

Cat Street

Tokyo, Japan
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Young People Walking
on Cat Street

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Harajuku and Shibuya districts in Tokyo are some of the most popular for young people interested in shopping and fashion. Cat Street (officially the Kyu Shibuya-gawa Promenade) is a narrow pedestrian street that connects these two neighborhoods. It is very popular with young people for strolling and shopping.

Cat Street is lined with chain stores, boutiques, street vendors, artist studios, a playground, and cafes. Described as “funky”, “Bohemian”, and as possessing “European charm”, Cat Street is a place where young people can express themselves with fashion, graffiti, and perhaps by opening a unique small businesses.

The pedestrian centered design of Cat Street encourages people to be outside, meet friends, and people-watch.

Tokyo's urban evolution has been a gradual process of overlaying new systems on older ones in partial ways- superseding but not fully erasing traces of the old order. -Mark Mulligan

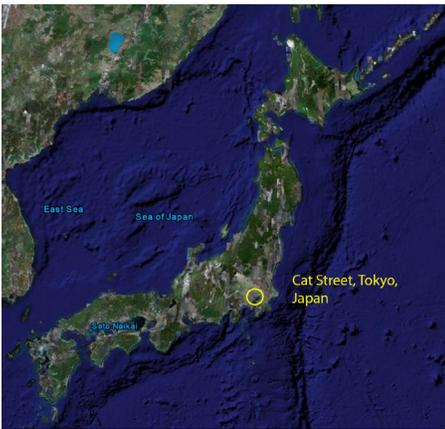


Design in Japan

Tokyo is renowned world-wide for its vibrancy- a mix of traditional Japanese cultural with innovative modern style. The government of Japan has helped develop this vibrancy through planning efforts and financial support of large projects. In the 1990's the economic boom facilitated the large scale government investment in urban amenities (Gruyaert & Mulligan 2001). Omotesando Street (which Cat Street intersects) in Harajuko was redeveloped and is now considered the Japanese Champs Elysee. In 2001 the Urban Renaissance Headquarters was created to continue the momentum of the urban renewal effort and encourage financial investment in large projects (Jenks & Dempsey 2005).

Mulligan states, ***“Ambitious large-scale public and commercial projects have been inserted into the older city fabric; new kinds of public spaces and amenities that offer the possibility of a more leisurely, cosmopolitan enjoyment of the city.”***

Context of Cat Street

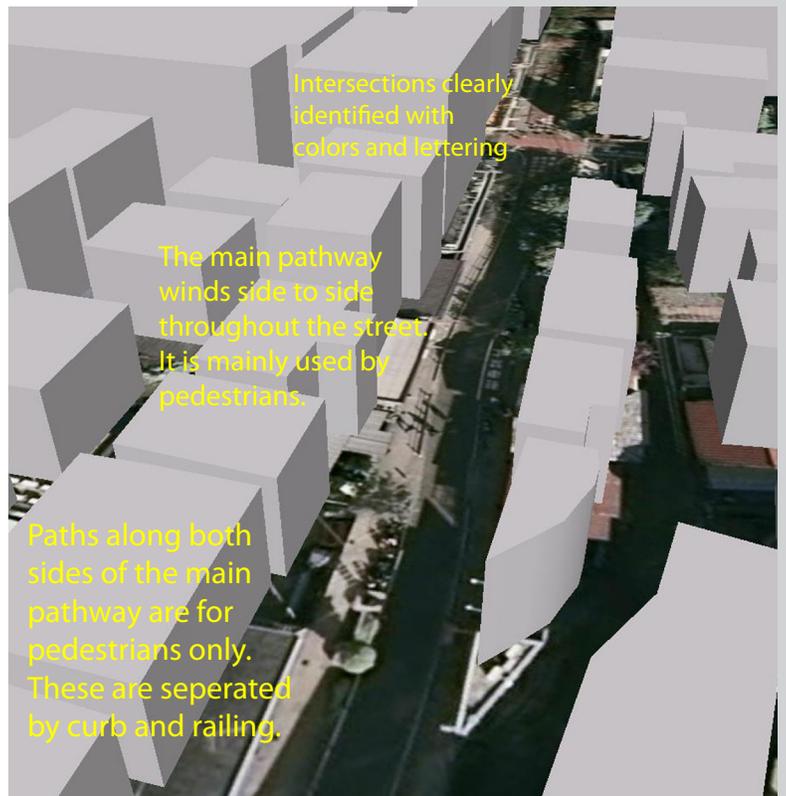


Cat Street is a hidden street, almost an alley way. It is the entrance to Ura-hara, which is an area known as the “back gate” or “wrong side” of Hirajuku. Beginning in the 1980’s, this area was home to many underground artists

The street was actually a lid project, placed over the Shibuya/Furukawa River. The river is visible south of Shibuya and is heavily embanked in concrete.

Local folklore say the street received its nickname because of the fact that a lot of cats used to wander this area.

The official name of Cat Street is Kyu Shibuya-gawa Promenade. Locals also refer to it as “yu-hodo.”



"...aluminum Chinese hair clips, handmade bead accessories, wonderfully patterned socks (for men too) and crafted, original handbags that can only be described as super-granny chic." -items available in a Cat Street shop described by Kaori Shoji

A Place for Youth Culture

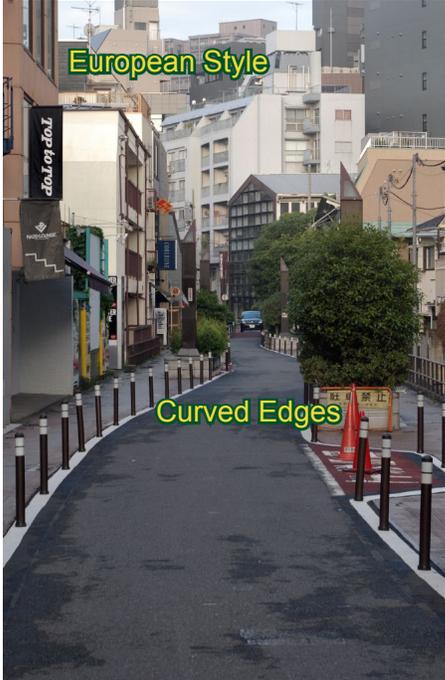


A trend for several years among Tokyo youth is kosupure or costume play. Young people develop amazing, outrageous costumes to express themselves. Gothic, punk, baby-doll, and anime styles are drawn upon to create unique costumes that fashion designers look to for inspiration.

How does this relate to public space? Part of the fun of kosupure is the element of showing creativity on the street. This hobby was developed on the streets of Harajuku and Shibuya neighborhoods. The public promenades including Cat Street and Omotesando Street give these cutting-edge youth a place to display and develop their creativity. In addition, many young people and tourists come to Harajuku neighborhood to see the eclectic costumes and unique aspect of Tokyo culture.



Design Elements



Conclusions

+ positives

- lots of visual stimuli; living and non-living; intrigue and curiosity
- good places walking, stopping, standing, and sitting
- great location; connection between 2 popular destination areas; yet hidden, so not too crowded
- safety for pedestrians; railings and curbs separate main path (where cars are allowed) from side paths (pedestrians only); clearly marked intersections and crossings
- good lighting at night; from all the shops and cafes; buildings
- good circulation; clearly marked paths
- human scale; narrow street; more intimate
- site encourages creativity and self-expression in a unique culture
- winding path signifies river
- simple playground for children
- car access is restricted; but can still access for services when needed
- activation of the ura-hara; alleyway

— negatives

- lack of natural systems; vegetation, habitat and river
- more references to river
- curbs and railings can restrict access across paths
- not enough places for public sitting
- seems to be mostly private open spaces; storefronts;
- playground for children could be more developed



Cat Street at night
Children's playground



Shibuya/Furugawa River
Concrete embankments

Sources:

Gruyaert, Harry (photos) & Mark Mulligan (text). *The Game Has Changed: Scenes of Tokyo*. 2001 Summer 14: 52-67

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All photos from: www.flickr.com

All map images from Google Earth

