

# Stations Help Define Urban Image —Kyoto and Lille-Europe

Corinne Tiry

The new stations at Kyoto (Japan) and Lille (France) both have direct high-speed rail connections to their respective national capitals (Tokyo, 135 minutes; Paris, 58 minutes). The innovative architectural design of both stations is an important and lasting legacy from the 1990s. They have several other things in common: both were the result of studies launched in 1988; both were opened at about the same time (1997 for Kyoto Station, 1994 for Lille-Europe); and both are based on the idea that a station should form an integral part of the city in its own right, even for transit passengers. On the other hand, the architecture of the two stations is radically different. This is a reflection of different decision-making processes and urban visions that were appropriate to each cultural context. Here, I would like to look at the creative processes and mechanisms that gave rise to the similarities and differences.

## Kyoto: A Custom-made Station

Kyoto Station has been rebuilt a number of times. It was first built in 1877, completely rebuilt in 1914, and then rebuilt once again in 1952 to keep up with increasing rail ridership. The station has always been in the same location at the

southern edge of the main part of the city. It now serves as a passenger hub for both the Keihanshin region (Kyoto–Osaka–Kobe) with its 16.7 million inhabitants, and for the major cities (Tokyo, Nagoya, and Osaka) of the Tokaido axis. The station is located on the Tokaido Shinkansen, linking Japan's two largest business centres, Tokyo and Osaka. However, during the 1980s it fell out of step with the modernization envisaged for the Kansai region.

This obsolescence was placed in relief by some ambitious plans for transport infrastructure in the region. The new Kansai International Airport being built on an artificial island in nearby Osaka Bay was projected to open in 1993, while various cities in Keihanna region (a vigorous technical-industrial centre in Kyoto, Osaka and Nara area) were to be linked at the beginning of the 21st century by new high-speed railway lines. At the time, these major projects prompted local decision-makers and Japanese National Railways (JR West since 1987) to bring the ongoing process of regional modernization and internationalization to Kyoto as well. This was all the more important because Kyoto (Japan's ancient capital periodically from 794 to 1867) had participated to some extent in the industrial and financial prosperity of the

region, but was being increasingly marginalized by the growing economies of its neighbours, Osaka and Kobe. Few Tokyo companies have offices in Kyoto, but some 40 million tourists visit it each year. In many cases, their first impression of Kyoto is formed at the train station.

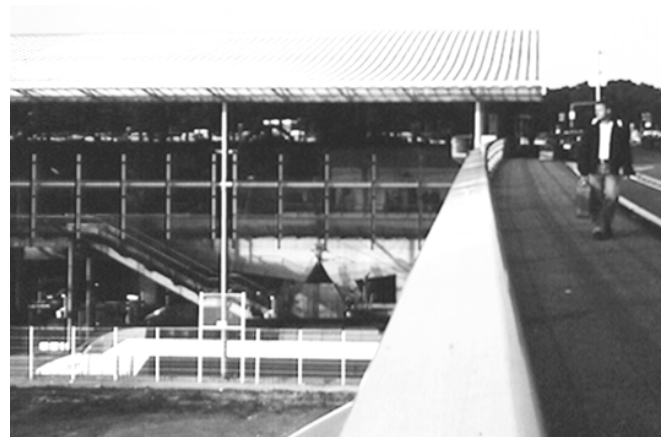
A task force (composed of representatives from the city, prefecture, Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and JR West) organized an international competition for the design of a new station for Kyoto. The winner, the Japanese architect Hiroshi Hara, was announced in 1991. This type of competition is uncommon in Japan and shows how much was at stake in this ambitious project.

The competition organizers had three goals: (1) to revitalize the public transportation system; (2) to accommodate tourism more smoothly; and (3) to reinvigorate the local urban area. Just as Osaka was promoting the Kansai International Airport project as a way of re-establishing itself as an international economic centre (having fallen behind Tokyo's overwhelming economic strength), Kyoto decided to use its remarkable station project to reaffirm its identity not only as the centre of Japanese culture but also as Japan's major tourism destination. The enhanced role of the new Kyoto Station shows how



The main facade of Kyoto Station is a giant sculpture in the city.

(JR West)



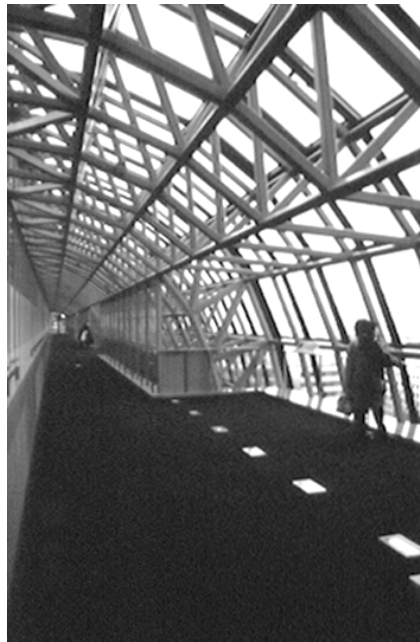
The openness of the main facade of Lille-Europe Station with a TGV standing below is like an exhibition.

(SNCF AP-AREP, D. Boy de la Tour)

important these considerations were, and is indicative of the diversification policy that the new JR companies were promoting throughout Japan at the time. The wide variety of components making up the station building—hotel, department store, shopping mall (with boutiques, cafés and restaurants), cinemas, museum, exhibition venues, offices for prefectural government services, parking lots—and the huge surface area (238,000 m<sup>2</sup>) all show how Japanese station buildings have finally and completely evolved from the postwar mindset. With very few exceptions, station design in Japan has focused on simply twinning a station with a department store. At Kyoto, new functions, both commercial and symbolic, have permitted the station to act as a regional airport gateway (one can even check-in baggage for Kansai International Airport), and to become an identifiable metropolitan symbol, thanks to the unique design of its famous architect. The intent was obviously to make the station into an attractive showcase for the city.



Shaped like a valley, the interior space of Kyoto Station creates a recreational landscape. (Author)



On the upper level, a free space is devoted to watching Kyoto's unique cityscape. (Author)

Hara's rectangular structure is monolithic and monumental. It is inward-looking, although it offers several views of the city. The building's numerous functions are accommodated within its 16 floors, of which three are below ground. With its valley-like hollow space, the station building creates an artificial interior landscape that is open to the sky. This is not unlike the Kyoto cityscape, where the atmosphere is defined by a plateau surrounded by mountains and sky. The building's composite spatial layout likewise reminds us of the complexity of major Japanese cityscapes: vertical dimensions, interlocking networks, fluidity of space, and discontinuities of scale. The vocabulary for the different features call to mind both the country and the city—promenade, grand staircase, square, gateway, etc. In a vast collage, like a theme park reflecting an international city, Kyoto Station juxtaposes commonly known, but often foreign, components: the atrium of American malls, the traditional public space of



After crossing the Kyoto Station hall, consumers become passengers as they finally discover the railway tracks. (Author)

western cities, and the transportation hub of Japan. The possibility of moving around within this space without seeing or coming into actual contact with the railway functions clearly reveals that Kyoto Station was built, first and foremost, with the consumer in mind. Here the consumer is invited not merely to spend money, but to enjoy a rich spatial sensory experience as well. Hara expressed it best saying, 'Simply put, the new Kyoto Station is in a way sub-culture—culture for everyone! Popular architecture ....'

### Lille-Europe: A Station from a Mold

Unlike Kyoto, where the railway station has been reconstructed periodically at the same location, Lille chose to build elsewhere. Lille-Europe Station was constructed about 500 m from the old station, which is still in operation. Its purpose was specifically to accommodate the high-speed TGV trains running on northern Europe's railway network. The



On the lower level, the railway platforms offer a wide view through the urban public space and the city of Lille. (SNCF AP-AREP, D. Boy de la Tour)



Open to the city, the upper floor of Lille-Europe Station floats between the curved roof and glazed walls. (D. Rapaich)

Mayor, thanks to his position as Prime Minister at that time, convinced French National Railways (SNCF) to relocate the station in order to promote development of a new business centre around the TGV station by taking advantage of economic activity created by the new train system (*JRTR* 20, pp. 44–49). The station design was entrusted to the Agence des Gares, the study and project management office of the SNCF, with most responsibility going to the architect Jean-Marie Duthilleul. The project was part of a

national series of railway projects completed in 1994, including stations at Roissy-Charles de Gaulle and Lyon-Satolas. All these stations belong to the same architectural group with design characteristics regulated by charter in a precise, top-down manner by the Agence des Gares. The charter gives mandatory construction rules (clarity in spatial organization, homogeneity of roof surface, great visual depths, etc.) and aesthetic rules (such as exclusive use of certain materials, including metals, light-coloured

concrete, wood and glass). These rules ensure that each building harmonizes with the features of the specific location in France.

Without a doubt, the main feature of Lille-Europe Station is its open perspective on the city. Architects at Agence des Gares designed the building as a long, three-level balcony looking out over the city protected by high glass walls and covered with a great wave-like expanse of metal, interestingly called ‘the flying carpet.’ Unlike Kyoto Station, both passengers and passers-by are in almost constant visual contact with the running trains at the lowest level of the structure in an open framework of concrete. Rem Koolhaas, the Dutch architect who planned the adjoining Euralille business district, suggested that the moving trains should be on view because he wanted each TGV arrival to be a memorable event. Starting with this masterful idea, SNCF architects reinforced it by designing a linear, fluid, bright and open space, ‘Like a real street, in order to make the train an everyday experience.’ explains Duthilleul.

Before the TGV came to Lille, the city was not a tourist destination. Its former dependence on industry, especially textiles, is only part of its history, which is actually quite varied. In the midst of economic restructuring after a long



Lower and upper access to Lille-Europe Station create a dynamic event across the linear transparent window. (Author)

downturn in the 1970s, Lille chose to regain its former economic vitality by emphasizing tertiary industries. Tourism became one of these industries, but not a major one. However, the 1982 agreement between France and Britain brought high-speed trains through the Channel Tunnel to Lille, making it possible to base an economic strategy primarily on the TGV link. Situated at the crossroads of rapidly accessible capitals—Paris (and Roissy Airport), London and Brussels—Lille welcomes many tourists today.

The design of Lille-Europe is based on a French serial pattern. The architecture, the first image visitors have when disembarking, announces that they are on French soil, rather than that they are in Lille or at a European crossroads. Even so, the view of the city from the station makes it clear to tourists that they are on the flat plains of the north, not another French city like Lyon or Marseille.

### The Station As New Urban Magnet

Thanks to their innovative architectural styles, the Kyoto and Lille-Europe stations each create a distinct urban image. The Japanese station gives greater impact to the city's image and helps integrate Kyoto into the greater metropolitan region. The French station has given new vigor to Lille's image, while at the same time integrating the city into the national network of railways and airports.

However, in both cases, it is important to note that the stations were constructed because of trans-border factors—Kansai's international airport and the Channel Tunnel. The stations' architectural grandeur, in both a concrete and a symbolic sense, comes from local and global forces. The stations thus represent what we could call an urban magnet that attracts many people. ■



Emerging from the railway tracks, the Kyoto Station building is a massive and opaque volume containing attractive commercial activities. (Author)



Like a sign, the curved roof section gives a strong identity to Lille-Europe Station and Euraille, the new urban development area. (Author)



### Corinne Tiry

Ms Tiry is a French architect and researcher. She attended Kyoto University from 1994 to 1996 as a research worker on a scholarship from the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. She then received an AFAA grant from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs to study in Tokyo as a freelance architect-researcher from 1996 to 1997. She has written several articles about Japanese cities for specialist magazines (including *JRTR* 13 and 20), and is the author of *Learning from Three Tokyo Stations, 1997–2000* (CD-ROM format; <http://tenplusone.inax.co.jp/index.html>). She is a current member of the research team AVH (Architecture, Ville, Histoire) at Lille Ecole d'Architecture.