

Reflections on Tokyo Tower: Memory, History, and Human Resilience

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Abstract

This reflective paper revisits my personal journey to Tokyo Tower on 26 April 2017, a visit in which history, emotion, and imagination came together with a heightened awareness of how cities rebuild after profound destruction. Standing within the 1958 steel tower, completed only a little more than a decade after Japan's devastation in the Second World War, I experienced a dense mixture of meanings. Tokyo Tower appeared not only as an achievement of engineering, but also as a declaration of national recovery, dignity, and technological confidence. My reflections arise from the sensory experience of moving through the structure, the sweeping views of Tokyo's metropolitan landscape and Tokyo Bay, and my knowledge of how the city had risen from the ashes of wartime bombing and fire. By revisiting these visual and emotional memories, the paper examines how human resilience, public memory, and national identity are inscribed in the human-built environment and ecosystem. It also shows how historical understanding transforms a tourist visit into an embodied learning experience, in which photographs, facts, and textbook narratives become part of a lived, personal encounter with the place of visits.

Keywords: Tokyo tower; Memory; Resilience; Urban history; National identity

Introduction

After my reflections on my Tsukuba experiences [1,2], my passions are growing to reflect most of my personal trips especially in Japan. My visit to Tokyo Tower in April 2017 was such a moment. What began as a simple family outing became a reflective encounter with histories, memories, and beyond my imaginations. Tokyo Tower is not only a famous tourist attraction; it is a symbol of Japan's remarkable recovery after the Second World War. From its observation decks, the city appears as what Liotta [3] called a "cinematic cartography," a moving map in which architecture, streets, and skyline inscribe layers of twentieth-century experience. Scholars of Tokyo have shown that the metropolis is constantly reimagined through memories and imaginations, where the metropolitan's spaces are repeatedly written and rewritten in the literature, film, and everyday narratives [4,5]. Standing within the metallic warmth of the tower brought together my awe, feeling and awareness of Japan's wartime sufferings, my admiration for its post-war human resilience, and my own emotional journey of seeing the world through these layered representations of the past,

present and possible the future. The visual presence of the tower rising above the gardens and spring flowers, later captured in my photographs (Figure 1), became the anchor point of these reflections in this paper. All these I see them as environmental psychology [6].

Figure 1. Tokyo Tower photographed on 26 April 2017 during a family visit (Figure 1). The left image shows the full structure rising above the surrounding gardens and spring flowers, highlighting the tower's vivid red-white lattice design against a cloudy sky. The right image presents an upward perspective from the tower's base, capturing the intricate steel framework that symbolizes Japan's post-war reconstruction and technological resilience. This paper revisits that day, the emotions and feelings that surfaced (and re-surfaced), and the intellectual and non-academic reflections that accompanied the unforgettable experience. This paper is written as my personal narrative grounded in historical understanding, emotional awareness, and the broader meaning of human recovery and nation's reconstruction,

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while also engaging with existing scholarship on Tokyo's urban memories, commemorations, and human resilience [7-11].

The Journey to Tokyo Tower

Our visit took place on 26 April 2017. The weather was slightly cloudy, with the soft light of a Japanese spring illuminating the gardens surrounding the Tokyo Tower. As we approached the base, the bright red steel framework rose sharply into the sky, framed by patches of green trees and blooming flowers. I remember feeling immediately impressed by its presence. The tower looked both solid and elegant, a structure that carried decades of stories quietly within its steel. This sense of arrival is clearly visible in the photographs taken from the foot of the tower, which show both the landscaped foreground and the soaring lattice structure (Figure 1). Walking toward it, the knowledge that this tower was completed in 1958 at 332.9m that persisted as the tallest tower in Japan until the construction of Tokyo Skytree in 2012, and became a global symbol in the 1960s shaped how I looked at it. It was no longer just a building. It was a statement, a declaration by Japan that it had recovered, that it was ready to show the world its progress, stability, and modernity. In this sense, Tokyo Tower anticipates the later developments described by Hein, who portrayed Tokyo as a metropolis that continually reinvents itself through adaptive strategies while maintaining its role as a modern Asian major capital. Seen from the ground, the tower already suggested this dynamic, namely a post-war structure rooted in the ambition to reconnect Japan to the global stage.

Standing Within a Symbol of Post-War Recovery

When I entered the tower and stepped into the elevator of Tokyo Tower, I felt a mixture of excitement and joys. The elevator's ascent was smooth but symbolic. As the lift climbed higher, I thought about Japan's own ascent after the war; from ruins in 1945 to an advanced super economy by the 1960s. Tokyo Tower represented that rise. Historical and geographical studies remind us that this ascent is inseparable from the trauma of wartime destruction. Karacas showed how the memory of the Tokyo air raids survived in scattered monuments and local initiatives rather than in Grand National memorials, while Waley noted that much of Tokyo's past is preserved through modest neighborhood shrines, cemeteries, and reconstructed streets. My historical awareness intensified the emotional experience. During the war, Tokyo was heavily bombarded, with massive firebombing raids destroying countless homes and lives. The thought that only two decades later, this beautiful landmark, filled me with admiration for Japan's resilience. The tower felt like a monument not only to engineering, but to a society determined to rebuild with dignity. It stands in contrast to the relatively understated memorial landscape below, embodying a vertical expression of recovery in a city where

commemoration is often small-scale and dispersed. The close-up perspective of its steel framework, recorded in my upward-facing photograph, reminds me of this structural and very symbolic strength the time I revisit it (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Tokyo Tower photographed on 26 April 2017 during a family visit.

The View from the Observation Deck

The moment I stepped onto the viewing deck, a quiet awe filled me. The photos I captured through my hand phone still remind me of the moment when Tokyo unfolded beneath me like an endless tapestry. Tall buildings, intricate road networks, clusters of greenery, and the silent presence of Tokyo Bay stretched into the distance. These layered urban scenes are preserved in a series of panoramic photographs that show Tokyo from different angles and distances (Figure 2). From this height the city appeared very much as described by Liotta and Follaco namely a dense and dynamic urban landscape whose forms and rhythms are continually reinterpreted through cinema, literature, and other cultural texts. Figure 2: Panoramic views of Tokyo captured from the Tokyo Tower observation deck on 26 April 2017, illustrating the scale, architectural diversity, and spatial organization of the Tokyo metropolitan landscape (Figure 2). (A) A northward view showing Shiba Park in the foreground, framed by a mixture of modern high-rise buildings and older urban blocks, highlighting the coexistence of green public spaces within Tokyo's dense city core. (B) A northeastern perspective featuring prominent commercial skyscrapers and residential towers, reflecting the city's post-war vertical expansion and continuous economic growth. (C) A wide western-facing panorama depicting the extensive spread of mid- and high-rise structures across central Tokyo, demonstrating the continuity of urban development that extends far toward the metropolitan outskirts. (D) A southeastern view revealing both urban greenery and the distant waterfront of Tokyo Bay, with the arrangement of buildings, bridges, and coastal infrastructure signifying the city's deep historical connection to maritime trade, post-war reconstruction, and international engagement. Together,

these four panels provide a comprehensive visual representation of Tokyo's vibrant and resilient urban fabric as experienced from the iconic height of Tokyo Tower. From that height, the city's scale became overwhelming. Yet the view also connected directly to the big history: Tokyo Bay, visible from the deck (Figure 3), was the site where Japan officially surrendered on 2 September 1945 aboard the USS Missouri. Seeing that historical space with my own eyes made the weight of history feel real, not virtual and not abstract. As Thornbury and Schulz argued, Tokyo is experienced through overlapping geographies of memories and imaginations; the bay therefore became not just a body of water, but a mental landscape in which images of surrender, occupation, and reconstruction quietly surfaced.



Figure 2: Panoramic views of Tokyo captured from the Tokyo Tower observation deck on 26 April 2017.

Figure 3: Tokyo Bay viewed from the Tokyo Tower observation deck on 26 April 2017. The image captures the Rainbow Bridge spanning the northern section of the bay, with Odaiba's waterfront district visible in the background. The photograph highlights the expansive urban-coastal interface of Tokyo, while also providing a direct visual link to the historical significance of Tokyo Bay as the site of Japan's formal surrender on 2 September 1945 aboard the USS Missouri. At the same time, the pattern of green spaces and built-up areas visible from above hinted at another dimension

of human resilience. Kumagai [12] have shown that the long-term evolution of parks and green spaces in Tokyo is central to the city's capacity to cope with environmental and social stress. In the mosaics of trees, shrines, and playing fields scattered among high-rise buildings, I could glimpse the living infrastructure that underpins the metropolis's adaptability. The contrast between the dark memories of 1945 and the vibrant metropolis of 2017 was powerful. Standing there, I felt that Tokyo had become a living lesson in resilience, urban regeneration, and human determination and strength, much in the way that contemporary studies describe Tokyo as a resilient and adaptive metropolis within a broader Nexus of food-energy-water.



Figure 3: Tokyo Bay viewed from the Tokyo Tower observation deck on 26 April 2017.

Reflecting on Height, Modernity, and National Identity

Tokyo Tower, once the tallest structure in the world, now stands lower than both the Kuala Lumpur Tower and the Tokyo Skytree. Yet this did not diminish its meaning. Height is only one of many measures of significance. Its real influence lies in its historical context and its place within a changing family of urban landmarks. Kobori and Konishi [13] described how the newer Tokyo Skytree incorporates advanced seismic technologies to ensure structural safety and continuity of broadcasting during earthquakes and typhoons, illustrating how lessons from past disasters are translated into engineering innovation. When viewed alongside Tokyo Skytree, Tokyo Tower becomes the senior member of a lineage of structures that embody Japan's evolving technological imagination and commitment to safety. For Japan, the tower symbolised modernization, technological confidence, and global re-entry after wartime. For me personally, it symbolized the importance of remembering history while appreciating the present. Looking again at the sweeping views of the city captured in Figure 2, I am reminded that Tokyo Tower does not stand in isolation; it is

embedded in a dense urban fabric that testifies to decades of economic growth, social change, and cultural creativity. The view of Tokyo's metropolitan sprawl from above also prompted reflection on what cities represent socially and economically. A city is more than buildings; it is a repository of hopes, labour, dreams, and collective memory, continually productive and reproduced through cultural texts and everyday practices.

Emotional Memory and the “Like That One, I See” Feeling

As someone who often connects personal experience with historical awareness, the visit awakened an inner sense of recognition. It was a “like that one, I see” feeling; a moment when theoretical knowledge met lived experience. I had read about Tokyo's transformation, its cinematic representations, and its contested commemorations. But seeing it with my own eyes, and later revisiting the visual evidence through Figures 1 and 2, made the knowledge more vivid and meaningful. This internal connection generated a sense of intellectual satisfaction, emotional warmth, and even gratitude. It reminded me that learning is not only embedded in books, but also in the simple act of standing in a place where history happened and then freezing those moments in visual form emphasized that memory and imagination are central to how residents and visitors make sense of Tokyo. Hence, my personal reaction at Tokyo Tower became one small example of this broader pattern, where scholarly perspectives and individual emotion intersect.

Reflections on Resilience and the Human Journey

My visit to Tokyo Tower also became a quiet moment to reflect on resilience (not only of nations), but of individuals. As someone who has navigated my own academic obstacles, responsibilities, and emotional challenges, I saw in Tokyo a metaphor for human endurance and resilience. Urban scholars described Tokyo as a city that has repeatedly absorbed shocks, earthquakes, air raids, economic shifts, and yet continues to adapt through new infrastructures, planning visions, and socio-ecological arrangements. Japan rebuilt from ashes. Individuals to rebuild from difficult moments. Standing on Tokyo Tower felt like a reminder that growth is possible, that recovery is real, and that determination can transform both cities and people. Figures 1 and 2 now act as visual anchors for this lesson, namely a firm red tower rooted in the ground, and a vast city stretching confidently to the horizon. Just as Tokyo's public memory is maintained through both formal institutions and quiet local initiatives. Personal resilience is sustained through visible achievements and small, often unrecorded acts of perseverance. The tower stood firm above the city, and in its strength, I found a symbolic encouragement for my own journey.

Conclusion

The memory of visiting Tokyo Tower remains a vivid and memorable beauty because it blended emotion, awe, historical awareness, and personal reflection. It was not merely a sightseeing activity; it was an encounter with a structure that holds deep symbolic meaning for Japan and for anyone contemplating resilience. Through its steel framework and panoramic views, Tokyo Tower narrates a story of a nation's recovery, ambition, and hope. For me, it became a place where past, present, and future intersected. A place where history felt alive, where knowledge felt embodied, and where reflection turned into appreciation and gratitude. This reflection paper records that moment, not only as a memory but as a reminder of how travel, history, and personal growth are intimately connected. Tokyo Tower stands as a testament to the human capacity to endure, rebuild, and rise toward a new horizon.

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