



Tokyo On and Under the Waterfront: Transformations and Continuities in the Venice of the East

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Tokyo is at heart a city built on water, both literally and figuratively. Since the feudal period vast areas have been created through landfill, expanding the port and industrial districts, creating new canals and neighborhoods, and the waterfront and port were a source of identity and pride. But while Tokyo started as a city oriented towards the water and water-transport for goods, for people and for pleasure, during the 20th century the city turned its back on an increasingly degraded waterfront, filled in the canals, covered over rivers, and erected increasingly imposing shoreline defenses against flooding. Since the 1990s those moves have been increasingly questioned, with an accelerating push to take advantage of redevelopment opportunities on brown field sites, with initiatives to restore rivers and streams, canals and shorelines, and with local government efforts to re-cast the waterfront as an asset. The physical and cultural legacies of the developmental state legacy are enduring, however, and it is proving difficult to reverse decades of waterfront transformation. This research examines the shifting attitudes towards the waterfront in Tokyo, through the lens of public and private planning and development initiatives.