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株式会社 鈴蘭 TEL 779-9176





Osaka, Ikuno-ku ward, a large residential complex, at its centre is a resident's parking area.

HOW CARS AND THE QUESTION OF WHERE TO PARK THEM HAVE RESHAPED URBAN PLANNING IN JAPAN

- ▶ Due to the lack of space in Japanese cities, many people choose not to own a car.
- ▶ If you do not have access to your own parking space, the civil motoring authority will prevent you from purchasing a car.
- ▶ Letting parking spaces has become big business and a parking space can yield more than an apartment.
- ▶ Kei cars, mini vehicles no longer than two metres, are very common and make up 40% of the car market.
- ▶ All of this is redesigning the urban aesthetics of Japan's cities, populated by tiny cars parked in improbable spaces, all of which are scrupulously authorised.

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Ichikawa, Chiba prefecture, the first light of dawn. Houses with parking spaces for cars and bicycles.



Ichikawa, Chiba prefecture, a company car parked in a courtyard.



Tokyo, Edogawa ward, an eastwards view from on high over the neighbourhood near Hirai station.



Tokyo, Edo-gawa ward, the small private garage can fit only part of the family's Mercedes jeep.

At the end of the 1980s, at the height of the economic boom, for most people in Japan the car was an essential status symbol. So much so that for many years having a luxury car was considered more important than having a beautiful home. In fact, it was not unusual to see big, expensive cars parked outside less well-to-do tenement blocks.

Today things have changed and the new generations that live in the cities feel less of a need to own a car. Public transport is certainly efficient, but the main disincentive to car ownership is the lack of space in such high-density living areas. In Japan it isn't possible to park by the roadsides and if you don't have access to a parking space, then you aren't even eligible to buy a car. At the moment of purchase, in fact, detailed information is requested about where the car will be parked: a map or rental contract for a parking space must be presented otherwise the civil motoring authority will reject the purchase.

A fully-fledged market exists for parking spaces and those who own a small piece of land can offer it for rental for that purpose. The lack of space has made automobile manufacturers remodel their cars based on necessity, leading to a return of the kei cars: versatile vehicles, often electric, that are no longer than two metres and no wider than one and a half meters. While, in the 1980s these almost completely disappeared, today the kei cars make up almost 40% of the market where, in cities like Tokyo and Osaka, letting a parking space can yield more than letting an apartment (especially considering that a parking space requires little to no maintenance).

All of this is changing the urban aesthetic of Japan's cities, populated by thousands of small cars parked in scrupulously authorized spaces. The lack of space in 21st century cities that are overcrowded (and increasingly "smart") is already a widespread problem in every continent: could Japan then be showing the way forward?



Tokyo, Edogawa ward, a residential area of independent houses, each with their own parking space.



Higashiosaka prefecture, Osaka, used cars on display.



Tokyo, Edogawa ward, kei car parked in front of an independent home.



Ichikawa, Chiba prefecture, a car parked in front of a low-rise building.



Tokyo, Edogawa ward, a kei car parked in front of a small four-family building.



Ichikawa, Chiba prefecture, a car parked in front of a low-rise building.



Osaka, Tennoji ward, a car park near Teradachō station.



Fukuoka, Minami ward, the entrance to a multi-storey in the city centre.



Ichikawa, Chiba prefecture, a car parked in front of a low-rise building.



Ichikawa, Chiba prefecture, paid parking near Motoyawata.



Tokyo, Edogawa ward, cars parked in front of low-rise buildings.



Tokyo, Edogawa ward, a small car pokes out of a miniscule garage of a private home near Hirai station.



Fukuoka, Higashi ward, a pedestrian underpass and a bridge over the railway line.



Tokyo, Edogawa ward, a self-service car park open 24 hours a day located beneath a flyover.



Tokyo, Edogawa ward, a vehicle for carrying children parked near a golf driving range.



Tokyo, Edogawa ward, the car park of a Family Mart convenience store, open 24 hours a day.



parallel zero

via Donatello 19/A Milan - info@parallelzero.com - www.parallelzero.com - +39 02 89281630