

Chapter 2

Landscape Perception in Japan and Germany

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Abstract With increased global discussion about the natural environment, an understanding of culturally different meanings of environment is needed for local participatory environmental management as well as cross-national cooperation. In the present report, by using Landscape Image Sketching Technique (LIST), the culturally different landscape perceptions were analyzed between Japan and Germany.

The sketches of representatively beautiful scene in common with the regions were obtained through interviews with 197 respondents living in the four forest regions; namely, Rheinhardswald and North-Schwarzwald in Germany and West-Waga and Yoshino in Japan.

As results, landscape image sketches showed diverse variety in each research site, but different characteristics between Germany and Japan suggested the fundamental difference in the ways of seeing the landscape through cultural framework. The most remarkable research finding was counterintuitive and involved the opposite direction of their line of sight. It suggested different relationships between the subjects' home community and natural surroundings. In addition, the great variation of Japanese results implied Japanese challenges with landscape planning with citizens' participation.

Keyword Fukei • Landscape Image Sketching Technique • Way of seeing landscape

2.1 Introduction

Japan is an interesting example for environmental studies because of its extensive industrial development in contrast with its traditional relationship with nature. The Japanese forest coverage rate of 67 % is one of the highest in the world.

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It is said that these are the rich blessings of nature and in turn, respect, appreciation, and a concerted effort to live in harmony have contributed to a long tradition of revering the natural surroundings.

With increased global discussion about the natural environment, an understanding of culturally different meanings of the natural environment is needed for local participatory environmental management as well as cross-national cooperation. Aiming at consensus building in environmental management with democratic procedures, a communication tool for mutual understanding is profoundly needed. This report discusses the way of seeing landscapes in Japanese culture as a fundamental precondition for democratic environmental discussions.

This article consists of three parts. The first is 'Landscape' in Japanese language, which describes the historical transition and characteristics of Japanese landscape concepts. The second is a demonstration of the ways of seeing landscapes in Japan and Germany. This features the characteristics of a conceptual understanding of Japanese and German landscapes as illustrated by the results of an empirical study. The final section deals with current challenges in Japanese landscape planning focusing on urbanization and ways of seeing the landscape.

2.2 The Concepts of Landscape in Japan

Each language has its own characteristics in the definition of the terms corresponding to 'landscape'. In the Japanese language, possible prominent synonyms for 'landscape' include *Keikan* and *Fukei*. A Japanese–English dictionary explains that *Keikan* means aspect, landscape, and scenery and that *Fukei* means landscape, paysage, and scenery. It implies that these Japanese terms are hardly distinguishable by European languages such as 'Landscape', 'Paysage' and 'Landschaft'. 'Landscape' also has multiple meanings, but two of them are dominant; namely, the 'natural character of a region' and 'visual representation' (Ipsen 2006). *Keikan* and *Fukei* could correspond approximately to the two dominant meanings.

The two Japanese terms equivalent to 'landscape', *Keikan* and *Fukei* can be written in Chinese characters. Since the words have been used in various fields of research in an arbitrary manner, they are often used as synonyms and are not easily distinguished. However, the general distinction between *Keikan* and *Fukei* is the objective and subjective meaning of landscape. *Keikan* is preferred in architectural engineering and planning as well as in geography and current ecological studies, while *Fukei* is used mainly in human science (Nishibe 2006).

But why does the Japanese language have these two terms? Japanese culture developed through encounters with other cultures, in which landscape concepts also changed through the course of globalization, modernization, and urbanization. In ancient times, there was an influx of major cultural elements mainly from China such as Buddhism and writing systems. Then, in modern times (from the Meiji Restoration to the early years of the twentieth century), Japan actively adopted modern systems, mainly products of Western civilization, and the ideas of rationalism

mainly from Europe. After World War II, accepting the American culture, Japan became a democratic country, attained rapid economic growth and became a country that is rich in material things (Berque 1990).

Concerning landscape concepts, the first step was the introduction of *Fukei* from China in the eighth century through the teachings of Buddhism, which continues to be a part of Japanese culture today. Especially at that time, China was the most important foreign country for Japan, and following China was an inchoate form of globalization. The introduction of Buddhism prompted many foreign policy discussions, and eventually it came to coexist with the original Japanese religion, Shintoism. The term *Fukei* represented the Buddhist universe as an impression of the world. Consequently, the meanings of *Fukei* covered every perceptible environment.

The second step was the introduction of the German word *Landschaft* through the course of modernization in the twentieth century. After almost 300 years of isolation, Japan opened its doors to the West during the Meiji era. Ever since that period, Japan has pursued modernization by making its national policy “escaping Asia for Europe”. Japan had to adapt everything to the European way, its politics, its economy, and in part, its culture. Japan digested knowledge from the West and improved and utilized it while adapting it to the Japanese situation.

From Germany, Japan introduced many ideas to the field of natural science. The modern scientific idea of landscape that is *Landschaft* was also introduced to Japan and interpreted into the Japanese language (Abe 1995). To interpret this new concept, a new Japanese word *Keikan* was coined using Chinese characters. Thus, *Keikan* is connected to scientific and modern concepts that have been introduced from Western countries and permeated across Japan through the modernization of the twentieth century.

The latest significant change of landscape concepts began under the rapid economic development and urbanization after World War II. To improve the unplanned expansion of urban areas, urban planners needed an objective discipline and control. Consequently, the modern idea of *Keikan* became popular in the context of urban planning, rather than through the long tradition of Japanese cultural adaptations complete with emotional and religious transformation. Nowadays, we use the two words *Keikan* and *Fukei* as objective features of the landscape and subjective impressions of the landscape in an arbitrary manner in discussions of landscape planning.

In parallel with the discussions, Japan intends to introduce one more concept related to landscape. Japan is exploring a new National Spatial Planning Act that considers landscape conservation in the context of Japan’s declining population. It involves utilizing ‘landscape’ as a loan word, and ensuring that the definition of ‘landscape’ is equivalent to the European Landscape Convention where ‘landscape’ is seen as an area, perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors (Council of Europe, 2000, Chapter I). This is why the European Landscape Convention gets a lot of attention from a remote non-EU nation, Japan. In terms of interaction between natural and human factors and characteristics of each region, the recently introduced concept of ‘landscape’ is expected to serve as an alternative to link the Japanese concepts,

Keikan and *Fukei*. However, it is time to review the ways of seeing landscape considering the cultural relationship with our own life-world which can offer an insight to overcome the rhetorical discussion and to realize a democratic environment management.

2.3 Comparative Studies on Ways of Seeing the Landscape Between Germany and Japan

To elicit the cultural way of seeing landscapes empirically, a drawing method was adopted. A sketch drawing is one kind of representation of one's landscape imagery. Like mental mapping by Lynch (1960), the sketch can be interpreted with some main elements based on the tenets of Gestalt psychology (Nakamura 1982). The drawing process induces people to associate landscape elements and build a composition in a frame. The represented sketch shows us the respondent's viewpoint and distance from the scene as well as the composition of figure and ground in the sketch. In addition to that, it is also expected that the drawing process can elicit explanations of the view, which in turn promotes more vivid narratives and concrete information about one's notions and attitudes toward the landscape. It means that the sketch represents what the respondents look at and how they view the landscape (Ueda 2009).

The visual data are analyzed not psychologically or pathologically as clinical drawings, but in terms of cultural comparison: what kind of landscape elements the people imagined. They composed a scene through interconnection of the elements and the self-oriented field of view. Hence, the ways of seeing the landscape can be reflected by the visual data drawn or reported (Ueda et al. 2012).

Figure 2.1 includes four examples of landscape image sketches representing forest imagery. The first one is a close up view of a forest composed of just trunks of trees appearing in the near distance. The second one is a sideways view combining various landscape elements such as a mountain, the sky, a forest and a lake representing a scene in the middle and a faraway distance. The third one is a bird's-eye view of a surrounding place. It describes the horizontal structure and wide expanse of the landscape. In the fourth sketch, the observers themselves or the setting of their standpoint, such as trails, vehicles and houses are drawn into the sketches



Fig. 2.1 Examples of landscape image sketches

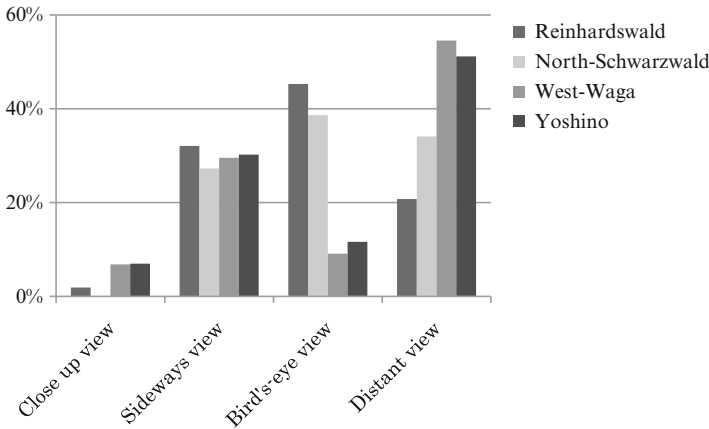


Fig. 2.2 View of landscape image sketches

to explain their activity. The standpoint is sometimes surrounded or separated from other landscape elements describing the spatial continuity and accessibility to the forest.

Here we show the results of landscape images from an aesthetic standpoint. The following question was asked, “What kind of a picture would you take for a typical postcard in this region?” It was expected that subjects imagined a representatively beautiful scene in common with the region. The experiments were conducted in Japan and Germany. Since the experiments were carried out as a study of forest awareness, the research areas were selected in forest regions. Consequently, the sketches were obtained through interviews with 197 respondents living in the four forest regions; namely, Rheinhardswald ($n=58$) and North-Schwarzwald ($n=50$) in Germany and West-Waga ($n=46$) and Yoshino ($n=43$) in Japan.

As results of landscape image sketching, the represented distance and viewing angle showed different characteristics at a national level (Fig. 2.2). Many landscape images represented panoramic views, but the viewing angle was different. The results at German research sites were characterized by a ‘bird’s-eye view’. On the other hand, the results at Japanese research sites were characterized by a ‘close-up view’ and ‘distant view’. The results seem to clearly reflect the different definitions of ‘landscape’, namely ‘spread of district’ in Germany and ‘scenery’ in Japan.

The result of self-orientation, which was interpreted by the position of the standpoint, showed the different cultural ways of viewing and idealizing the landscape more clearly (Fig. 2.3). The main trends are similar to the foregoing analysis; the results reflected more obviously the basic definition of *Landshaft* in Germany and *Fukei* in Japan. At the German research sites, the landscape aesthetic was represented as an expansion of the regional district, while in Japan it has connotations of scenery. Furthermore, the environment is perceived in Germany as one’s surroundings, in which the subjects’ own standpoints are also represented as external aesthetic motifs.

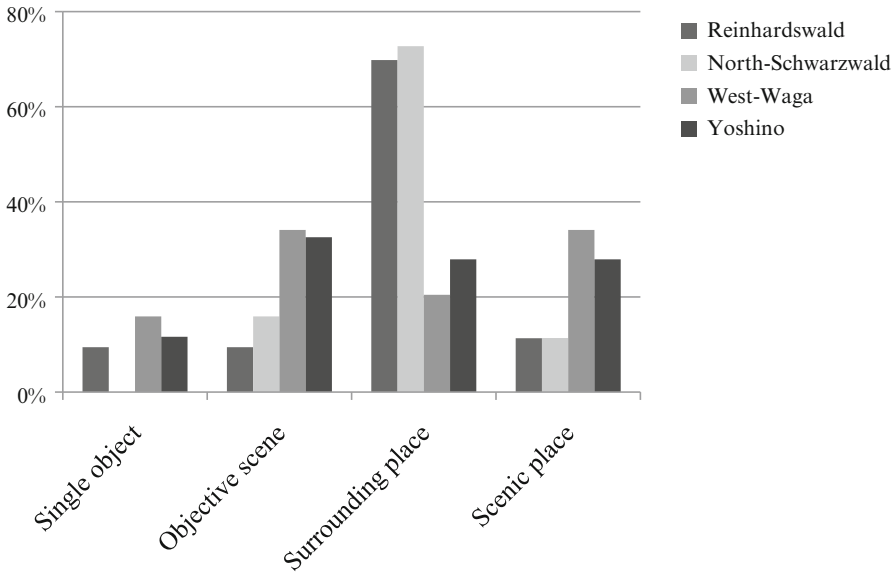


Fig. 2.3 Self-orientation of landscape image sketches

Conversely, Japanese perspectives point outwards. This empirical result offers significant proof and new insight into understanding the different landscape perceptions and the meaning of life-world in both nations.

The main motifs of the sketches were considered from the visual landscape elements and verbal accounts and classified into the following seven categories.

1. Seasonal change: a beautiful scene visible only in a specific season, at otherwise uninteresting places
2. Natural landscape: a combination of natural elements in a certain location
3. Recreational activities: a combination of the natural landscape and viewpoints
4. Cultural landscape: a synergistic effect between the local natural environment and human activities through primary industry
5. Home community: a description of their own settlements from the outside
6. Historic and memorial architecture: a representative historic place
7. Infrastructure: a construction project such as a bridge and hydroelectric dam

In Fig. 2.4, the categories were arranged from natural landscapes to artificial, showing the different preferences towards natural and cultural landscapes at each research site. At Japanese research sites, ‘seasonal change’ is significant and a preference for natural elements emerged, which also suggests a temporal way of seeing the landscape. On the other hand, the German answers were biased in favor of cultural landscapes. The motif of settlements such as ‘home community’ and ‘historic architecture’ in Reinhardswald is especially noticeable, but North-Schwarzwald doesn’t have an outstanding motif for postcards, which may suggest a large variety of motifs in the cultural landscape. In comparison with the Japanese description of

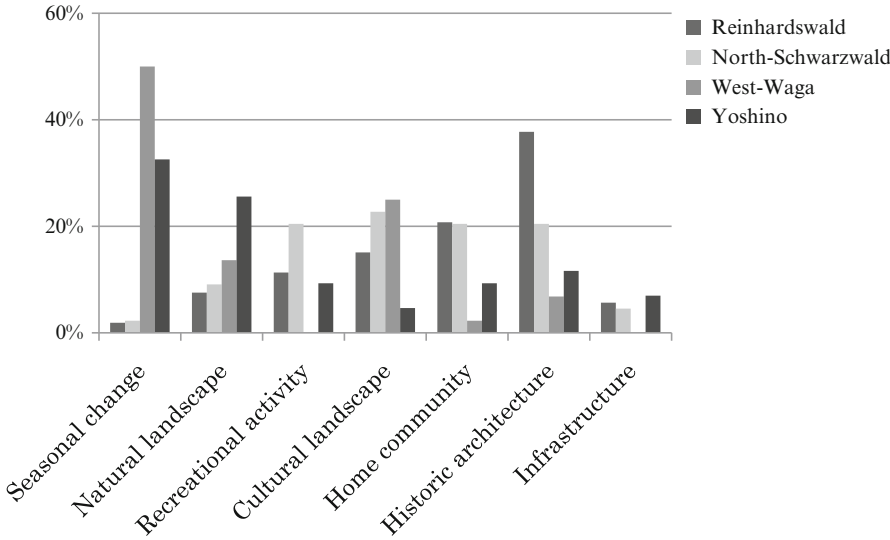


Fig. 2.4 Main motifs of landscape image sketches

temporality, German motifs such as ‘cultural landscape’, ‘home community’ and ‘historic architecture’ are characterized by spatiality and sustainability.

As we have seen, the most remarkable research finding was counterintuitive and involved the opposite direction of their line of sight. It suggested different relationships between the subjects’ home community and natural surroundings. In Germany, people tended to draw historic architecture and their home communities, which are composed of houses and settlements. The pictures are often viewed from a bird’s-eye view. That is, an inward-looking focus on the surroundings. On the other hand, in Japan, natural landscapes and their seasonal changes are represented by mountains and water, and in the study they were often a combination of foreground and a distant view describing an outward-looking focus on scenic views.

The ways of seeing the landscape in Germany and Japan can also be discussed in the context of landscape planning (Fig. 2.5). A different range of time and space tends to be taken into consideration depending on the different concepts. An inward-looking focus on an inhabited area in Germany is represented as an aesthetically cultural landscape. German sketches describe a sustainable system in a certain spatial range. It could be a representation of an awareness of their life-world. In Japan, an outward-looking focus toward a natural landscape represents scenic harmony in a certain temporal moment. It could be a representation of the Japanese connection to nature throughout the four seasons.

Through the experiments, the way that many Japanese tend to see landscapes appears to be based on the concept of *Fukei*. As Kato (2007) reports, Japanese culture is connected with the concept of the ‘here and now’, in which the quality of an independent part is emphasized rather than the whole structure. The ways of seeing landscapes must also be related to a cyclical sense of time through the four seasons and a spatial awareness of boundaries in mountainous land.

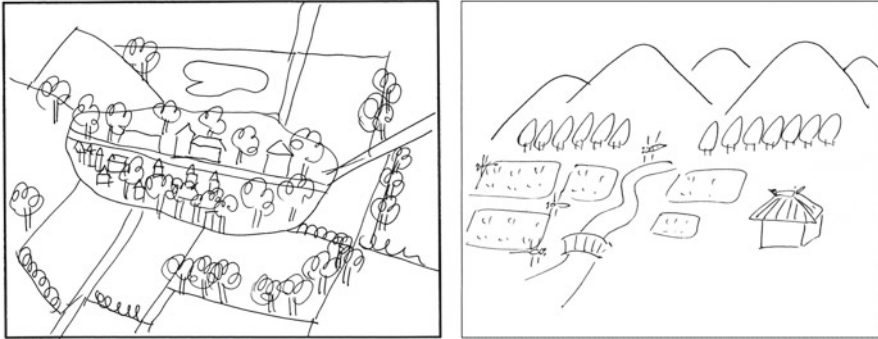


Fig. 2.5 Examples of landscape image sketches in Germany (*left*) and Japan (*right*)

2.4 Japanese Challenges with Landscape Planning

As for landscapes in the context of urbanization, nature, which is apt to be the center of one's orientation, does not exist in our usual life-world. A direct relationship with nature is becoming much less common in our modern lifestyle. The traditional concept of landscape *Fukei*, on the one hand, and the current lifestyle that has been mostly introduced through western countries on the other, do not fit together well. It can be why the idea of *Fukei* does not hold a prominent position in the discussion of urban planning in Japan. How to fill the gap between them is the current challenge facing Japanese landscape planning.

Comparing with Germany, the Japanese outward-looking focus toward a natural landscape could be connected with disregard for our own life-world. Considering Japanese challenges with landscape planning, however, can it be accepted to regard the ways of seeing the landscapes as unavoidable given cultural differences?

The opposite direction of line of sight can be compared to the figure-ground relationship in the visual perception of the Rubin Vase: the figure-ground relationship of a residential area and natural surroundings in the regional landscape appears as a reversible structure which changes depending on a context but cannot be observed simultaneously (Fig. 2.6). The direction of line of sight can be switched with the slightest of opportunities. For example, new viewpoints around settlements could offer an inward-looking focus like in Germany.

This hypothesis was generated in an ongoing similar study in Sapporo, a big city with a population of 1.9 million. Incidentally, it is said that Sapporo is the most attractive city in Japan. We found that citizens who have more emotional attachment to the city tend to associate mountains more frequently as a representative scene of the city. The result underpins a Japanese centrifugal line of sight that was observed in the Japan–Germany comparative study. Moreover, it implies the connection between ways of seeing the landscape and possessing a regional identity. In addition to that, more noteworthy results were various responses about the

Fig. 2.6 Rubin Vase

inward-looking focus on the city. Sapporo is surrounded by low hills and mountains, which enable the citizens to look down at their own everyday life-world from outside. It suggests the connection between the ways of seeing landscapes and their emotional attachment to the hometown. This hypothesis requires further validation but can be a key approach for Japanese landscape design. To resume the feeling of orientation and attachment to one's life-world, both clear views to the immediate natural surroundings as well as natural trails for regional perspective need to be reserved.

A landscape can be described as the physiognomy of the city. Character and health condition occur in its appearance. Conversely, we can judge the conditions by the expression. Like a body check in the mirror in a lifestyle, frequent scenes of landscape perspective can raise the awareness and responsibility to your life-world.

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