

**TOKYO MOVES WESTWARD:  
A GEOGRAPHY OF NEW LANDMARKS AND NEW SYMBOLS OF THE CITY**

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**ABSTRACT:** In an effort to relieve congestion in the CBD, planners in Tokyo have advocated development of new commercial "subcenters" at key rail interchanges closer to the suburban ring. The largest of these, Shinjuku, about 5-6 kilometers west of the CBD, has grown to be especially important. Among other distinctions, it now has the city's busiest train station, the largest retailing center, and a planned cluster of office buildings and hotels that includes several of Tokyo's tallest buildings. In 1991 the city's new City Hall was opened in Shinjuku. It is the tallest of all the buildings, and one of several new landmarks in the area that collectively symbolize the emergence of this district as the new center of Tokyo. There are many similarities in Shinjuku with the urban form of Manhattan, continuing Tokyo's modern-era habit of copying specific landmarks in other cities to present a western face.

In a case where the biggest city keeps getting bigger, Tokyo has undergone tremendous expansion at its edges in recent years, as well as reconstruction of the center to make it more dense. Not only is the city growing outward to the far reaches the Kanto Plain, it has expanded significantly into Tokyo Bay, where huge landfill projects shift the shoreline outward, and where large new islands for urban development are shaped at ever greater distances in the water. So too, the city has grown upward to new heights of skyscrapers, and below ground, to what planners have called the "geofrontier". Redevelopment projects dot the city, especially in central districts where land costs are highest, and high-rise megastructures replace lower buildings and neighborhoods of homes. All of this is fueled by continued population growth and incessant demand for space in a desperately overcrowded city, as well as by a rich and powerful land development industry that is more than pleased to satisfy demand for growth -- and create still more demand -- in exchange for profits (Cybriwsky, 1991; Seidensticker, 1990).

In this paper, I look specifically at two aspects of this restless metropolis: (1) its new City Hall, which was opened in 1991 in an part of the city called Shinjuku; and (2) the decidedly western face of Tokyo that the Shinjuku area presents. The title of this paper, "Tokyo Moves Westward," relates both to the fact that Shinjuku is on the west side of Tokyo, and to the word "westward" as in "the West" (e.g., North America). Shinjuku, as we will see, presents not only a western face, but it makes a point of directly copying its chief foreign rival (and close foreign friend), New York City, in numerous specific aspects of landscape. Therefore, this paper is also a case study of a pattern of urban landscape development that we might call "urban mimicry." Before we get into these two concerns, I will review the recent history of Shinjuku and provide a geographical orientation.

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### HISTORY OF SHINJUKU

Shinjuku's rise to prominence in Tokyo goes back to the 1923 earthquake, that at noon on September 1 of that year destroyed virtually the entire central part of the city. It was one of dozens of disasters that had befallen the crowded core of Tokyo (previously named "Edo") over its history, but this was the biggest, and the one that got Tokyo to think seriously about decentralization. The city center was rebuilt almost immediately after the earthquake, but in the process Shinjuku gained the attention of investors who saw its promise as an alternative commercial district. Previously, it had been a crossroads shopping center and travelers' stop among the market gardens west of the city, and since 1885, when the train station opened, a budding hub of passenger rail transportation. The district was particularly desirable to investors because of the presence of this station, location on a major road, and several other geographical advantages. It gained especially from decisions by large retailers such as the Mitsukoshi and Isetan department store chains to build there after the earthquake to avoid concentrating their investments in the hazard-prone CBD. In addition, the retailers wanted to be closer to the growing residential population of Tokyo's west side, a growth that itself was stimulated partly by the earthquake (Waley, 1988).

Growth continued all through the post-earthquake years, as the rail and subway network of Tokyo was expanded to favor Shinjuku, and then again after World War II. As the city was rebuilt from that disaster, attention was again given to the benefits of decentralization. Eventually, by the 1960s, a master plan -- as much as this is possible in Tokyo -- started to be articulated. A key element was that to relieve congestion in the CBD, as well as to reduce commuting times for train riders from the suburbs, alternative commercial subcenters should be developed at varying distances in the broad zone between the CBD and bedroom communities at the periphery. This scheme is commonly referred to as the plan for a "multi-nodal metropolis". It called for several of the largest subcenters to be developed fairly close to the CBD (within approximately five kilometers) at selected stations of the Yamanote Line, a extremely heavily travelled rail line of 29 stations that forms a roughly circular loop around central Tokyo.

Shinjuku was to become the largest of these subcenters. Among the main reasons was that the district had one of the key stops along the Yamanote Line, at the strategic intersection of several passenger rail lines and subway lines, and the terminus of numerous bus routes. So too, Shinjuku's growth is attributed to the area's early start as a larger commercial district, when department stores relocated there, and when other retailing and entertainment functions such as movie houses, theaters, and places for food and drink were set up. It is also important to note that Shinjuku's rise as a retailing center is tied to its role as a center for black market goods during the years after World War II when consumer goods were in short supply. The role of Shinjuku Station was especially critical in the rise of the area. Several of its rail lines, notably the Chuo, Odakyu and Keio Lines, reached far into the western suburbs, making this station the gateway to central Tokyo for many thousands of commuters each day.

Also critical to Shinjuku's rise to prominence was the presence of a large tract of land just to the west of Shinjuku Station that was available for redevelopment projects. This was the site of the Yodobashi Waterworks, facilities which were outdated and could be relocated to less costly land. The 107-hectare site was cleared in the mid-60s, and a planned cluster of high-rise office buildings and hotels was erected, piece by piece, in the years thereafter. This project, called the New Shinjuku City Center (*Shin Toshin Shinjuku*), or simply *Nishi Shinjuku*, meaning "West Shinjuku", has resulted in the construction of several of Tokyo's tallest buildings. Like other urban renewal projects elsewhere, this

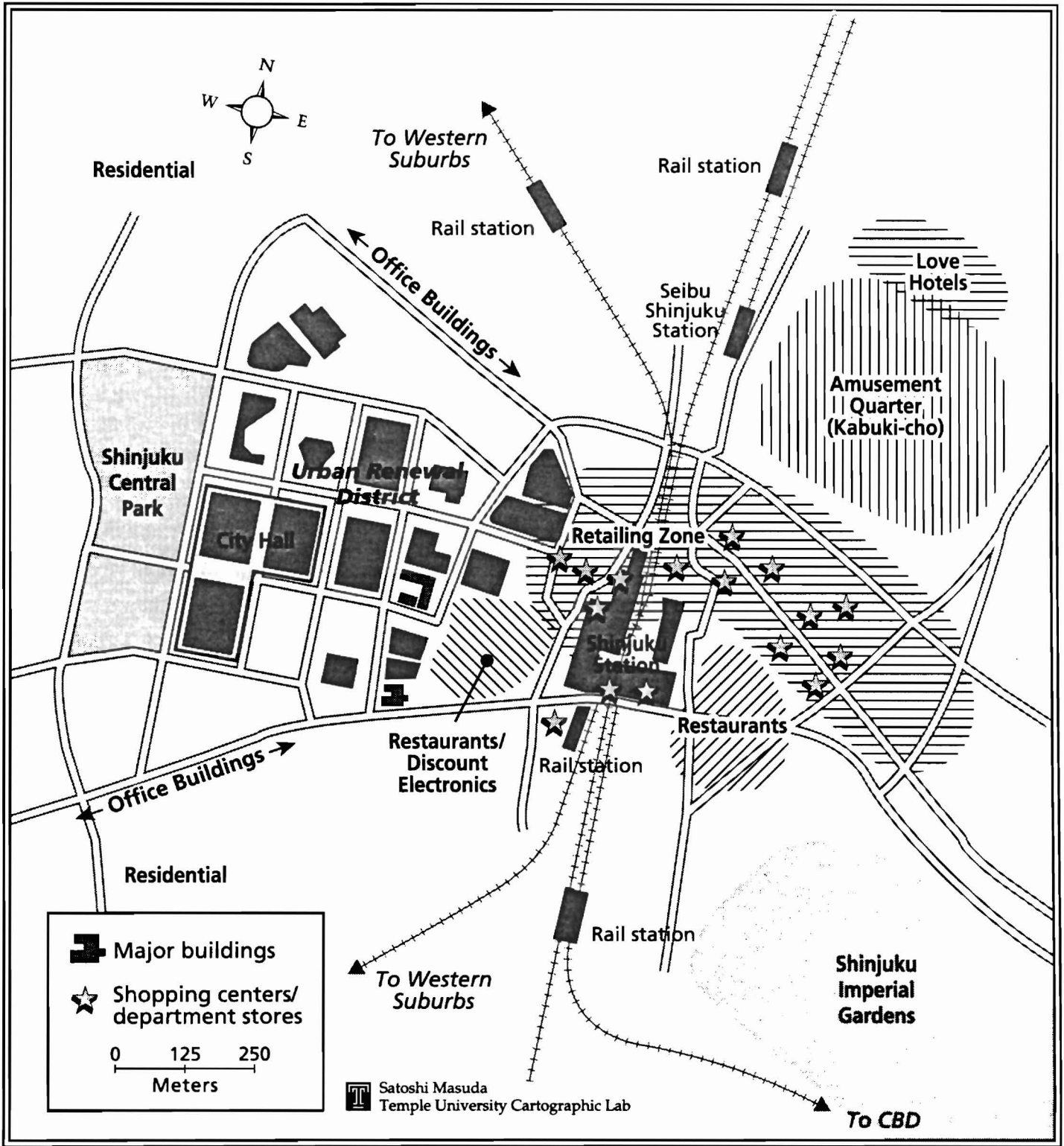
development employed the familiar formula of government land and infrastructure to attract private investors.

As a result of growth, Shinjuku has achieved several important distinctions in Tokyo. Its train station, Shinjuku Station, has grown to become the city's busiest station, handling approximately 3 million passengers each day. Also, the area is the largest retailing center in the city, having surpassed the CBD in value of sales and numbers of shoppers. Similarly, Shinjuku is the busiest section of Tokyo in terms of after-hours dining, drinking and entertainment, particularly in its subsection called Kabuki-cho, having more customers than the famous Ginza area of the CBD. So too, Shinjuku is a major concentration of office employment and international hotels, focussing mostly on the West Shinjuku urban renewal area. Finally, as we shall discuss below, Shinjuku is now the new center of Tokyo Metropolitan Government.

### **SPATIAL STRUCTURE**

The internal spatial structure of Shinjuku is similar to that of train station commercial centers in other parts of Tokyo and other large Japanese cities. It follows the general model that I have described elsewhere (Cybriwsky, 1988; 1991, p. 166), and includes several different functional subdistricts arranged around the commuter station at the center. The focus is the train station itself, which sprawls in labyrinthine fashion both above and below ground, with numerous exits. Large department stores and multi-level shopping malls are built into the station. There is also additional retailing along a major street that runs off the train station and along various other streets. One of the biggest of these retailing areas is on the west side of the station. It specializes in cameras and electronics goods. Another key functional area is the large nighttime entertainment zone called Kabuki-cho. Typical of many other such districts close to crowded train stations, it has many restaurants and bars, as well as numerous massage parlors and other sex businesses, video arcades, pinball (pachinko) parlors, movie theaters, and other places of entertainment. A zone of so-called "love hotels" is nearby. The office and hotel district of Shinjuku is on the west side of the station, not far from the shopping streets. A large part of this district, featuring the tallest buildings, is the previously mentioned urban renewal area. It is easily identified on a map by its grid street plan and large blocks (Figure 1).

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## NEW CITY HALL

Tokyo's new City Hall is the principal symbol of the city's westward shift. It was constructed in 1988-91 to replace outmoded facilities in the CBD, and to bring the seat of Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) closer to the geographical center of Tokyo Metropolis.<sup>2</sup> Relocation also brings government closer to west-side residential areas that are particularly fast growing (e.g., the Tama area), and that rank above the industrial east side of the metropolis in socioeconomic status. The specific site within Shinjuku of the new City Hall is also meaningful: located at the western edge of the West Shinjuku urban renewal district, it overlooks a large park and faces an enormous flat expanse to the west (the Kanto Plain) that is mostly residential and generally low-rise. Therefore, City Hall can be seen for many miles, making the building all the more effective as landmark and new symbol of the city itself.

City Hall is especially impressive because of its size. It is actually a complex of three adjoining buildings, the tallest of which, called the T.M.G. No. 1 Building, is the tallest in the city. It measures 243 meters and has 48 stories above ground. The T.M.G. No. 2 Building is also tall: 163 meters and 34 stories. The third building is the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly Building, and is only seven stories high. A prominent feature is a 5,000 square meter open space ("Citizens' Plaza") in front. Because of its size and visibility, City Hall is now a major new symbol of Tokyo, much like Tokyo Tower symbolized the city as it was reconstructed after World War II, and Edo Castle and the Imperial Palace symbolized the city before.

As was illustrated in the slides that accompanied the oral presentation, there is a distinctive finish to these buildings, particularly the taller ones, that reminds at least some onlookers of computer chips. This was the expressed desire of the architect, Tange Kenzo, who chose this appearance so that the new City Hall to be a "21st century landmark for a 21st century city." However, other onlookers have been critical, some remarking that the new City Hall has an Orwellian "Big Brother" quality to its appearance. Another aspect of the design, also illustrated in the slides, is that as modern as City Hall appears, the foundation stones at its base look to have the form and size of the stones from which Japanese castles and fortifications are built. That is, this ultra-modern building is constructed on a solidly Japanese foundation, reminiscent of Edo Castle or other symbolic landmarks from Japan's past. This too was an expressed desire of the architect.

Regardless of one's opinions about the design, at least one interesting fact stands out about the architect: Tange Kenzo, now an older man who is celebrated as modern Japan's master builder, was selected for this project even though he was the architect of the previous City Hall (built in the 1950s) which has now been abandoned and bulldozed away. I think that it is only in Japan, with its cult of *sensei*, that a master of some craft can be at the top of his profession for so many years that, as in this case, he outlives his buildings; and that it is possible for someone to win a contract to build something (at enormous cost, I might add) to replace structures that were designed earlier by that same person that failed.

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<sup>2</sup>Tokyo Metropolis, the political unit that is Tokyo, is elongated east-west and has the CBD in the eastern end (see "Defining Tokyo" in Cybriwsky, 1991, pp. 17-23.)

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### WESTERN FACE

At least on the surface, Shinjuku has a decidedly western face, mimicking in many instances the appearance of New York City. This is particularly so in the case of the urban renewal district, with its several high-rise office towers and hotels and grid street pattern. Often referred to in Japan as "our Manhattan," the skyline of Shinjuku's tall buildings has come to be an instantly recognizable symbol of Tokyo itself, and one of the best known landscape views in the entire country, ranking in recognizability right behind Mt. Fuji itself. Japanese see the towers of Shinjuku almost daily on television and in the movies, as backdrop for countless detective dramas and soap operas, as well as an urban backdrop for TV commercials and magazine advertisements that sell cigarettes, liquor, jewelry, and other supposedly "sophisticated" products. Some of the slides that I showed with the oral presentation illustrated Manhattan-like portrayal of the Shinjuku skyline, as on a telephone card showing a view of the skyline at night.

Sometimes the copying of New York City is direct. Another of my slides was of a souvenir key chain that I bought in Tokyo. It says "Tokyo Megalopolis" and shows a montage of Tokyo landmarks (e.g., Tokyo Tower) and the unmistakable form of *the Chrysler Building*. There was also the Christmas card with the impressive skyline of Shinjuku on a quiet, snowy night, Santa and his reindeer in the sky above, and the unmistakable reflection of *the Statue of Liberty* on the glass skin of one of the high-rises. Other "New Yorkisms" are the name of the park next to City Hall, Central Park, and the name of the waterfalls-fountain near its center, Niagara Falls (in this case, New York state, not city). So too, there are examples of billboards and advertising posters in Shinjuku (and elsewhere in Tokyo) that show scenes of Manhattan, and countless references to Tokyo (or Shinjuku) as the "Big Mikan" (a Japanese orange), in answer to New York's "Big Apple" theme. Peter Popham, author of one of my favorite books about Tokyo, observed similar scenes, and concluded that high-rise Shinjuku was "the embodiment of [Tokyo's] Manhattan fantasies" (Popham, 1985, pp. 101-2).

Why does Tokyo mimic New York? The answer, I think, is tied to a long track record that the city has had for urban mimicry. In the late 19th century, when a modern CBD was taking shape in Tokyo for the first time, the first office district (now disappeared) was called Londontown. Designed by Englishman Josiah Conder, other imported architects and their Japanese students, it looked like London except for the rickshaws. When a fire burned Ginza in 1872, the district was rebuilt as "Ginza Brick Town" in a distinctively urban-European fashion. The official state guest house (the former residence of the Crown Prince) resembles Buckingham Palace on the outside and the Versailles on the inside. Tokyo Station is a copy of Amsterdam's central station. When Tokyo needed a grand symbol of post-World War II reconstruction, it erected Tokyo Tower. Its designer, Dr. Naito Tachu, a Japanese university professor who built 33 towers in his country and was lovingly called Dr. Steel Tower, claimed until he died that he did not pattern Tokyo Tower after the Eiffel Tower, and that any similarities were coincidence. More recently, Tokyo Dome, the sports and concerts facility, looks like the Pontiac Silverdome. The list of similarities in landmarks is long indeed.

I see the copying of western landmarks as an extension of Japan's response to the West following the forced opening of the country in 1853, when Matthew Perry's "black ships" arrived uninvited in Tokyo Bay. According to an enormous literature, Japan dealt with the foreign threat, in part, by taking on western ways, at least superficially, and emulating the foreigners (e.g., Barr, 1968; Meech-Pekarik, 1986; Reischauer, 1977; Seidensticker, 1983). This was to show a measure of friendship, but especially to show to foreigners and Japanese alike that Japan was not backward, and could do anything that the foreigners could do. Thus, starting in the late nineteenth century Japanese pressed to learn foreign languages and technologies, began to dress in western clothing, added new

foods to their diet, took in new forms of sports and entertainment, and adopted western models for government, schooling, policing, and other important institutions. In line with this, parts of the capital city, which was designated as the city that would deal most with the presence of foreigners in the country, were made to look western. Western-style hotels and restaurants were put up, as were shops with western goods and western housing in certain specific neighborhoods. The 1872 rebuilding of Ginza and the construction of Londontown (where the Marunouchi office district now stands) was an outgrowth of this, as were the various other examples of western landmarks mentioned above.

### CONCLUSION

The western face of Shinjuku, I think is a modern extension of this trend. In many ways, this is the new center of the city, symbolized by the tall office towers and hotels in the urban renewal district and the new City Hall; while the new place for Tokyo to copy is New York, the city's biggest rival and close foreign friend. Why Tokyo copies foreign landmarks, especially in Shinjuku those of New York, is a complicated topic, but seems to be related to Japan's response to the arrival of foreigners in the country a little more than a century ago, after a much longer period of enforced national isolation. I have cautioned that the copying is merely superficial. As was illustrated with the example of the foundation stones of City Hall, Japan is fundamentally unchanged despite the look of the surface, and is very determinedly Japanese. As Popham (quoted above) goes on to say about other details of Shinjuku (Popham, 1985, pp. 101-2):

... it's not like Manhattan at all; it's just like Japan only fifty stories high. That most venerable Japanese magic trick, in frequent use since at least the eight century, by which they solemnly and meticulously copy some product of another culture and wind up with something that is unmistakably Japanese is at work again.

I think that Popham is directly on the mark, and that Shinjuku's western face is indeed part of a stage set.

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