Sakura Center
– connecting people through architecture –

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Thesis Statement

“Sakura Center”

The assimilation of Japanese-Americans to the American society has changed their ethnic identities and they have become distanced from their roots.

Architecture is a tool to connect people. It plays an important role to invite people, engage them in activities and have them united.

This thesis will examine how design can provide the community of Japanese-Americans with a place to rediscover their identity and celebrate their cultural heritage and also how it can offer the general visitors with an opportunity to understand and experience the Japanese culture.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Architecture is a tool to connect people. It plays an important role to invite people, engage them in activities and have them united.

The initial idea for this thesis was to design a community center focused on active seniors and children in Japan because growing elderly population and decreasing numbers of younger generation is an emerging trend in Japan. The aim was to design a space that can promote interaction and help rebuild a connection between the two demographic groups. The plan was to convert an abandoned school to a community center and a childcare center in one building so that both generations can benefit from interacting with each other’s activities. Children can learn traditional cultures and activities from seniors, while seniors can help children and can remain engaged and active.

However, the focus shifted to the needs of senior Japanese-Americans as their experiences, social standings, and ethnic identities were being investigated. Many second generation Japanese immigrants suffered from anti-Japanese movement, including Japanese Internment during the World War II. After the war, they tried to become assimilated with a mainstream American society. Therefore, striking a balance between achieving assimilation and maintaining a connection with their native culture was a challenge, even though senior Japanese-Americans express their desire to maintain their connection to cultural heritage. According to the data in 2010 Census by the U.S. Census Bureau, 41 percent of the Japanese population identified themselves with multiple detailed Asian groups and/or another races. When marital assimilation is completed, ethnic minorities begin to lose their ethnic identity. Indeed, third and fourth generation
Japanese increasingly identify themselves as “Asian-Americans” rather than “Japanese-Americans”, but this generation is interested in discovering their ethnic identities.\textsuperscript{5}

The need to satisfy both young and senior Japanese-Americans’ interests has led to an idea to design a community center that can support Japanese-Americans to reconnect to their roots through intergenerational activities. The facility would allow senior Japanese-Americans to pass their knowledge of their home culture to younger generations through various cultural activities, strengthen their connection to their heritage, and improve their quality of life. The activities will also help younger generations to rediscover their ethnic identity.

Because the purpose of the building is to help Japanese-Americans reconnect to their heritage, it should naturally be built in a city which has Japanese elements. San Francisco and Seattle were good candidates because of large Japanese-American populations living in those cities.

The first candidate was Military Intelligence Service Historic Learning Center at Presidio in San Francisco (Fig.1, 2). It is a former military base on the northern tip of the San Francisco Peninsula, and is the original site of the language school where U.S. army secretly trained the Japanese-American soldiers as military linguists.

(Fig.1)
Another candidate was Panama Hotel located in the International District in Seattle (Fig.3, 4). It was designed and built in 1910 by Sabro Ozasa, Seattle’s first Japanese-American architect. It has served as a home for generations of Japanese immigrants, Alaskan fishermen and international travelers.

Tidal Basin in Washington, D.C. is famous for Sakura (Fig.5), beautiful Japanese cherry trees that symbolize the Japanese perception of the world, yet it currently lacks architecture to showcase and let visitors experience the Japanese culture. In contrast, both San Francisco and Seattle lack iconic Japanese symbols. A visitor center at Tidal Basin
will be an opportunity to create an architectural presence for this important Japanese
cultural icon, and would anchor the Japanese community in Washington, D.C. and allow
visitors to have a holistic experience of the Japanese culture.

Combining the need to build a community center for Japanese-Americans and an
idea to build a visitor center to showcase Sakura and the Japanese culture at Tidal Basin
has led to an idea to build a Japanese community center at Tidal Basin.

(Fig.5)

This community center will be a part of the “Monumental Promenade,” a pathway
which connects monuments around Tidal Basin. The center will function as a portal (i.e.,
gateway) to Sakura and monuments around Tidal Basin for visitors who come from the
Smithsonian Metro station or National Mall. This thesis proposes to design a community
center at Tidal Basin where Sakura, the distinctive characteristics of the landscape of
Washington, D.C. and a symbol of Japan, are planted.

This thesis will examine the importance of identity of Japanese-Americans and
ways that architecture design can reinforce identity, connect people with their heritage
and create a community. This thesis will also examine an opportunity to showcase the
Japanese culture to the world.

For now, this place will be called “Sakura Center”, and it will be analyzed and studied in details in the following chapters.
Chapter 2: Research

As stated in the introduction, key concepts for this thesis are Identity, Connection and Community. In this chapter, research on Sakura is presented in order to understand the spiritual background of the Japanese culture. This is followed by research on the history of Japanese-Americans and their assimilation that have influenced Japanese-Americans’ identities.

2.1 Sakura – its metaphor and symbolic meanings

For more than one thousand years, the breathtaking sights of the full bloomed Sakura have inspired Japanese people. As you can see in the artwork of Moronobu Hishikawa (Fig.6), general visitors gather to enjoy the view of full bloomed Sakura, and in Hiroshige Ando’s artwork (Fig.7), a woman of the Imperial Court and her attendants head west to view Sakura. Sakura has been a symbol and an image of Japan, as is Mt. Fuji. People are moved deeply by the sublime, ethereal beauty of Sakura.
Sakura has also been a symbol of “life”, which is closely related to agricultural production. The word “Sakura” is said to be a combined word of “SA”, which is the God of Agriculture, and “KURA”, which is the name of a mountain where the God lives. The God of the Mountain is said to dwell in the petal of Sakura to protect rice cultivation and to turn into the God of the Rice field. Blooming of Sakura is a sign of the time of rice planting, and after the fall harvest, the God goes back to the mountain. Sakura was closely tied to rice cultivation and was dissolved in people’s lives.\textsuperscript{7}

The ethereal beauty and their brief life of the flowers also symbolize human’s evanescent life. This can be seen in Ono no Komachi (Fig.8)’s poem in “Kokin Wakashu” – an early anthology of waka, a classical form of Japanese poetry – compiled in the age of Heian Era (794–late 12th century).

花の色は
うつりにけりな
いたづらに
わが身世にふる
ながめせしまに
The flowers withered
Their color faded away
While meaninglessly
I spent my days in the world
And the long rains were falling

This poem relates the withered, color fading Sakura with the impermanence of life and human mortality, and from this time of the period, Sakura has become a symbol of uncertain, ephemeral and evanescent life.

Brief and exuberant blooming of Sakura was an important symbol for samurai warriors. They lived a highly disciplined life as cultured men of war, and their goal was to die with honor, preferably in the service of their overload and in the prime of life. This same notion compelled the Kamikaze pilots to perform their astonishing feats during the World War II, ensuring their certain death at a young age in service to their country. To samurai warriors, the blooming of Sakura and its petals falling from a tree in their prime signified the beauty of a brief life well lived (Fig.9).
2.2 Sakura – a Gift from the City of Tokyo

Sakura was planted throughout Tidal Basin in 1912 and has been pleasing people’s eyes since then. Behind the back screen of this breath taking beautiful vista, there is a story of four significant people who had a stable enthusiasm to Sakura and constantly put their efforts to make this planting a reality.

Eliza Ruhamah Scidmore (Fig.10) was a travel writer who had a great love of Japan. She made her first trip to Japan in 1885 and spent three years visiting her brother who held a consular position at Nagasaki Prefecture. Her own feeling was expressed in an ancient Japanese poem which she included on the title page of her book, “Jinrikisha Days in Japan”:

*In the ancient Yamato island*
Scidmore extensively traveled throughout Japan, Alaska, India, China and Indonesia. She had keen appreciation of nature’s beauty and the richness of other cultures, and she published several books on these subjects.

Her enthusiasm about the Japanese culture and Japan extended to the flower. As she wrote, “No other flower in all the world is so beloved, so exalted, so worshipped, as sakura-no-hana, the cherry-blossom of Japan…the vernal celebration of which has been observed with unflagging zeal for at least two thousand years.”

After her return from her first trip to Japan, Scidmore started her efforts to have Sakura planted at Tidal Basin. She met with successive Superintendents of Public Buildings and Grounds, showing them photographs and postcards of what she called the “most beautiful thing in the world –the Japanese Cherry Tree,” hoping to convince them to plant “something of spring beauty down in the waste space…the great stretch of raw, reclaimed ground by the riverbank.”

Her efforts were unsuccessful, but when President William Howard Taft was inaugurated in 1909, and Helen Herron Taft became First Lady with a goal to improve the city of Washington, Scidmore’s request was accepted and her plan was implemented swiftly because First Lady Taft was familiar with Sakura herself from her own visit to Japan. At that time, neither Jefferson Memorial nor Lincoln Memorial had been constructed, and she was hoping to host outdoor concerts and felt that Tidal Basin
New York resident chemist and Japanese native, Dr. Jokichi Takamine (Fig.12), renowned for his work on Adrenaline and Takadiastase, was visiting Washington, D.C. and heard this plan from Scidmore. He was an advocate of improving U.S.-Japanese relations and was concerned by the hardening atmosphere of the United States toward Japan. Believing that Sakura could be a bridge between two countries, he offered to play a pivotal role for arranging an official gift of two thousand trees from mayor of Tokyo, Yukio Ozaki (Fig.13), as a token for Japan’s gratitude for a United States’ role in negotiating the peace treaty ending the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05.

The inspection of trees after their arrival in Seattle revealed that Sakura was riddled and infested with insects and nematodes and other plant diseases. The trees had to be burned. To fulfill their original promise, Dr. Takamine and Mayor Ozaki had Sakura raised under a special care of scientific experts and donated six thousand trees. Half of them went to the City of Washington, D.C. and the other half to the New York City in February, 1912. There were enough trees to be planted throughout Tidal
Basin, on the White House grounds and in some other areas in the city. The planting ceremony was held on March 27 by the First Lady Taft.15

(Fig.12) (Fig.13)

2.3 Historical perspective of the Japanese-Americans’ cultural assimilation and identity16

Ethnicity refers to the cultural, racial, religious, and linguistic characteristics of people17 and ethnic identity refers to the subjective meaning of one’s ethnicity.18 According to the 2010 Census, the population of Japanese alone-or-in-any-combination population is 1,304,286, the 6th largest detailed Asian group living in the United States followed by Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, and Korean.19

The population of Japanese alone decreased from the 2000 Census by 1.2 percent, while population of Japanese in combination with one or more other races tremendously increased, by more than 50 percent (Fig.14). As stated in Chapter 1, when intermarriage rates increase, so does the marital assimilation, and as a result, the minority group begin to lose its ethnic identity.20
This chapter studies the history of Japanese-Americans by generation, focusing on the transformation of Japanese-Americans’ ethnic identity and their cultural assimilation.

Immigration history of Japanese-Americans started with the arrival of the Japanese to Hawaii in 1868 as sugarcane plantation laborers (Fig.15). The number of newly arriving Japanese immigrants to the mainland United States increased in late 1880s as they were attracted by high wages. Because of the reform of land and tax system of the Meiji Restoration Era (1868~1889), farmers were poor and were in hardship in Japan. These Japanese immigrants worked very hard as they hoped to save money and go back to Japan. Interracial marriage was not legal at the time, so Japanese women came to the United States to marry male Japanese immigrants, arranged by relatives who exchanged
pictures. There were almost no interaction between Japanese immigrants and other United States citizens, and Japanese immigrants stayed close together. As they began settling, anti-Japanese movement emerged, led by native Caucasian American citizens who feared losing jobs to Japanese immigrants.

The Japanese community grew larger as second generation Japanese-Americans were born. They formed groups with strong traditional Japanese cultural content.\(^2\)

Second generation Japanese immigrants suffered from rising anti-Japanese movement, including Japanese Internment during the World War II. They considered this experience something to be ashamed of, and tried to become assimilated by behaving the same way Americans do. This greatly influenced their ethnic identity and parenthood of third generation children.\(^2\)

Third generation Japanese-Americans became both economically and politically successful than earlier generations. While they maintained their ethnic ties, they were influenced by and adapted to the American way. They tend to be even more absorbed in the non-ethnic society.\(^2\) Third generation Japanese-Americans are characterized by their movement for social justice, which coincided with civil rights movement in the 60s and
the 70s. In this context, alliances with other Asian-American communities were formed in their civil right movements as these ethnic groups shared common experiences of being discriminated and oppressed.24 They sought and eventually won apologies and compensations for their experiences in the war time (Redress for the WWII incarceration in 1988).

(Fig.16)

Fourth generation Japanese-Americans enjoy their already established social status as an ethnic group and can freely choose any job. They have been raised to respect diversity and cherish their own roots as recent education tends to encourage understanding different cultures. This has been helped by a social trend that views speaking non-English languages and having ethnic cultural background positively. One example of this trend is English plus.25 This is an American movement formed in reaction to the English-only movement. According to EPIC (The English Plus Information Clearinghouse)'s Statement of Purpose, the English Plus concept “holds that the national interest can best be served when all persons of our society have access to effective
opportunities to acquire strong English proficiency plus mastery of a second or multiple languages.\textsuperscript{26}

Because of their parents’ or grandparents’ intermarriage, the ratio of Japanese-Americans having multiple ethnicities is high. Ties of Japanese-Americans to Japan have weakened and Japanese-Americans are increasingly becoming Asian-Americans. These developments have driven fourth generation Japanese-Americans to search their identities.\textsuperscript{27}

As pointed out by Juang, L.P. and Cookston, J.T. (2009), being connected to ethnic communities is important in maintaining mental and psychological health during adaptation to a new environment.\textsuperscript{28} The objective of designing and building Japanese community center as a place to experience, understand, and transfer Japanese culture is to help Japanese-Americans strengthen and/or discover their ethnic and cultural identity. For older generations, it will be a place to reconnect to the culture and transfer cultural knowledge to younger generations. For younger generations, it will be a place to discover a part of their identity. For general visitors, it will be a place to experience a different culture.

2.4 The Building Height Act, Topography and Japanese Community Centers’

Typologies

Understanding regulations is necessary to design the building. Understanding the topography is important to determine the site. And studying Japanese community centers in the United States will provide insights into necessary elements in the program.
The Building Height Act

Height restrictions in Washington, D.C. aim primarily at reducing fire hazards. President George Washington worked closely with Thomas Jefferson on the early planning and designing of the nation’s capital. Jefferson’s notes from March 1791 shows that he was interested in building height as a way of controlling fires, and established the First Building Regulations including a height limitation in 1791. This proclamation stated that “The wall of no house to be higher than forty feet to the roof in any part of the city; nor shall any be lower than thirty-five feet on any of the avenues.” Somehow, Washington ultimately cooled off the building regulations in 1796, but it is clear that building height was a key consideration during early planning for the city.

Building height in Tidal Basin is regulated by the Building Height Act of 1910. Height limit in Washington, D.C. was introduced in 1899, prompted by complaints about limited light and fire hazard of Cairo Hotel that was under construction in 1894. (The Building Height Act of 1899). In 1910, the Congress amended the Act (The Building Height Act of 1910) to provide more thorough height regulations. This law includes the following restrictions: for mixed use or commercial areas, buildings may be as high as the width of the street plus twenty feet but may not exceed 130 feet; for residential areas, heights are limited to ninety feet; and for Pennsylvania Avenue between First and Fifteenth Street, NW, buildings can rise to 160 feet.

All three potential sites analyzed in this thesis are on Tidal Basin and this height regulation applies. This means that while designing this project, the building height can not exceed the width of the street plus twenty feet.
(2) **Topography**

Tidal Basin was created by the reclamation of the Potomac flats. This broad marshland of silt was a dumping ground for sewage and a breeding ground for malaria and it was lacking a visual appeal. Following a severe flood in 1881, Major Peter Hains of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers submitted a plan in 1882 that called for the dredging of the flats to create parkland with the reclaimed fill. Key feature of this plan was Tidal Basin to serve both as a visual centerpiece and as a means of flushing out the Washington Channel, a harbor separated from the river by the new fill lands. The history of Tidal Basin explains that the land was not intended to be raised high by the reclamation because of the plan to create parkland.

(3) **Japanese Community Centers’ Typologies**

The studies of Japanese community centers are aimed at obtaining ideas of the programs and activities that the planned community center should offer. Core outputs of these centers are programs that present the Japanese culture and features that showcase the beauty of Japan. Majority of users of these centers are looking forward to interacting with each other, hoping to perpetuate and promote diversity.

a) **Japanese American Cultural and Community Center**

Los Angeles, California

In 2010 Census, the highest proportion of Japanese alone-or-in-any-combination population lived in California (Fig.17). Next to Hilo in Hawaii, Los Angeles is the city that has the second largest Japanese population.
There are at least four Japanese community centers in Los Angeles. They all have quite similar programs, including Japanese culture and art classes, exhibitions, concerts and lectures. Beside these activities, Japanese American Cultural and Community Center (Fig.18), one of the four centers, hosts wedding service, reception, and memorial service in its Japanese garden (Fig.19, 20). The building has multiple tenants that help Japanese-Americans enjoy better living, which is unique and is not seen in other centers.
b) Japan Society  New York, New York

New York is the state with the largest Japanese population on the east coast. The Japan Society (Fig.21)’s mission is “to bring the people of Japan and the United States closer together through mutual understanding, appreciation and cooperation.” While many community centers in the United States have mission statements that are centered around Japanese-Americans, this center is unique in that its mission is to promote mutual understanding between the two cultures. However, programs are similar to those offered by other community centers. It has a theater, gallery, community activity programs, a language center and a library.
Figure 22 is a brief block analysis on how the space is being used. This section drawing does not cover the whole center, but shows some notable features such as: a spacious entry zone with double height ceiling and a foyer with views of a bamboo grove and a waterfall; a state-of-the-art 260-seat auditorium adjacent to the foyer; two galleries with different ceiling heights (Performance zone) for various purposes; and meeting rooms and conference rooms in various sizes (Community/Connection zone) to serve different needs (Fig.23). Unique features of this center are year-round film screenings and periodic meetings of innovators to share their knowledge and insights.

2.5 Landscape Architecture

Landscape architecture, defined by Holden, R. and Liversedge, J. (2014) is “an aesthetically based profession founded on the understanding of the landscape. This
understanding requires knowledge of the land sciences, geology, soils, hydrology, botany, horticulture and ecology, and also of biology, chemistry and physics.”

Idea of making the most of the vista of Sakura has led to the idea of applying landscape architecture to the project. Applying landscape architecture enables examining the way that architecture, interior and landscape work together to create a holistic experience. To this end, it is useful to understand the history of landscape architecture.

(1) Brief History of Landscape Architecture

According to Holden, R. and Liversedge, J., American architect Calvert Vaux (1824–95) and journalist, farmer and mine manager Frederick Law Olmsted (1822–1903) first applied the term ‘Landscape Architecture’ to their new profession in 1863. In 1858 they had won the competition to design Central Park in New York, and the Board of the Central Park Commission adopted their design in 1865 (Fig.24).

In 1900, Harvard University opened its first landscape architecture course, with Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. at its head. Cornell University followed.

Historically, landscape planning has aimed at composing human development
with the ecological, cultural and geographical features of the landscape, for example, in already protected area such as National Park (Fig.25).

(Fig.25)

Then, the main artistic movement “Harvard Revolution” occurred in 1930s. This was led by Garret Eckbo (1910–2000), Daniel Kiley (1912–2004) and James C. Rose (1913–91), Harvard classmates, who applied the principles of Modernism to landscape architecture and emphasized interlocking spaces, asymmetry, the importance of site, functionality, biomorphic shapes and the public good.

Since the 1960s, landscape architecture has been concerned with ideas of sustainability, ecological health (including derelict and toxic land) and global warming, biodiversity, population growth and the ecological footprint. And since the 1980s, post-industrial landscapes have been discussed in relation to landscape and urban design. It tries to address issues mentioned in the previous sentences while continuing to address visual matter.

Integrating architecture and landscape will allow the building to blend into the Tidal Basin. The benefits of applying landscape architecture to this project are two-folds: it can create a space without interrupting the existing landscape, i.e., the panoramic vista of Sakura and Tidal Basin; and it will enable the project on the importance of Sakura and
architecture and its connection between human and natural world.

(Fig.26)

(2) Case Studies

To examine and learn the way that architecture, interior and landscape work together to create a holistic experience, four studies of landscape architecture are presented in this sub-section. These include two cases in which landscape architectures blend into the topography, one case which incorporates the architecture into the ground, and a work of Tadao Ando, a Japanese landscape architect.

a) Brooklyn Botanic Garden Visitor Center          Brooklyn, New York

Brooklyn Botanic Garden, founded in 1910 “is an urban botanic garden that connects people to the world of plants, fostering delight and curiosity while inspiring an appreciation and sense of stewardship of the environment.”37 Brooklyn Botanic Garden grew from its humble beginning as an ash dump in the late 1800s to today’s well organized urban gardening and horticultural display. A new visitor center (Fig.27), designed by Weiss/Manfredi, opened in 2012.
Weiss/Manfredi architecture group, based in New York integrated landscape into their design of the building. The landscape’s central feature is the building’s living roof (Fig.28). Embedded into an existing hillside, this center is conceived as an inhabitable topography defining a threshold between the city and the garden, culture and cultivation.

It is also developed as a seamless extension of the Garden's path system which continuously leads into the 52-acre garden. Earth and plants here serve as pivotal materials in helping the building integrate itself into the landscape (Fig.29).

The visitor center includes an orientation room, an information lobby, a gift shop, an exhibition gallery, a café, and an elliptical events space.
b) Quintessa Winery          St. Helena, California

(Fig.30)

The Quintessa Estate, designed by Walker/Warner architecture group based in San Francisco, encompassed a winery with a visitor center, a residence, and a series of tasting pavilions that together reflect and enhance the beauty of the unique 280-acre Napa Valley Property (Fig.30). A very simple, yet elegant and sensitive building that nestles
into the contours of a hillside reflects the natural form of the landscape. It is considered as a good use of topography because it allows tractors to transport grapes to the roof terrace, where the grapes can then move through the fermentation process by gravity. The gravity flow of crushed grapes helps ensure very high quality wine by minimizing the mechanical processing and pumping often used in typical wine production (Fig.31). This is a good example of architecture that is well integrated into the landscape and makes a good use of it.

(Fig.31)

c) Women’s Memorial and Educational Center Arlington, Virginia

(Fig.32)

This memorial and an educational center is a place to honor military women from past, present and future (Fig.32). It was designed by Weiss/Manfredi in 1997. The project
was to create a new gateway to Arlington National Cemetery. The site of the center is defined by a historic hemicycle retaining wall. The site is partially excavated from the steep hillside to create an underground space. Roof is a series of arcs of glass tablets that introduce natural light (Fig.33). A space was created by carving out the ground, and the center was built in that space. This is another way to integrate the architecture into the landscape.

![Fig.33](image)

d) Japanese landscape architect, Tadao Ando’s work (Fig.34, 35, 36)

Tadao Ando exemplifies spaces with active natural elements, such as sun, rain, and wind. In an interview with Architectural Record (“Spirit of Modernism”), he stated, “When you look at Japanese traditional architecture, you have to look at Japanese culture and its relationship with nature. You can actually live in a harmonious, close contact with nature –this is very unique to Japan. Japanese traditional architecture is created based on these conditions. This is the reason you have a very high degree of connection between the outside and inside in architecture.”
His distinctive inclusion of nature in his style is another example of landscape architecture. The condition of land differs from place to place. Before designing the architecture, the character of the land is explored and studied. This way, connection between the architecture and the landscape work well together.
Four case studies of landscape architecture reveal that when architecture is designed with the character of landscape in mind, connection between the architecture and the landscape creates a holistic experience.
Chapter 3: Thesis Proposal

This chapter first analyzes three possible sites for Sakura Center at Tidal Basin, followed by a discussion of the final choice of the site as well as the site and space plan.

3.1 Analysis of three possible sites

Sakura has been a distinct character of the landscape of Washington, D.C. and a symbol of Japan. This has led to the idea of bringing the Sakura Center to Tidal Basin. This center will play an important role of a portal to Sakura and the “Monumental Promenade”, a pathway which connects monuments around Tidal Basin.

A search of the area around the Tidal Basin has led to three possible sites (Fig.37). An analysis of each site is presented below and the site of Sakura Center selected.

(Fig.37)
(1) Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial gift shop on West Basin Dr. SW
(Fig.37, #1)

This site (Fig.38) used to be a Ranger Station Bookstore, now a souvenir shop for Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial, which is situated on a four-acre site along the Tidal Basin adjacent to Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial. It is on a segment between Lincoln Memorial and Jefferson Memorial. The centerpiece of the memorial is a 30-foot statue of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The souvenir shop has both a bookstore and a gift selling area. It also has a public bathroom that is only accessible from the outside (Fig.39).

(Fig.38)

(Fig.39)
A traffic path analysis (Fig.40) shows that main means of transportation to get to the site are by vehicle and by Metro. There is no existing parking lot in the site, but alongside the West Basin Dr, there is street parking with a meter. The closest Metro station is Smithsonian station of Metro’s Orange, Blue, and Silver lines. It will take 15 to 20 minutes by foot from the 12th St./Independence Ave. SW exit. Besides Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial, Lincoln Memorial, Korean War Veterans Memorial and Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial and several other memorials are all within walking distances.

(Fig.40)

The gift shop site is very small. It is one level, about 2,800 ft², 31 ft in width and 90 ft in length. Including a space for an indoor parking lot, 40,000 ft² will be ideally needed for this project. Polo field on the west side or an open lot on the south side of the gift store is an ideal space to excavate for expansion.

The two-foot contours topography map (Fig.41) shows almost no difference in height on the site of the gift shop. The land was not intended to be raised high by the reclamation because of the plan to create parkland. In order to proceed with this project, there would be a need to create a berm, raise the ground higher, and excavate the ground to a certain degree.
A sun path analysis (Fig.42) informs decisions about the placement of interior spaces and functions. The gift shop is facing east but its main entrance is on the north side of the building. The analysis shows that the morning sun will affect directly the east side of the building.

The advantage of this site is, as mentioned earlier, the closeness to other memorials. Visitors to Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial will likely visit Sakura Center, and so are the visitors to other memorials. It also is readily accessible by vehicle because West Basin Dr. SW is connected to Independence Ave. SW and Ohio Dr. SW. The fact that it is approximately 380 ft walk from the site to the Sakura on Tidal Basin is also a plus.

The disadvantage of this site is Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial obstructing the view of Sakura at Tidal Basin. It will not only be in the way of the view but will also create a barrier to access the center from the Tidal Basin. The size of the site is also a minus, although, as mentioned, there are several ways to expand the space. The site is surrounded by various broadleaf trees but not a lot of Sakura are present close to the site.
(2) The baseball field open lot at the north east corner on Ohio Dr. SW 
(Fig.37, #2)

This baseball field open lot (Fig.43) is situated on the south bank of the Tidal Basin at the southwest corner of West Potomac Park. It is adjacent to Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial. Across the Inlet Bridge, there is George Mason Memorial, and Potomac River is on the west.

(Fig.43)

A traffic path analysis (Fig.44) shows that main means of transportation to get to the site are by vehicle or by foot. There is street parking without a meter alongside the
West Basin Dr. The closest Metro station is Smithsonian station of Metro’s Orange, Blue and Silver lines. It will take 25 to 30 minutes by foot from the 12th St./Independence Ave. SW exit.

(Fig.45) (Fig.46)

This baseball field open lot has an enough space for 40,000 ft² that is needed for this project. The south end of the lot would be a suitable site for Sakura Center.

The site on the baseball field open lot is six to eight feet higher than the waterside (Fig.45). The contours are tight at the bank where Sakura is planted, which means there is a steeply sloped pitch. Because the site is a baseball field, there is no sloped area on the field.

Facing toward the Tidal Basin is an ideal direction to build Sakura Center. According to the sun path analysis (Fig.46), both morning and evening sun glare will not affect much of the building.

The advantage of this site is a continuous row of Sakura (Fig.47) and a great view of National Monument, Jefferson Memorial and the Capitol (Fig.48). To apply landscape architecture in the design, six to eight foot height difference will work as a plus, although
the ground still needs to be raised higher and a berm created.

The disadvantage of the site is its distance from other elements of the city. This gives a feel of isolation and also results in a smaller number of visitors than in other sites. Transportation also is an issue as Ohio Dr. SW is connected only to E. Basin Dr. SW, which is not a major road. The fact that there are no close Metro stations also is a disadvantage. Since the site is close to the Interstate 395, a multi-lane highway, the noise and the sight of the traffic will cause a serious disruptive effect to its place.
This open lot is a lawn area with trees (Fig.49) with a parking space for both government employees and visitors (Fig.50). This site is on the line segment of Washington Monument and Jefferson Memorial. The site measures is a parallelogram shaped area inside Maine Ave. SW on the rim of Tidal Basin. Washington Monument is located north of the site, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum east of the site, Floral Library at the northwest corner, and Tidal Basin Paddle Boats platform at the southeast corner. The southeast corner of the lot would be a suitable site for Sakura Center. 

(Fig. 49)

(Fig.50)
In terms of transportation (Fig.51), it will take only ten minutes from the nearest Smithsonian Metro station. There are several Metro bus stops nearby and there are many major roads to get to the site. Although surrounded by high motor traffic roads, the site is not too noisy.

This site has enough space for 40,000 ft\(^2\) that is needed for this project. The site measures about 750ft in width and 620ft in length and is a parallelogram shaped area of about 350,000 ft\(^2\).

(Fig.51)

There is a difference of height of ten to twelve feet between the waterside and the highest point between the open lot of Independence Ave. and Maine Ave. Wide, yet constant contour lines mean that it is a gradually sloped area (Fig.52).

One of advantages of this site is that Sakura dots the Tidal Basin side of the site. There are also many memorials around and near the Tidal Basin, and Sakura Center will be a first stop for visitors of these memorials because of its location, which makes it practically the “gateway” of the “Memorial Promenade” of Tidal Basin. The height
difference on the site helps apply landscape architecture, although the ground still needs to be raised higher and a berm created.

The disadvantage of the site is the glare of sunlight reflected on the Tidal Basin in the afternoon (Fig.53). The best vista the building could have is when it is facing the Tidal Basin. However, fierce glares of the afternoon sun light would cause a problem. This problem can be solved by using appropriate materials on the west side of the building.

3.2 Final choice of the Site

After the analysis of the three sites at the Tidal Basin in Chapter 3.1, selection is made by considering following decision factors: size of the space, sun path analysis, traffic path analysis, topography and the closeness to other monuments in Tidal Basin. The site should also function as a portal to Sakura and the Monumental Promenade.

Each site has its strength and weakness. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial gift shop is close to other memorials and also to Tidal Basin and a lot of visitors can be
expected, but the space of the existing building is too tight and limited. The baseball field open lot is spacious and has a great view of Jefferson Memorial, National Monument and Capitol, but the distance from other elements of the city is a huge minus for building a community center. The main concern of the open lot between Independence Ave. and Maine Ave. is the sunlight glare in the afternoon, but the space, the location and accessibility to transportation are big plus elements.

Taking all of these into consideration, the open lot between Independence Ave. and Maine Ave. SW shown in Fig.37, #3 has been chosen as the most ideal site.

The characteristics of the site discussed in Chapter 3.1 can be summarized as follows. This open lot measures about 750 ft in width, 620 ft in length, and is a parallelogram shaped area of about 350,000 ft² inside Independence Ave. and Maine Ave. on the rim of the Tidal Basin. This site is large enough for the proposed building. In terms of transportation, this site is in the shortest walking distance from the Smithsonian Metro station compared to any other possible sites; there are several Metro bus stops nearby; and there are many major roads to get to the site.

The difference of height is not large enough to have a building built using landscape architecture, so the ground needs to be raised higher in order to create a berm.

3.3 Design Concept, Programming, Space Planning

The design concept, programming and space planning will be discussed in this sub-chapter.

(1) Design Concept
This thesis proposes to design a community center at Tidal Basin with three goals in mind.

The first goal is to create a portal to Sakura and Tidal Basin monuments. As already explained, a pathway around Tidal Basin can be considered as “Monumental Promenade”. One aspect of the design concept is to make Sakura Center function as a portal that brings visitors from the Metro station and National Mall to Sakura and monuments in the Tidal Basin area.

The second goal is to connect Japanese-Americans with each other as a community and with their heritage. At Sakura Center, both generations should be able to discover and strengthen their ethnic and cultural identity. Therefore, another aspect of the design concept of Sakura Center is to make it possible for older generations to transfer cultural knowledge to younger generations and for both generations to experience and understand the Japanese culture through intergenerational activities.

The third goal is to showcase aspects of Japanese culture to the world. The design concept should ensure that Sakura Center allows visitors to experience and understand various aspects of Japanese culture.

(2) Programming

Sakura Center will be a place where social functions happen. It will open a gate to the process of finding roots for Japanese-Americans and will be a place for visitors to understand Japanese culture. The center provides three different kinds of experiences in distinct zones in order to achieve two of three goals of the Sakura Center: connecting Japanese-Americans with each other and with their heritage; and informing visitors about
Japanese culture. The location of the center makes it a gateway to the Monument Promenade, the third purpose of the center. These three zones are equally important as shown in Fig.54.

(Fig.54)

The first zone is Info./Learning zone, which plays a role of informing visitors about Japanese culture. It explains to visitors the history of Sakura at Tidal Basin as part of the Monument Promenade as well as the history of Japan and its culture.

The second zone is Community/Connection zone. This zone provides a space for Japanese-Americans to connect with each other and with their heritage through Japanese cultural activities, such as workshops, lectures, social functions (group meetings and conferences), and practices of traditional Japanese arts such as Japanese drumming and martial arts. General visitors can also participate in these activities.

The third zone is Performance zone and includes a theater and galleries. This space allows Japanese-Americans to connect with their heritage (second goal in the design concept) and visitors to be informed about Japanese culture through performing arts (third goal in the design concept).

Two auxiliary zones will support the functioning of the three main zones. Entry zone includes an entrance and a welcoming space/hall. Back of house includes a cloak, a
locker room, an administration office, restrooms, a storage, a mechanical room and a parking lot.

Visitors of this center can be categorized into three types of users. One category is *Sakura visitors*, who come to Washington, D.C. during the Sakura blooming season from mid-March to mid-April. Their main purpose to visit Washington, D.C. is to enjoy viewing the full bloomed Sakura and possibly enjoy the Sakura Festival which is held usually in early April. They will most likely visit monuments and other historical sites around the Tidal Basin. Another category is *General visitors*, who come to Washington, D.C. to visit monuments and other historical sites around Tidal Basin throughout the year. The last category is *Community visitors*, Japanese-Americans and others who take classes and lectures and participate in cultural and public-outreach events throughout the year.

The three zones of Sakura Center are designed for these three types of visitors. Sakura visitors and General visitors will flow in/through the Info./Learning zone to get information about Sakura and learn a history of Japan and Japanese culture. The performance and exhibition in the Performance zone will be an attractive feature for both Sakura visitors and General visitors to learn Japanese culture. Community visitors socialize, take classes and lectures, and participate in cultural and public-outreach activities in the Community/Connection zone in order to reconnect with their roots and ethnic identity.

Timing diagram (Fig.55) shows the proportions of three types of users of the three zones in different times/seasons. The Info./Learning zone will be used mostly between morning and afternoon and will be closed during night. The utilization rate will be higher in weekends than in weekdays, and it will be at the peak during the Sakura season. The
utilization rate of the Community/Connection zone depends on the number of classes, lectures and social-events that the center offers. People will be constantly coming in and out throughout the day/week/season. The Performance zone will be used when there are performances at the theater or exhibitions at the galleries. The frequency of performance at the theater will be higher in evenings and weekends. Exhibitions at the galleries will be weekly/bi-weekly events, so the room will be occupied at certain periods of time.

(Fig.55)

(3) Space Planning

Schematic bubble diagram (Fig.56) presents relationships between different zones. Arrows indicate the flow of visitors in the building. Another diagram (Fig.57) represents adjacency of the rooms and the needs of natural light. The upper half of the diagram represents the upper level, and the lower half of the diagram represents the lower level. Natural light and the view of Tidal Basin need to be carefully considered in deciding the location of rooms.
Following description is the plan of the center.

Entry/hall will be adjacent to all three zones. As visitors enter from the ground level, there will be a spacious welcome hall. It will be an atrium with a double ceiling height. This entry area will benefit from the best view of the site—Sakura and Tidal Basin.
Adjacent to the welcome hall will be the Info/Learning zone. It is the closest to the entry to provide easy access for one-time visitors. It is accessible from the welcome hall and directly from outside. Visitors will easily flow into the space so that they will get the information they need and learn the history of Sakura and Japan from displayed materials. There will be display panels, partition walls and tables with touch screen panels. This room needs to be light shielded for the works that will be exhibited.

The Performance zone is a two-level theater with at least 300 people occupancy. Back of the stage has a direct exit to a loading deck. Galleries with different capacities will be on each level. They will showcase beautiful aspects of Japanese culture to general visitors and need to be light-shielded to protect materials.

The side of the building opposite to the Info./Learning zone and the Performance zone is the Community/Connection zone, which will have several rooms with different capacities to cater to different needs. It will provide outreach-programs and community-based programs open to any visitors. Windows are essential for ventilation and compliance with fire regulation and for viewing purposes. Studios will be on the lower level for the sound proof purpose so that Japanese musicians can practice traditional Japanese instruments. All three zones have an emergency exit besides their main entries.

Color-coded space program chart (Fig.58) shows zones, users, space and function, occupancy, square footages and the number of rooms. Approximately 20,000 ft² is needed for each level in this project, although this number might change during the process of designing the site.
The NS section sketch (Fig.59) represents the image of the Sakura Center seeing from the west. The basement level is built into the ground, and streamlined shape green roof extends toward the Sakura and Tidal Basin. The center will blend into the landscape and will focus on the importance of the Sakura and the connection between people and the natural world.

(Fig.59)

The NS section sketch (Fig.59) represents the image of the Sakura Center seeing from the west. The basement level is built into the ground, and streamlined shape green roof extends toward the Sakura and Tidal Basin. The center will blend into the landscape and will focus on the importance of the Sakura and the connection between people and the natural world.

(Fig.59)

The next step is the actual process of designing the Sakura Center. In proceeding, the following two points need to be reflected. First, it is important that the building has
connection to the surrounding area. In particular, the site should blend into the landscape.

Second, careful consideration should be given to the circulation of people inside the building and their transition from inside the building to outside.
Chapter 4: Process and Results

This chapter develops and implements the design of Sakura Center.

As mentioned in my thesis statement, “Architecture is a tool to connect people. It plays an important role to invite people, engage them in activities and have them united.” This thesis has examined how design can provide the community of Japanese-Americans with a place to rediscover their identity and celebrate their cultural heritage and also how it can offer the general visitors with an opportunity to understand and experience the Japanese culture. This thesis has also examined how Sakura Center can play an important symbolic role as a portal for visitors of “Monumental Promenade,” a pathway which connects one monument to another at Tidal Basin.

4.1 Approach to Sakura Center
Figure 60 shows how visitors approach the site. Visitors will come to the site by Metro or by vehicle. Some visitors also approach the site by foot while there are touring monuments around Tidal Basin. Most of the visitors will walk into Sakura Center from the entrance on the northeast of the building. After walking through the building, some continue their Sakura tour or their monument and memorial tour. Some visitors might visit Sakura Center as a final destination to watch art performance, participate in a workshop, or practice instruments at the studio.

(Fig.61)

Figure 61 shows the flow of visitors. Visitors who are approaching the center from the Metro station will walk Independence Ave. westward. Currently these visitors need to continue on Independence Ave. and make a big detour to reach the site. For easy access, a new pathway will be build to lead visitors from Independence Ave. directly to the center. The pathway will branch off from Independence Ave. and crosses Maine Ave. Visitors coming by vehicle enter the site from a parking entrance at the southeast part of the site.
Figure 61 also shows how the center functions as a gateway to Sakura and “Monumental Promenade”. The main entrance is the northeast side of the building on the upper floor. Visitors are led to the lower floor through a ramp and can step out to a terrace, which leads to Tidal Basin. This flow allows visitors to see and experience the program of Sakura Center on their way from the Smithsonian Metro Station or National Mall to Tidal Basin.

4.2 Floor Plans

Sakura Center has two main floors and a service floor. It takes advantage of the topography of the site. The main entrance faces the Maine Ave. and leads visitors to the upper level. The building uses the height difference of the site and has an atrium that faces Tidal Basin and spans two levels.

(Fig.62)
On the upper level (Fig. 62), visitors find a gift shop, a 400 plus-seat auditorium, meeting rooms and offices on their right. On their left, an information center and three galleries are located along the ramp, which leads visitors to the lower level.

(Fig. 63)

The lower level (Fig. 63) has a private community area and a public area separated by a glass wall. The private community area houses a conference room, workshop rooms and studios so that visitors can experience cultural activities. The key feature of the public area is a half circle seating area where art performances are made occasionally. It faces a rock and bamboo Zen garden, so when it is not used for performance, it provides visitors with a place to relax. The public area also has a café. This floor has an exit through a glass curtain wall which leads visitors to a terrace, a parking lot, and the Monument Promenade.
The building has a service/loading level (Fig.64) below the lower level. This service/loading level can be approached from the parking lot area through a service road. There is another ramp connecting this service/loading level to a storage and service area on the lower level of the building. Staff will access this storage and service area from a hallway on the back side of the café.

(Fig.64)

The building provides visitors with a panoramic view of Tidal Basin and Sakura (Fig.65). After passing through the narrow vestibule, visitors are welcome by an atrium. The glass wall in this atrium provides visitors with a spectacular view of Tidal Basin, Jefferson Memorial, and Sakura in spring.

The design of the ceiling gives a sense of continuance and extension to the space. Inspired by the Hilton Pattaya Hotel in Thailand (Fig.66), unflammmable Washi texture sheets are draped from the ceiling in the direction of the flow of visitors.
The ramp (Fig.67) has two functions. It will naturally follow the slope of the site and leads visitors to the lower level that sits on a low part of the site facing Tidal Basin. It also serves a function of an information zone. An information center located along the ramp allows visitors to get information about and learn and understand the history and culture of Japan. Next to the information center are three galleries (Fig.68) along the
ramp. The cuts of the wall inside the gallery spaces will allow visitors to move between galleries. Visitors walking down the ramp can enjoy both the view of Tidal Basin and exhibitions inside the galleries.

(Fig.67)

The building offers visitors an opportunity to see a unique Japanese landscape. It has a rock and bamboo Zen garden enclosed by a glass cylinder running from the lower
level and passes through the roof. As shown in Fig.69, Zen garden itself is a landscape. Sand is carefully raked, small rocks represent ponds and streams while big rocks represent islands and mountains. The Tidal Basin itself is a landscape, but visitors will be able to experience another landscape in a Zen world inside the center.

(Fig.69)

(Fig.70)

This rock and bamboo Zen garden will be positioned so that it can be enjoyed from several perspectives in Sakura Center. Moso bamboo trees that can grow as high as
the height of the building will be planted in the garden. A glass elevator is installed inside the glassed courtyard (Fig.70). While on the elevator, visitors will feel they are exploring a bamboo forest.

(Fig.71)

Visitors will also be able to enjoy the garden from the lower level as well (Fig.71). There are seats hugging the glass courtyard and visitors can sit down and relax to watch the evergreen bamboo.

The design of the atrium calls for a strong support of the ceiling. The atrium has a double height ceiling and needs structurally strong columns in order to hold the roof. Figure 72 shows parallam wood columns with iron casting. They are placed forty feet apart on the glass wall in the atrium and the ramp. This is the same structure as the one used at the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C.
4.3 Sections

These sections of the building and the site show the height difference of the building and three layers of horizontal roofs, each of which is staggered with a five feet height difference. Fig. 73 is a East-West section and Fig. 74 is a North-South section. Two lower layers of the roofs are green roof. The east and the west side of the building are covered by berms to give a look that the building is part of the surrounding landscape.
Berms are as high as the roof. The glass wall and windows in the gaps between roof layers will bring sun-light into the building.

### 4.4 Materials and Furniture Fixture

To match the concept of Sakura Center, three traditional Japanese colors are used as primary colors inside the building (Fig.75). These are red bean color (reddish brown), Nightingale bird color (greenish brown), and wisteria color (bluish purple).

![Fig.75](image1)

Other traditional Japanese materials are also used in the building. Washi, traditional Japanese paper, is used as wall papers for most interior walls (Fig.76). Natural wood is used for a reception desk and coffee tables. Plasters are commonly used in traditional Japanese buildings. Several different kinds of toned plaster are used for exterior and some interior walls (Fig.77). The flooring is light-colored limestone while the ceiling panel is medium-toned bamboo (Fig.78).

![Fig.76](image2)
Color, materials and designs of furniture fixture are guided by the design concept of the center. Colors of furniture fixture will be above-mentioned three traditional Japanese primary colors to match the colors used for the building. They are also made of natural wood because the building is designed using landscape architecture. To give ethereal lightness and an extreme softness, woven metal mesh and café tables and chairs are placed at the terrace (Fig.79)
4.5 Conclusion

This sub-chapter concludes the thesis by describing what Sakura Center would achieve.

Sakura Center helps Japanese-Americans connect each other and connect themselves with their heritage. The community of Japanese-Americans in Washington, D.C. is small and there are not a lot of activities aimed at making them interact and help each other. As detailed in Chapter 3 and 4, Sakura Center has been designed to anchor the Japanese communities in Washington, D.C. It makes it possible for Japanese-Americans to interact more actively through cultural activities. For example, Japanese-American members of a drum band might find players with a common interest and cultural heritage from other bands and learn more about traditional Japanese drums from each other as they practice in the same building. This is an example that architecture is a tool to connect people and create a community.

The analysis has also explained how Sakura Center can function as a portal to Sakura and Monumental Promenade of Tidal Basin. It has shown that Sakura Center will naturally lead visitors from the Metro and National Mall to Sakura and monuments around Tidal Basin. Sakura Center has been designed so that visitors, as they path through the building, can enjoy the view of Sakura and Tidal Basin and learn the history
of Sakura before they continue their tours.

Sakura Center also is designed to showcase the Japanese culture to the general visitors. It is designed to allow general visitors to have cultural experiences and learn about Japan through performances and other activities, exhibition in galleries and information centers, and the Zen garden and other design elements such as the use of traditional Japanese construction materials.

In summary, this thesis has shown how design can provide the community of Japanese-Americans with a place to rediscover their identity and celebrate their cultural heritage, how it can offer the general visitors with an opportunity to understand and have a holistic experience of the Japanese culture, and how it can provide a portal to Sakura, an important Japanese cultural icon, and the Monumental Promenade.
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