

REVIEW ARTICLE

Rebuilding patterns: four books on urban reconstruction

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Carola Hein, Jeffrey M. Diefendorf and Yorifusa Ishida (eds) (2003) *Rebuilding urban Japan after 1945* (Macmillan, London, UK, 296 pp. ISBN 0-333-65962-7)

Nick Tiratsoo, Junichi Hasegawa, Tony Mason and Takao Matsumara (2002) *Urban reconstruction in Britain and Japan, 1945–1955: dreams, plans and realities* (University of Luton Press, Luton, UK, 100 pp. ISBN 1-860-20590-9)

Geneviève Massard-Guilbaud, Harold Platt and Dieter Schott (eds) (2002) *Cities and catastrophes: coping with emergency in European history* (Peter Lang, Frankfurt, Germany, 241 pp. ISBN 0-820-45468-0)

Joan Ockman (ed.) (2002) *Out of Ground Zero: case studies of urban reinvention* (Prestel Verlag, München, Germany, 192 pp. ISBN 3-7913-2790-9)

In the study of changing city form, whether by avowed urban morphologists or not, far more attention has been paid to gradual, piecemeal alteration than to the radical changes precipitated by disasters. But recently this has begun to change. There has been something of a minor explosion in the historical literature devoted to post-disaster urban change in general, undertaken by non-morphologists. While change in urban form is never the direct subject of such studies, they are increasingly beginning to integrate the transformed built environment and its basic patterns (streets, lots, buildings) into their conceptual concerns, thus helping fill this lacuna among morphologists – who are still generally ‘gradualists’, some important exceptions notwithstanding. The four books reviewed here all contribute to this new literature and illuminate, to varying degrees and in various ways, the morphological transformations associated with cataclysmic events.

No broad catastrophe in history comes even close to World War II in the sheer scale of its destructive impact on cities. By contrast, the damage inflicted by World War I was more rural and confined to Europe. Not

surprisingly, then, the destruction of World War II and subsequent urban reconstruction have received most scholarly attention over the last two decades. Major surveys and analytical studies began to appear in the 1980s, particularly in Germany, France and Japan. Their publication in the respective languages of these countries, and their focus on national coverage or city case studies, limited their scholarly dissemination. This began to change by the 1990s, with the appearance of English-language works, many of them multinational in scope.

The book edited by Carola Hein, Jeffrey Diefendorf and Ishida Yorifusa on *Rebuilding Urban Japan after 1945* is part of this trend. The editors are, respectively, a German-born, US-based specialist on the history of Japanese urban planning, the leading English-language scholar on German post-war reconstruction, and the leading scholar on Japanese post-war reconstruction. They have produced an ambitious collection of essays whose strength lies in placing Japanese urban reconstruction within the context of Japanese urban and planning history. Its main drawback is that it greatly privileges one group of actors – the

'planners' – among the mass of agents who intervened and readjusted the direction that the rebuilding of the urban fabric took. The book's richness stems from its mixture of context-setting pieces and case studies.

Hein's brief introductory chapter draws parallels between post-war reconstruction in Japan and elsewhere, and anchors it within the history of Japan's adoption of planning. The longer second chapter by Ishida synthesizes the history of the planning behind the rebuilding of Japanese cities after 1945, covering war damage in 215 cities (plus others in the Ryukyu Islands that suffered ground battles); the general course of reconstruction planning under American occupation (a significant, mostly indirect factor in itself); the main actors involved in planning; the key enabling legislation; and the complex interactions between the national government, municipal authorities and local powers – notably property owners.

Then follow five city case studies: Tokyo (Ichikawa Hiroo), Osaka (Hasegawa Junichi), Hiroshima (Ishimaru Norioki), Nagaoka (Matsumoto Shōji) and Okinawa (Ikeda Takayuki).

The last four chapters provide context for the reconstruction planning experience. Chapter 8 (by David Tucker) may seem out of place in this book, dealing not with the post-war reconstruction, but rather with colonial Japanese planning prior to 1945, particularly in Manchuria. But this is an essential chapter because the colonies served as the prime training and experimentation ground for many of the reconstruction planners and architects of the reconstruction. The chapter might well have opened the book. It also contrasts the interventionist attitude of the Japanese in their colonial cities before 1945 with the more restrained American involvement after 1945 – concerned mostly about the expenditure of public funds.

In Chapter 9, Cherie Wendelken tackles architectural culture in the reconstruction period, posing the question: 'what, if any, meaning did Japanese tradition have after the radical changes caused by the war and the defeat?' (p. 188). She describes two shifts in

the mid-1950s: a push for a Japanese modernity in architectural expression (focusing on Tange Kenzō, the most famous architect of the period), and a movement to preserve pre-war physical and cultural vestiges. Both phenomena, to her, share a 'double invocation, of Western or modern practices and Japanese traditional models' (p. 206).

The two remaining chapters situate the Japanese reconstruction in space and time. Diefendorf compares the reconstruction of Japanese and German cities (both east and west) – surprisingly, a scholarly first. Superficially, the former wartime allies shared similar post-war conditions: a majority of cities damaged or destroyed, struggling reconstruction under occupation, then speed-up of rebuilding with their 'economic miracle'. Yet the reconstructions fundamentally differed because of 'the timing and nature of the destruction, the legal and conceptual frameworks for reconstruction planning, actual planning experiences and practice, the interplay between central and local initiatives, and historic architecture' (pp. 229-30). Hein returns to assess the balance between 'change and continuity'; while this theme is a cliché, it fits post-World War II reconstructions well. The rebuilding of Japanese cities was similar to that elsewhere, with its many continuities and considerable inertia, but, unquestionably, it also represented a break in Japan's urban history.

Hein also considers the role of architects, planners and the public in the reconstruction, but this treatment reflects a limitation seen throughout the book. The role of the professionals is considered at the expense of that of the public – or, as the book itself makes clear, the various publics. In case after case, architects and planners (often fresh from the colonies, with the freedom that these offered to their activities) developed initially wide-ranging reconstruction plans that inevitably shrivelled within a short time. In urban Japan, as Ishida notes, 'all the early postwar attempts at reform failed' (p. 44). While this record of extensive 'failure' had multiple causes, at its centre perhaps lay the impact of many different publics, often sharing one aspect: