

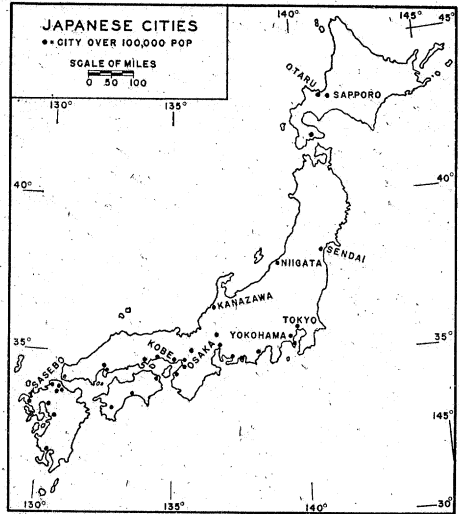
DISTRIBUTION OF JAPANESE CITIES

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The value of the study of cities as a culminating topic in regional and economic geography has already been brought to the attention of geographers by Whitaker¹ who points out that both review and summary may be secured by such a procedure. Another method of attaining a similar climatic epitomization of a large region is by a study of its cities and their areal relationships. To exemplify this method of procedure, a brief description and explanation of the distribution of Japanese cities might well be used.

There are thirty-six cities in Japan with a population of over 100,000, the figure commonly accepted as truly defining urban agglomerations. (See figure.) Thirty of these cities are located south of the 36th parallel where the trend of the main mountains of Japan is east and west. Within this most urbanized portion of Japan occurs one of the most remarkable city alignments of the world. If a straight line be drawn from Tokyo to Sasebo, a distance of 600 miles, and if two lines be drawn parallel to this line, each 30 miles distant from it, the area bounded by the two outer lines would include, not only twenty-six of the thirty-six cities of Japan, but also its nine largest cities, two of which, Tokyo and Osaka, have a population in excess of two million. This alignment of cities might be termed a corridor, a structural, or a trunk route alignment, but in a larger sense it is a regional alignment, lying as it does along the major axis of a region. Within this regional alignment there are four city groups or urban nodes. These are (1) the Kwanto Plain grouping, including Tokyo the capitol, and Yokohama its port; (2) the Kinki grouping, including Osaka, Kyoto, Kobe and others; (3) the Hiroshima-Kure group; and (4) the grouping in Northern Kyushu. Between these groups of cities and the cities interspersed between them is a surprisingly regular interval of from sixty to seventy-five miles.



The ten cities not included within this alignment are scattered throughout the remainder of Japan, with only one other grouping existing, that of Otaru and Sapporo in the fertile Ishikari Plain. This Sapporo-Otaru grouping also points to a minor urban pattern very common in Japan, that of a large city with a satellite port city. Other examples are Osaka and Kobe, and Tokyo and Yokohama. Though from a map there appears to be an alignment of the three cities of Kanazawa, Niigata, and Sendai, it is perhaps accidental, since there seems to be no evidence to support any reason for such a pattern.

The most favorable physical environment for the development of Japanese culture seems to be that of Southwestern Japan where that same Japanese culture originated. And within Southwestern Japan the most favorable combination of both site and situational factors is found in that east-west belt where the great city alignment is located.

Japanese culture is associated with flat alluvial plains, the only areas in such a humid, rugged land where intensive

¹ Whitaker, J. R., "The Study of Cities as a Concluding Unit in Economic Geography", *Journal of Geography*, vol. 36, pp. 50-54.

rice agriculture is possible. This belt contains the largest, as well as several of the larger, alluvial plains of Nippon. These include the Kwanto Plain, the Nobi Plain, the Kinki Plain, and the Plains of Northern Kyushu. In addition to these, there are a number of other plains of lesser extent, all of which, however, add to the sum total of flat, rich land available to the inhabitants of the zone of cities. All of these plains are situated on tidewater, a factor of great historical importance, since it enabled easy communication between them in a day when their encircling mountains were almost insurmountable barriers to trade. Increasing the effectiveness of this internal means of transportation was the Inland Sea which furnished a well-protected route between east and west. Later, when Japan became westernized, this same route also became significant in foreign trade since it lies astride the Great Circle route from Western United States to Shanghai. The present great axis of Japanese land transportation parallels this sea route all the way from Tokyo to Nagasaki, though it is to a certain extent an outgrowth of the imperial road system which tied the larger plains together.

The climate of this belt of cities is rather more favorable than that found in the remainder of Japan, for several reasons. Most of this belt is within the great structural valley or basin lying between the two main mountain ranges of Japan and thus is protected to the north and west from the severe winter monsoons blowing out of Asia and to the south from the destructive typhoons moving northward from tropical waters. Everywhere within this zone of city concentration temperatures permit two crops of rice annually, a very important consideration in the densely populated Orient. Temperatures are also suitable to the production of mulberry, the basis of much of Japan's export trade. As in all of Japan, precipitation is everywhere adequate for agriculture.

In addition to the large areas of flat plains, the natural and well-situated transportation route, and its favorable climate, this belt also contains other important natural resources. These include the extensive coal fields of Northern Kyushu, the basis of the Japanese iron and steel industry, the copper mines of Northern Shikoku, and the resources of the Inland Sea, salt, tatami reeds, and fish.