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## Places

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Buddhist Priests 2: Developers 1

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**Modern commercial street, Kyoto.**  
Courtesy Beth Blummer.

would require the removal of the raised floor structure, drastically changing the scale of the rooms. Removing the *tatami* would change the smell and feel of the room. Accommodating the handicapped would require the removal of the wooden threshold that secures the sliding wooden front doors. Contemporary selling standards require lighted display windows on the front of the building and display shelves throughout the store.

Even changes in the typical Japanese diet have implications for adaptive reuse. The average size of Japanese young people has become much larger; consequently, the traditional-sized *tatami* mats no longer fit the average young Japanese physique.

The preservation of these areas depends upon a continuation of traditional lifestyles, which seems unlikely. The ageless disregard of the young for things old has a new twist in Japan. The sons of the proprietors of these old-style shops have turned these once lively communities into quiet “bed”

towns, from which they commute into the center cities as salarymen. They would much prefer a new American-style house to the inconvenience of an old building.

The movement towards modernization and Westernization has become a cultural imperative for most of the younger generation. This has popularized the use of beds, couches, tables, chairs, material goods and probably most important of all, locked doors, which provide privacy. Old Japanese spaces with thin paper *shoji* (sliding doors) were designed for communal living and open communication, requiring politeness and consideration to ensure comfort to the large number of people who might live in a small space. The Japanese acceptance of the Western desire for privacy and insular spaces is resulting in the breakdown of the entire cultural approach towards living and working spaces.

Protective legislation, public education and design guidelines can be effective at protecting the architectural skeletons of towns. However, preservation must go beyond saving facades. Economic and cultural change can sap the soul and regional character of buildings and towns. The essence of preservation should be finding the *machinami* of a place, the strong relationship between buildings, spaces, community and people, and helping it to survive.

## BUDDHIST PRIESTS 2: DEVELOPERS 1

*Cathy Tuttle*

There is an old saying in Kyoto: “You can’t fight the priests.” In their rush to transform the city in time for Kyoto’s 1,200-year anniversary in 1994, real estate developers and Kyoto government officials are ignoring that proverb.

The priests are opposed to two current development proposals: the expansion of the main railroad station and a remodel of the Kyoto Hotel. Both projects take advantage of a 1988 law that allows buildings to exceed the 145-foot height of the five-story pagoda of Toji Temple, an enduring symbol of Kyoto, built in the late Heian period (799-1185).

Buddhist priests, organized in a group representing more than 1,000 Kyoto temples, have found an effective way to do battle against development: They are using the power of tourism to challenge Kyoto’s new high-rise construction boom.

Kyoto annually hosts 40 million tourists, who contribute one quarter of the city’s income. In the most recent conflict, priests

refused entrance to nine famous temples (including Kiyomizudera, Ginkakuji and Kinkakuji) to tourists who stayed in the Kyoto Hotel — unless the tourists signed a petition not to patronize any hotels belonging to the Kyoto Hotel group. The tactic brought the Kyoto Hotel management to the bargaining table, but construction still continues on the 190-foot structure, scheduled to open in 1994.

This is not the first time priests have used the power of tourism to influence urban development decisions. During 1986, tourist revenue declined drastically when the nine famous temples closed their doors to the public. Temple officials had been asked to collect a city tax on admissions, a tax they felt was not well spent. The temples reopened

only after being threatened by a city property tax.

Throughout most of 1990-91, many temples posted billboards on their property proclaiming: "We are against the new Kyoto Hotel and other skyscrapers that will destroy the ancient beauty of the city." And in late 1991, an association of 1,000 temples, much to the chagrin of the Japanese National Tourism Organization, took out an advertisement in the *New York Times*, protesting development and calling on "foreigners who love Kyoto" to protect its beauty.

Recently, Kiyomizudera, which boasts a spectacular city view from its hillside location, bought property worth more than \$7 million to halt construction of a six-story apartment house that would have interfered with the temple's scenic view.



**Kiyomizudera Temple is a popular tourist destination. Temple officials have led the fight against rapid development in Kyoto.**  
Photo by Cathy Tuttle.

Kyoto's fortunate escape from the ravages of World War II, and a series of scenic, cultural and historic preservation laws, have kept Kyoto from the common fate of becoming a placeless maze of new construction. But now, the cost of residential real estate (a 282 percent increase in the past three years) has made most protest ineffective. Buddhist priests have taken up the challenge to save Kyoto's identity and enlisted tourists as their most effective weapon to save the Kyoto way of life.



**Buddhist priests have been active in preserving the cultural fabric of Kyoto.**  
Photo by Cathy Tuttle.