *kenchiku kyōtei* or "building agreement") with the city government to lobbying to have themselves declared as a "disaster-prone area," which would in turn automatically impose development limits.[22]

Tokyo's undertrack infills share some of the same black-market history as its yokochō, but many have prewar origins as well. Tokyo has been sewn together by a dense network of rail infrastructure for more than a century, with train stations serving as both gateways between different areas and centers of commercial activity in their own right. The Yamanote Line, Tokyo's elevated loop railway, forms the backbone of the city's urban geography. Inside the Yamanote Line, the city's train infrastructure consists mostly of subways; outside it, aboveground commuter railways stretch out radially from Yamanote Line stations toward the city's many residential suburbs. To avoid the danger and traffic congestion that results when

noshōtengai wo arukō, http://tokyo-syoutengai.seesaa.net; for the media noticing the popularity of the yokochō phenomenon among youngsters and foreigners, see Takano Tomohiro, "Wakamono, gaikokujin ni mo ninki, 'yokochō' buumu ha itsu made tsuzuku no ka," *Newsweek*, Japan edition, August 25, 2017.

[22] There is little discussion of *kenchiku kyōtei* in English, but this article offers a useful explanation of the concept: Kiyoshi Hasegawa, "Law and Community in Japan: The Role of Legal Rules in Suburban Neighborhoods," *Social Science Japan Journal* 12, no. 1 (Summer 2009): 71−99, https://academic.oup.com/ssjj/article/12/1/71/1680605. For the nonprofit organization route, see "Mr. Koichiro Mikuri," *Shibuya Culture Project*, 2018, https://www .shibuyabunka.com/keyperson/?wovn=jp&id=152.

Figure 2: A Yokochō by the Train Tracks in the West Tokyo Neighborhood of Nishi-Ogikubo



Sources: Visualization generated using Tokyo Metropolitan Government geographical information system (GIS) data (2020). All graphics adapted from Jorge Almazán, Joe McReynolds, and Naoki Saito, *Emergent Tokyo: Designing the Spontaneous City* (Novato, CA: Oro Editions, 2022).

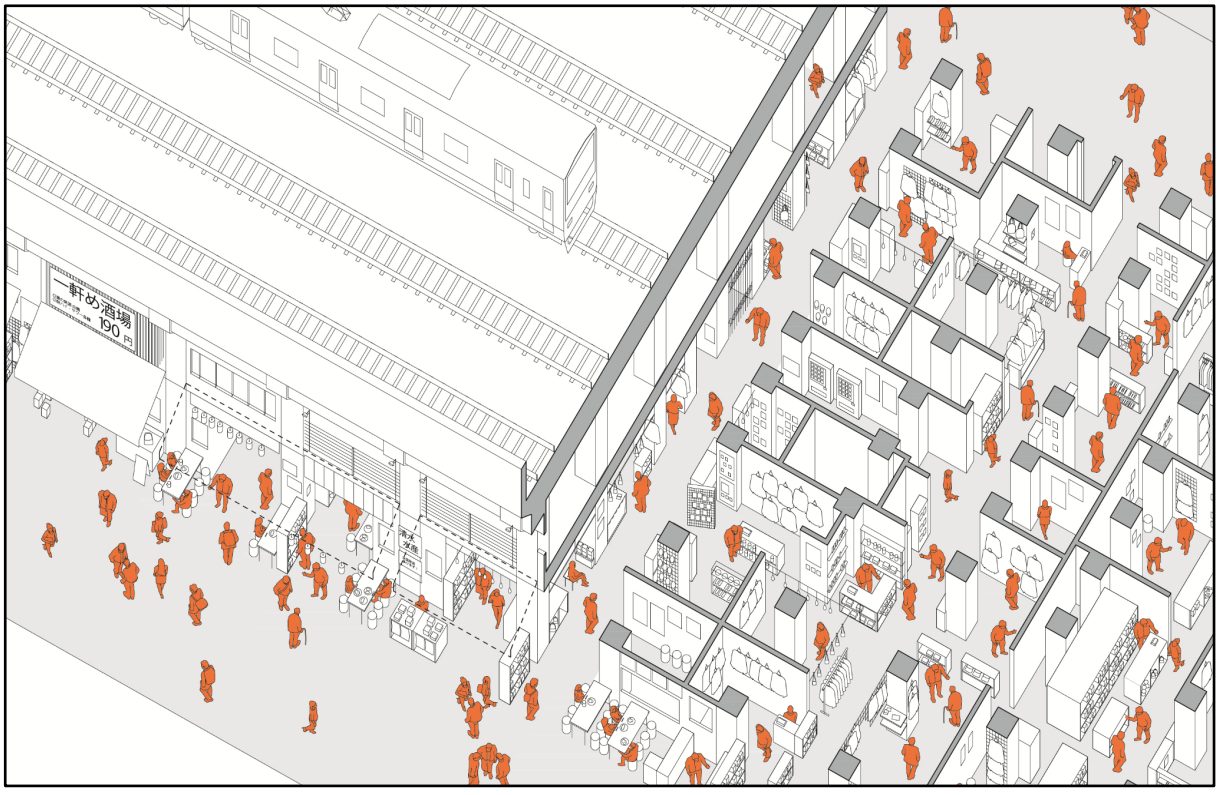
railways cross roadways at the same grade, some sections of track are elevated, particularly in the suburbs.

Tokyo's oldest undertrack infill spaces originated from elevated railways built before World War II, with the earliest example being the stretch of the Yamanote loop between Hamamatsuchō and Ueno stations built between 1910 and 1914.[23] Many of these elevated railways were occupied by black markets after the war, and some were also given over to

[23] Takayuki Kishii, "Use and Area Management of Railway Under-Viaduct Spaces and Underground Spaces near Stations," *Japan Railway & Transport Review* 69 (March 2017): 7.

returnees from Japan's lost imperial territories to open small businesses. Over time, the spaces under these tracks have become a bridge between the human and vehicular scales of the city, with once-unused undertrack spaces successfully developed and integrated into the existing urban fabric. Tokyo's undertrack infills are now magnets of human activity, full of tiny commercial and retail spaces (figure 3). A number of cities around the world such as Berlin are launching similar projects, but their scale of development often pales in comparison with Tokyo, where elevated lines controlled by private conglomerates with both real estate and transit businesses manage large swaths of undertrack space extending deep into the suburbs.[24]

Figure 3: The Undertrack Infill at Ameyoko in Northeast Tokyo



Sources: Visualization generated using researchers' architectural drawings of the site (2020). All graphics adapted from Jorge Almazán, Joe McReynolds, and Naoki Saito, *Emergent Tokyo: Designing the Spontaneous City* (Novato, CA: Oro Editions, 2022).

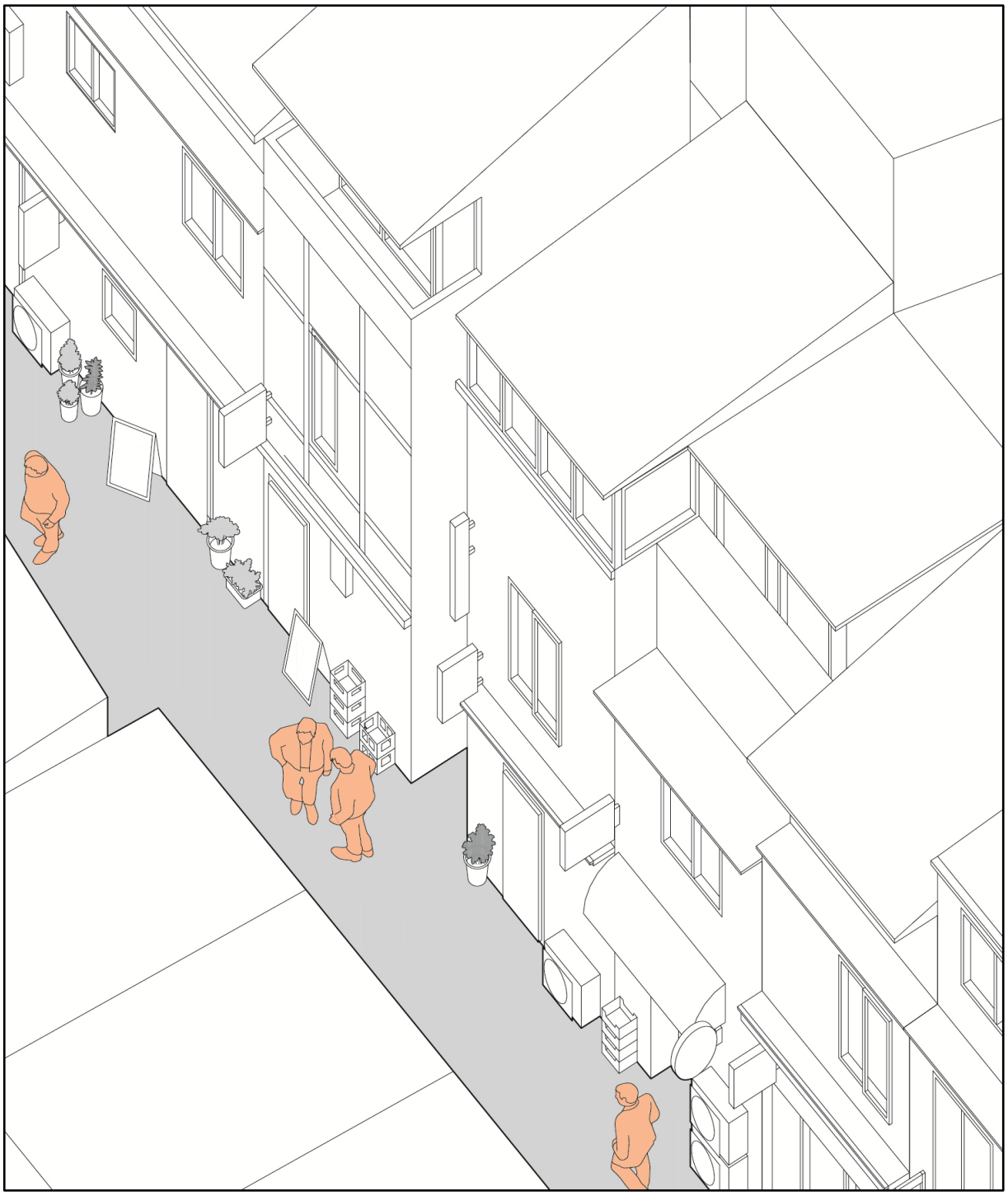
[24] For a full map of major undertrack infills in Tokyo, see Almazán, McReynolds, and Saito, *Emergent Tokyo: Designing the Spontaneous City*, 101.

Another major source of microspaces in Tokyo are dual-use residences (併用住宅 or *heiyō jūtaku*). In architectural terms these are ordinary residential row houses, but their bottom floor is given over to nearly any sort of commercial activity imaginable: a shop, a restaurant, a bar, even light manufacturing. A dual-use residence is defined as much by public policy as by its architecture (see figure 4); as discussed in detail later, this phenomenon exists owing to policy and regulatory choices (particularly in the realm of zoning) that give homeowners an exceptional degree of freedom to do whatever they please with their property.[25]

Dual-use residences represent a sea change from the predominant approach to land use in American cities, although they are also a common sight in many European cityscapes. The few American neighborhoods that do allow dual-use residences generally confine them to local shopping streets—a stark division between "Main Street" and "Elm Street." Tokyo residents, by contrast, expect to have businesses interspersed throughout their neighborhood (often in addition to traditional shopping streets known as shōtengai, rather than as a replacement for them) and view them as a net positive. Ubiquitous transit access and regulatory disincentivizing of car culture means that such businesses generally have minimal impact on parking and traffic. For many American homeowners, however, the reply to such businesses in their neighborhood would be "not in my back yard"—the unpredictability of commercial activity poses a threat to all-important property values, and the thought of next-door neighbors suddenly opening a rowdy bar in their house without warning is the stuff of nightmares.

[25] City Planning Division of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport, "Introduction of Urban Use Planning System in Japan," January 2003, https://www.mlit.go.jp/common/001050453.pdf.

Figure 4: A Typical Configuration of Dual-Use Houses Along a Residential Alleyway



Sources: Visualization generated using researchers' architectural drawings of Tokyo streets (2020). All graphics adapted from Jorge Almazán, Joe McReynolds, and Naoki Saito, *Emergent Tokyo: Designing the Spontaneous City* (Novato, CA: Oro Editions, 2022).

In Tokyo, a disruptive bar next door would also be unwelcome. However, a degree of legal ambiguity is present, which drives neighbors to negotiate a mutually tolerable consensus regarding in-home businesses. Under Tokyo's zoning regulations (discussed in greater detail later), dual-use residences are permitted by right; however, the regulations also prohibit creating an unreasonable nuisance for your neighbors in the process. Local neighborhood associations (自治会 or *jijikai*, literally "self-governance association") will often mediate those disputes between neighbors about what is or isn't unreasonable; if a consensus can't be reached, then the adjudicator of last resort will in practice be the local branch of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department. Tokyo's police maintain a local presence in each neighborhood through police boxes known as *kōban*, but they have a reputation for being under-resourced and uninterested in involving themselves in thorny local matters. When police do get involved, they may act capriciously and with considerable power. Given the risks and uncertainties that come with summoning police in a dispute, most neighbors prefer to reach consensus among themselves whenever possible.

Tokyo's final category of microspaces comprises its densely packed multistory buildings adorned with iconic vertical stretches of neon signage—what the Japanese refer to as zakkyo buildings (雑居ビル or *zakkyo biru*). In a tall, narrow zakkyo building, each floor can potentially hold multiple microbusinesses, collectively giving Tokyo a rich vertical dimension beyond mere high-rise offices and residences. Although buildings in this style are a central part of what makes Tokyo's cityscape visually iconic in the Western imagination, driving the perception of a city with nearly infinite possibilities hidden from public view, few foreigners are aware of their

history and urban context, to the point that the phenomenon itself has no particular name in English (*zakkyo* can best be translated as "coexisting miscellany").[26]

Zakkyo buildings often appear in train station commercial districts, where land prices are high but potential customers are numerous. Buildings tend to be taller in these districts, reflecting higher allowable floor area ratios and an economic incentive to build as densely as possible, but land plots are often small. Whereas in most cities around the world a building's commercial uses are located on its ground floors along the street, zakkyo buildings accommodate commercial functions vertically on all levels. Entering the upper floors of a zakkyo building, one might find a restaurant, an internet café, a health clinic, a hostess club, and a language school all in the same building, without any particular hierarchy or organizing principle.

A large share of today's zakkyo buildings did not begin their lives as such. In many cases they were simply generic constructions designed to fit the city's relevant architectural standards and regulations, occupied as multitenant, low-rent office buildings with a commercial ground level. Over time, however, they became zakkyo buildings through a gradual vertical colonization by incoming commercial enterprises. Their staircases and elevators, once purely functional in nature, become an extension of the street with their own commercial signage; the façades turned into advertisements for the establishments within. This spontaneous and incremental colonization was common among the first generation of zakkyo buildings in the 1960s and 1970s. Following

[26] For some of the only writing in English that touches on zakkyo buildings as a phenomenon, see Jorge Almazán and Yoshiharu Tsukamoto, "Tokyo Public Space Networks at the Intersection of the Commercial and the Domestic Realms: Study on Dividual Space," *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering* 5, no. 2 (November 2006): 301–8. For discussions of the visual element on the appreciative side, see: Barrie Shelton, *Learning from the Japanese City: West Meets East in Urban Design* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1999), 96; and Donald Richie, *Tokyo: A View of the City* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012). On the critical side, see Ashihara Yoshinobu, *The Aesthetic Townscape* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), originally published in Japanese as *Machinami no Bigaku* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1979); and Alex Kerr, *Dogs and Demons: The Fall of Modern Japan* (London: Gardners Books, 2002).

this generation, a new series of zakkyo buildings were consciously designed as such and specially adapted for recreational uses.

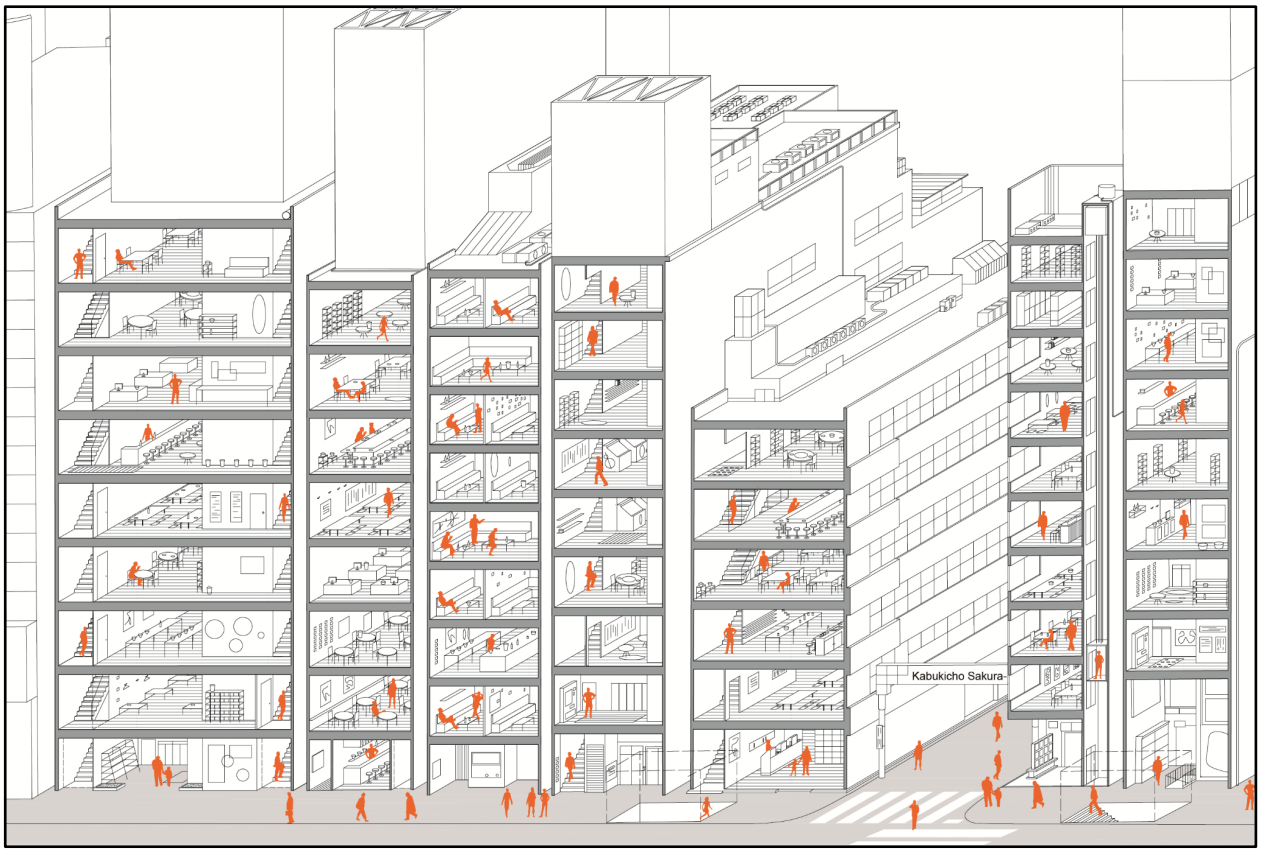
The north side of Shinjuku's famous Yasukuni Avenue showcases this gradual transformation over the decades.[27] Until the early 1960s, most of its buildings were low-rise and occupied by independent stores, eateries, and offices paired with small and straightforward advertisements. In the early 1970s construction boomed, with buildings reaching the maximum allowed height of about 10 stories. The types of shops inhabiting the zakkyo buildings remained similar to what had come before, but services and entertainment businesses gradually started to appear. Today, half of Yasukuni Avenue's zakkyo buildings belong to the first generation from the 1970s and early 1980s, whereas the other half have been reconstructed in the 2000s and 2010s.

The diversity of uses offered by zakkyo buildings' microspaces transforms the possibilities of the cityscape. A single narrow zakkyo building can sometimes host as many as 80 distinct microbusinesses (8 per floor over 10 floors), allowing for a density of commercial options that American land use practices don't come anywhere close to matching (figure 5).[28] And according to American real estate developers, the lack of zakkyo-like buildings in American cities creates an unfortunate self-reinforcing cycle: since American pedestrians don't expect to find public-facing businesses on a building's upper floors, any such businesses will generally receive much lower foot traffic, leading developers to design commercial projects in a way that precludes that possibility from the outset. Advertising regulations exacerbate this difference—the

[27] Nobutaka Kawai, "Shinjuku eki higashi-guchi shūhen ni okeru kenchiku yōto no suichoteki hensen ni kan suru kenkyū: Yasukuni-dōri to Shinjuku-dōri wo taishō to shite," Keio University, Almazán Laboratory, graduate thesis, 2016.

[28] Measurements of density of microbusinesses within zakkyo buildings is per fieldwork by the author.

Figure 5: The Zakkyo Buildings of Yasukuni Avenue



Sources: Visualization generated using researchers' architectural drawings of the site (2020). All graphics adapted from Jorge Almazán, Joe McReynolds, and Naoki Saito, *Emergent Tokyo: Designing the Spontaneous City* (Novato, CA: Oro Editions, 2022).

LED (formerly neon) signage that lines the entire façade of most zakkyo buildings to advertise its contents is often less restricted than corresponding signage in American cities.[29]

Public Policy Makes Tokyo Possible

Tokyo's abundance of microspaces has its roots in Japan's policy choices. Public policy has shaped every aspect of Tokyo's land use, both in obvious ways and through less direct means. Disaster regulations dictate the shape and layout of neighborhoods; inheritance taxes and property

[29] See, for example, Signs NYC, "A Summary of New York City Outdoor Sign Rules and Regulations," accessed November 1, 2022, https://www.signsny.com/blog/nyc-signs-rules-and-regulations.

rights regimes alter the scale of those neighborhoods' spaces; and zoning rules, income tax policies, and commercial regulation all influence who inhabits them and for what purposes.

Many cities around the world live under threat of disaster, but Tokyo has long been a particularly precarious megacity. The Japanese archipelago sits at the meeting point of several continental and oceanic plates, resulting in constant earthquakes and volcanoes. In a city that has historically been densely packed with wooden construction, these earthquakes carry the potential for devastating fires. The catastrophic destruction of the 1923 Great Kantō Earthquake, for example, resulted not from the quake itself but from the resulting fires that engulfed the city. Nearly every aspect of Japanese building regulation is therefore designed with disaster prevention in mind.[30]

However, the desire for earthquake-proof modernized construction poses challenges for the preservation of Tokyo's traditional communities and spaces. As Tokyo's neighborhoods have grown organically and spontaneously over the decades, many have developed into urban labyrinths full of dead-end streets and unusually shaped plots. In daily life such idiosyncrasies lend these neighborhoods their charm, but the downsides for disaster management are very real. Tokyo's dense low-rise neighborhoods largely overlap with what the Tokyo Metropolitan Government terms "densely built-up wooden construction areas" (木造密集地域 or *mokuzō misshū chiiki*), districts that authorities consider especially vulnerable to fires, earthquakes, and other natural disasters. Their weak and flammable building stock increases the risk that natural disasters will do serious damage, and their narrow streets (many narrower than the 4-meter

[30] One of the better English-language studies of this history is *Tokyo and Earthquakes*, published in 1995 by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's Bureau of Citizens and Cultural Affairs.

minimum width mandated by Japan's current Building Standard Law) make emergency vehicle access difficult.

Why have these problems persisted for decades, even as many stretches of Tokyo are increasingly dominated by sleek glass towers and corporate development? It's not for lack of trying to solve them. New housing construction mandates side setbacks as a fire prevention measure.[31] The postwar Japanese government attempted to widen the narrowest roads by establishing frontal setback obligations through regulation, requiring landowners who want to rebuild a house along a narrow alley to build their new walls at least 2 meters from the center of the lane. The hope was that over time, all landowners along Tokyo's alleys would set back their houses 2 meters on each side, resulting in a street that is 4 meters wide, and thus provides neighborhoods with modern construction and improved emergency access. Even a full 70 years after the law was established, many of Tokyo's back alleys remain unchanged. Landowners are generally uninterested in living in a smaller house for the sake of the public good, and they frequently use a variety of legal tactics and loopholes to resist setback obligations and preserve their precious square meters.

The largely failed setback obligation policy brought a perverse effect: by incentivizing against rebuilding, many more buildings retain their wooden structural elements and thus remain flammable. When landowners avoid rebuilding, their properties are not updated to the latest antiseismic standards, which generally require improvements to a building's foundation that are difficult and costly to make outside of rebuilding. The result in many neighborhoods is a maze of

[31] Amir Shojai, Rie Nomura, and Suguru Mori, "Side Setback Areas in Residential Zones in Japan: A Socio-Psychological Approach Towards Studying Setbacks, Case Study of an Inner Osaka Neighborhood," *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering* 16, no. 3 (2017): 589–96.

narrow alleys lined with flammable and vulnerable structures. In the event of a once-in-a-generation earthquake, many of these areas could become death traps.

One of Tokyo's primary means of protecting these communities is to enclose them using major arterial roads lined with larger fire-resistant buildings, an urban configuration sometimes termed a "superblock."[32] These superblocks began as a byproduct of Japan's postwar reconstruction effort. After the war, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government set out a plan for a web-like network of ring and radial arterial roads to be built over the coming decades, most of which were eventually completed. With four to six lanes, the wide roads stand in stark contrast to the city's preexisting network of narrower streets and alleys. The superblock configuration was further encouraged from 1981 onward by government measures that pitched them as "antifire blockade belts."[33] By law these modern buildings follow strict fireproofing regulations, creating what are effectively fire walls between districts.

In many parts of Tokyo, the result of these regulations is what some architects have termed the "pocket neighborhood"—blocks whose interiors are filled with older, low-rise residential buildings and winding, narrow streets, ringed by more modern commercial-use buildings around their periphery (figure 6).[34] The large commercial buildings on the edge of these pockets not only serve as a barrier against fires but also provide a daytime consumer population, with workers who can patronize the smaller mom-and-pop businesses in the residential interior. The resulting interior neighborhoods can be surprisingly tranquil considering their location in the heart of the city. Wide arterial roads eliminate any need for cross-town

[32] See Shelton, *Learning from the Japanese City*, particularly the chapter "Superblock Synthesis: 'Glorious Gokiso.'"

[33] Kim Youngseok and Takahashi Takashi, "Misshū jūtakuchi no 'kodate gun' ni okeru roji to sukima no yakuwari ni kan suru kenkyū," *Journal of Architecture Planning and Environmental Engineering* 469 (1995): 86.

[34] Derived from analysis of metropolitan government geospatial data by Yuma Matsumoto in Almazán, McReynolds, and Saito, *Emergent Tokyo*, 10−11.

Figure 6: A Pocket Neighborhood Near Gotanda

Sources: Visualization generated using Tokyo Metropolitan Government GIS Data (2020). All graphics adapted from Jorge Almazán, Joe McReynolds, and Naoki Saito, *Emergent Tokyo: Designing the Spontaneous City* (Novato, CA: Oro Editions, 2022).

commuters to cut through labyrinthine block interiors, and the taller periphery cuts off the neighborhoods both visually and spatially from the outside city.

Crossing from Tokyo's major commercial thoroughfares into interior pocket neighborhoods, one is immediately struck by the difference in scale between them. Pocket neighborhoods feature smaller buildings for a variety of reasons, but one surprising factor is the nation's inheritance tax

system. Japan's inheritance taxes have fluctuated over the years, but in general over the postwar period they have been far higher than in Western nations, with rates as high as 50 percent that often must be paid as a single lump sum at the time of inheritance.[35] To pay taxes assessed on inherited property, surviving descendants have often subdivided a property and sold a portion of it. Tokyo for the most part has no minimum dwelling sizes, unlike American cities; the Japanese Building Standard Law does not contain limitations or guidelines concerning plot subdivision.[36] Practicality is the main limit when selling off a portion of a lot, and even implausibly small plots of land can be converted to nonbuilding uses such as paid parking spaces.

This leads to a bifurcated effect in many Tokyo neighborhoods. On the exterior periphery of a superblock, landowners begin acquiring and consolidating plots in order to construct larger condominiums and commercial buildings, since maximum building height in Japan is tied to the width of adjacent roads. At the same time, however, inheritance taxes often push landowners in interiors to subdivide their land, producing ever-smaller plots and houses. These subdivisions sometimes have unclear or convoluted property lines as a result of spotty postwar record keeping, which combines with strong property rights (enshrined in Japanese law as a postwar response to abuses of governmental power by the prewar Imperial government) to make redevelopment of these neighborhood interiors a daunting prospect for real estate corporations. Much as with the aforementioned stalls given to former black marketeers, hyperfragmented ownership within a tightly interconnected neighborhood functions as a sort of unofficial historical preservation measure.

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[35] Better known as the "Enshō shadan tai" (延焼遮断帯).

[36] Hasegawa Tomohiro, *Introduction to the Building Standard Law: Building Regulation in Japan* (Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo: Building Center of Japan, July 2013), https://www.bcj.or.jp/upload/international/baseline/BSLIntroduction201307_e.pdf.

Tokyo has made it considerably easier in recent decades to construct large-scale redevelopment projects, but its gleaming skyscrapers are generally built on converted industrial, municipal, or corporate-owned land, simply because the task of acquiring small land from numerous individual owners is such an ordeal. The famous Roppongi Hills development, for example, required multiple decades of land acquisition by the powerful Mori Corporation, with tactics ranging from Mori's president personally cajoling individual landowners to rumored yakuza intimidation on Mori's behalf.[37] For developers without decades of patient capital to expend, it simply makes sense to avoid the old neighborhoods and look elsewhere to build. In practical terms, a surprisingly large swath of the city is thus somewhat insulated from corporate redevelopment pressure.

To see Tokyo's polarized land use at its natural extreme, look no further than Shibuya and its iconic scramble crossing. Shibuya's redevelopment leading up to the ill-starred 2020 Olympics was led by the district's two main corporate powers, the Seibu and Tokyu groups.[38] Both Seibu and Tokyu are megaconglomerates stretching across hundreds of businesses with more than a century of experience at playing a role in Tokyo's development; for a time during the bubble era, the patriarch of the Tsutsumi family that controlled Seibu was ranked as the world's richest man.[39] Tokyu and Seibu's sleek department stores and office towers connect to

[37] For details of Roppongi Hills's development, see Urban Land Institute (ULI), "Roppongi Hills," ULI Development Case Studies, Washington, DC, 2015, https://casestudies.uli.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12c/C033017.pdf. For a broader look at the conversion of Roppongi from one of Tokyo's grittier districts to an upscale destination, see Roman A. Cybriwsky, *Roppongi Crossing: The Demise of a Tokyo Nightclub District and the Reshaping of a Global City* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011). Yakuza [gangsters] are members of transnational organized crime syndicates originating in Japan.

[38] For more on the district's evolution, see Masami Ito, "Shibuya Crossings: Tokyo's Famous Shopping District Evolves Over Time," *Japan Times*, accessed November 1, 2022, https://features.japantimes.co.jp/shibuya/.

[39] The best book on the history of the Tsutsumi family is Thomas R. H. Havens, *Architects of Affluence: The Tsutsumi Family and the Seibu Enterprises in Twentieth-Century Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1994).

their respective commuter suburbs via their private commuter train lines, where their real estate development arms have spent decades building up bedroom communities.

In between these corporate pillars, however, are smaller-scale businesses that no reputation-conscious conglomerate would approve of. Mere minutes from the scramble crossing is Dōgenzaka Hill, full of intimate cafes and seedy love hotels. And sandwiched between two skyscrapers is an alleyway of tiny ramshackle bars known as "drunkard's alley" (のんべい横丁 or *nonbei yokochō*), whose residents have resisted intense corporate redevelopment pressures for roughly half a century (figure 7).[40] Like Shibuya, Tokyo today is increasingly dichotomized between the two archetypes that Japan's laws, regulations, and economic context most consistently enable—the vast scale of the skyscraper as a triumph of redevelopment and economic growth and the tiny scale of its dense low-rise districts as a triumph of individual property rights.

Tokyo's small-scale neighborhoods also distinguish themselves by being thoroughly mixed-use to a degree unlike anything seen in the United States, a fact that can be credited first and foremost to Japan's zoning system (table 1). Zoning in Japan is largely handled as a matter of federal law rather than at the local level, with a fairly straightforward system of 12 "nuisance tiers"—fewer than the average American city.[41] America's zoning rubrics are generally flat, meaning that one must meet the precise qualifications of a zone to be in compliance.[42] By contrast, Japan's zoning (and much of Europe's) is hierarchical,[43] meaning that at any given level

[40] "Interview with Koichiro Mikuri," *Shibuya Culture Project*.

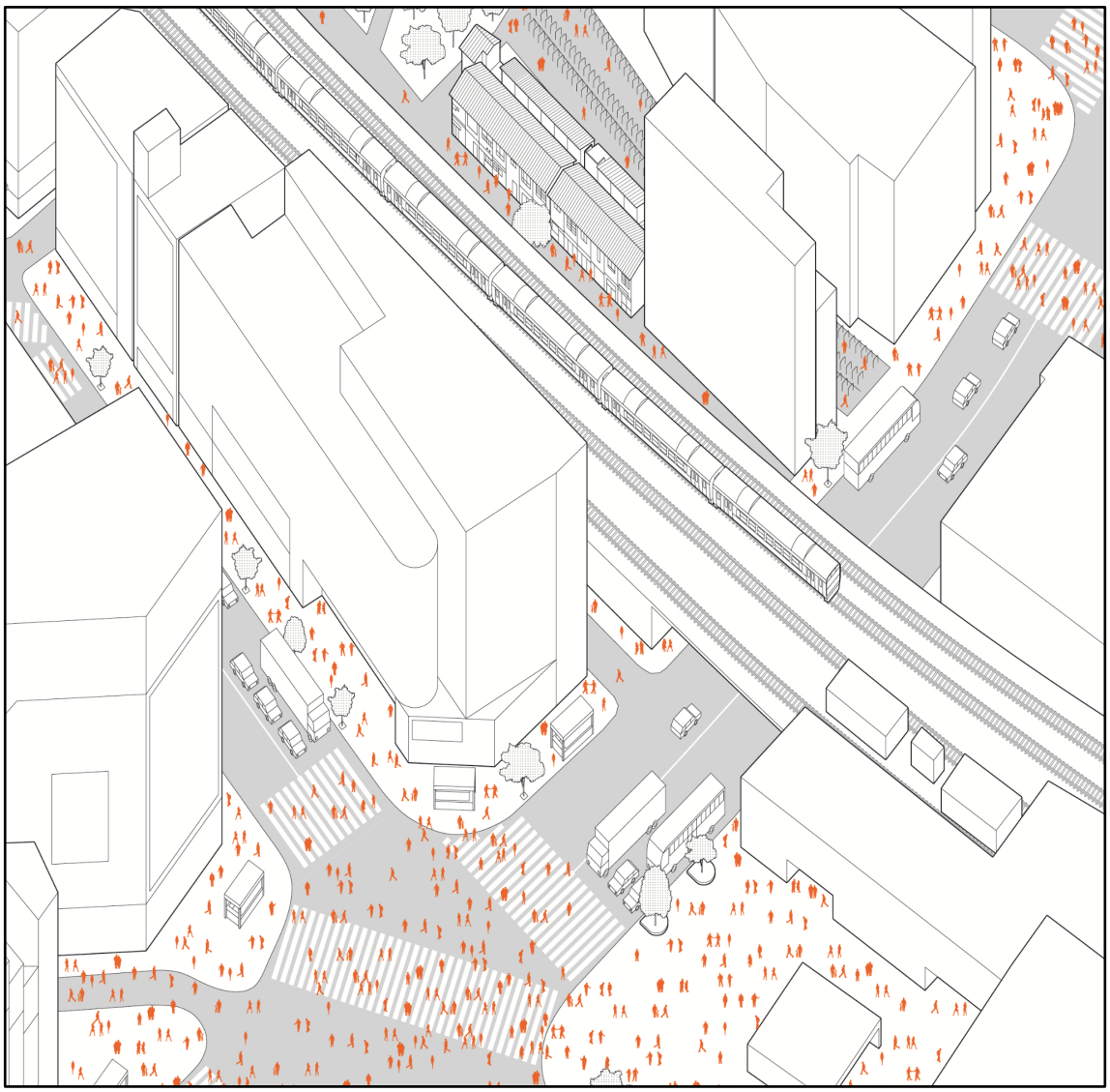
[41] Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport, "Introduction of Urban Use Planning System in Japan."

[42] See Sonia Hirt, *Zoned in the USA: The Origins and Implications of American Land-Use Regulation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 39, figure 2.2.

[43] Sometimes also referred to as inclusionary, which creates unnecessary confusion with the entirely separate concept of inclusionary zoning that advocates requiring resources to be allocated to underserved groups as a condition for the approval of urban development projects.

of "nuisance," any activity below that nuisance level is acceptable, with the exception of zones designated as being purely for heavy industry. Since the system's enactment, subsequent reforms such as the Urban Renaissance Law of 2002 have made the zoning regulations even more flexible, permitting streamlined rezoning to facilitate redevelopment efforts.

Figure 7: Nonbei Yokochō ("Drunkard's Alley"), Top Center, in Shibuya



Sources: Visualization generated using Tokyo Metropolitan Government GIS Data (2020). All graphics adapted from Jorge Almazán, Joe McReynolds, and Naoki Saito, *Emergent Tokyo: Designing the Spontaneous City* (Novato, CA: Oro Editions, 2022).

Table 1: Overview of Japan's Zoning System

Examples of buildings can be built / usually cannot be built	Category I exclusively low-rise residential zone	Category II exclusively low-rise residential zone	Category I mid/high-rise oriented residential zone	Category II mid/high-rise oriented residential zone	Category I residential zone	Category II residential zone	Quasi-residential zone	Neighborhood commercial zone	Commercial zone	Quasi-industrial zone	Industrial zone	Exclusively industrial zone
Houses, Houses with other small scale function (store, office, etc.)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
Kindergartens, Schools (Elementary, Junior High, Senior High)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	●
Shrines, Temples, Churches, Clinics	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Hospitals, Universities	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	●
Stores (mainly selling dairy commodities)/Restaurants with floor space of 150m² max. on the first or second floor (excluding※)	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
Stores/Restaurants with floor space of 500m² max. on the first or second floor (excluding※)	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
Stores/Restaurants not specified above (excluding※)	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
Offices, etc. not specified above	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Hotels,Inns	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	●
Karaoke boxes (excluding※)	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Theaters, Movie theaters (excluding※)	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	●	●
※Theaters, Movie theaters, Stores, Restaurants, Amusement facilities and so on, with more than 10,000m² of floor area	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	●	●
Bathhouses with private rooms	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	●
Independent garage with floor space of 300m² max. on the first or second floor	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Warehouse of warehousing company, Independent garage of other types than specified above	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
Auto repair shop	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Factory with some possibility of danger or environmental degradation	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○
Factory with strong possibility of danger or environmental degradation	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○

Source: Adapted from the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport's "Introduction of Urban Land Use Planning System in Japan," https://www.mlit.go.jp/common/001050453.pdf.

Perhaps most crucially, the closest Japan has to a purely residential zoning category enables a far wider variety of residential and commercial development than its American counterparts. There are no exemptions restricting the type of residential housing (such as the single-family housing restrictions found in many American communities), but just as important, any residential building is allowed by right to engage in commercial activity on its ground floor—defined in Japanese regulations as "houses with other small-scale functions." Houses in Tokyo's most residential neighborhoods can feature a small bar, shop, restaurant, or even a light manufacturing workshop on their ground floor with only the most cursory approval process and permits required. Strolling through Tokyo's residential neighborhoods offers a world of mom-and-pop stores, tiny eateries, and artisan workshops that lends texture and energy to urban life.

An interesting side effect of this radically simplified and permissive zoning structure is that it naturally shifts power from planning departments to other actors. Without a byzantine bureaucracy to navigate, planning committees are in practice superseded by entities ranging from local neighborhood committees, which take center stage in often-informal negotiations over land use, to corporate redevelopers.

Tax policies and commercial regulation also play important roles in making these neighborhood microbusinesses viable. Japan's tax system treats small businesses preferentially in a number of ways, such as allowing small business proprietors to keep a portion of the sales taxes they collect and pay reduced personal income taxes. Even government reactions to events such as COVID-19 have implicitly prioritized microbusinesses. Bars and restaurants were offered $600-per-day compensation payments during states of emergency, a sum that might seem paltry by the standards of a large commercial enterprise but exceeded the average small bar's pre-pandemic nightly take.[44] Regulatory compliance is also far simpler for many of Japan's microbusinesses than for their counterparts in the United States; alcohol licenses are simple and nearly free to obtain, and restaurant health inspections are minimal and in practice only occur every five to seven years.

Smallness offers inherent benefits as well; a bar or restaurant with only four to eight seats can reasonably be operated by a sole owner–proprietor without any need for additional staff. A tiny restaurant or bar may launch with as little as several thousand dollars in capital, a number that sounds ludicrous to anyone familiar with the costs of opening a nightlife business in a major American city. And because many of these small businesses are located on the ground floor of

[44] "新宿の飲食店「休んでも儲かる」「開けたもん勝ち」　6万円「時短要請」への経営者の複雑な思い [What Shinjuku bars and restaurant managers think of the city's 60,000-yen 'shorter hours request' money, which means 'even if you take a break, you make money' and 'even just opening means you win']," https://amp.bengo4 .com /topics/12338/ (website in Japanese).

owner-occupied housing—most often two-story row houses whose owner (who may or may not be the same as the proprietor of the business) lives upstairs—they tend to have lower rents and a higher degree of insulation from profit pressure than one might expect from a typical corporate landlord. Combined with Japan's robust social safety net, launching a consumer-facing brick-and-mortar small business as a personal passion project is simply far less financially demanding in Tokyo than it would be in the average American city.

Conclusions

Microspaces come in many varieties, but taken together as a phenomenon they offer a number of benefits in an urban context. Neighborhoods full of microspaces can more organically grow and evolve with less displacement, instead becoming multilayered districts that accommodate multiple demographics at once. Niche or experimental small businesses are easier to launch and to sustain, a boon to subculture and diversity of all kinds. Strong community support and low financial requirements make microbusinesses surprisingly resilient; historical preservation often occurs naturally as a result. When a sufficient number of connected microbusinesses cluster in one place, as in the case of Shinjuku's Golden Gai, the area itself becomes a destination, benefiting all of the district's microbusinesses even as they compete in a strict sense for clientele.

Whereas Tokyo's microspaces are the result of Tokyo's unique historical, spatial, and cultural circumstances, many of its most successful examples exist because of public policy interventions. Golden Gai stands as a prime example of how microspaces enable organic and distinctive urban environments, but it is not some retro relic that would be impossible to reproduce today in a new development. The magnetic charm of Golden Gai is in fact rooted in a spatial configuration that could be recreated elsewhere; it was strictly publicly planned, with ownership determined via lottery. The area's physical conditions of smallness, intimacy, and

flexibility are what produce its storied authenticity, and similar results should be possible to achieve in other countries' urban contexts through targeted public policy.

In the United States, such policies may be easier imagined than enacted. Minimum dwelling size requirements are common in American land use policy; liquor licenses (the economic lifeblood of many Tokyo microbusinesses) are expensive and difficult to obtain; battles over even the most modest upzoning are hard-fought at the local level. However, the growing "yes in my back yard" movement across America's cities is collectively pushing for a host of changes to land use policy that, whereas not explicitly aimed at creating Tokyo-style microspaces, are likely to speed their emergence if enacted. As a generation priced out of home ownership in America's cities because of outdated land use policy increasingly exerts its political voice, policy changes that might be pipe dreams today may be within striking distance tomorrow. And although many of Tokyo's liveliest microspace districts initially grew out of top-down government action, it is likely that a shift toward more flexible regulation, rather than toward government control of the built environment, would best enable the creation of new microspaces in many American urban contexts.

And what of their future in Tokyo? Although microspaces are ultimately the result of conditions that we can intentionally design, many of Tokyo's microspaces were not the result of any clear unitary vision, and so their current form is often to some extent unintended. Because of this lack of vision, a considerable share of Tokyo's microspaces are currently in a fragile state, with their numbers eroding year by year and no policies in place to preserve or enhance them. Old zakkyo buildings and yokochō continue to disappear under developer pressure, and some dense low-rise neighborhoods are becoming saturated by luxury housing unsuitable for

commercial activity. Over time, parts of Tokyo have become unintended laboratory experiments to discover how much stress these emergent urban spaces can endure before they break.

Nevertheless, there is little danger of Tokyo losing its critical mass of microspaces anytime soon; they are simply too numerous, too entrenched, and too natural in Tokyo's regulatory, cultural, and historical context. Tokyo's microspaces serve as a powerful real-world example of how cities can intentionally cultivate and benefit from emergent urbanism. With conscious effort and smart public policy, their best aspects could be replicated around the world.