



ROUTLEDGE RESEARCH IN ARCHITECTURE

OPEN ARCHITECTURE FOR THE PEOPLE

Housing Development in Post-War Japan

SHUICHI MATSUMURA



Open Architecture for the People

Open Architecture for the People explores Japanese architecture and the three different phases of development between the years 1950 and 2018.

Changing ways of life through differing generations have caused fluctuations in the building industry. This book demonstrates how each generation's expectations have resulted in discernible eras in architecture which can be examined collectively as well as in isolation. For example, the sudden increase in productivity from 1950 brought about by the Industrial Revolution flowed to the production of buildings and homes, and designs were influenced by modern ideas.

With over thirty black and white images to illustrate the changes, Matsumura brings to light architectural developments that have previously been confined to Japanese-speaking academics. In doing so, the book broadens the scope for further architectural examinations internationally. It would be ideal for academics, students and professionals within the areas of architecture and urban planning, particularly those with an interest in Japanese architecture.

Shuichi Matsumura was born in Kobe City, Japan, in 1957. He graduated from the University of Tokyo (Department of Architecture, Faculty of Engineering) in 1980 and was qualified as a First Class Architect and Engineer by Ministry of Construction in 1982. He earned his doctorate at the University of Tokyo (Department of Architecture, Graduate School of Engineering), completing it in 1985. He has worked as a full-time lecturer (1986–1989), an associate professor (1990–2006), a professor (2006–2018) and a project professor (April 2018–present) in the Department of Architecture, Graduate School of Engineering, the University of Tokyo. He has been engaged in the education and the research activities on housing, building system design, industrialization of building production, building organization, and so on for more than thirty years.

He has been active as a visiting professor in several foreign universities such as Rome University “La Sapienza” (Italy, 1992), Trento University (Italy, 1996), Nanjing University (China, 2004), Dalian Institute of Technology (China, 2005), Montreal University (Canada, 2007), and Loughborough University (UK, 2011–2014).

He has won many prizes for his education, research and writings such as the Prize of Architectural Institute of Japan 2005 (Research Theses Division), the Prize of Association of Urban Housing Science 2008 (Publication), the Prize of

Architectural Institute of Japan 2015 (Book Division), the Prize of Association of Urban Housing Science 2015 (Publication), the Prize of Japan Facility Management Association 2016 (Publication), the Prize of Architectural Institute of Japan 2016 (Education), and the Prize of Association of Urban Housing Science 2016 (Publication).

He has also been socially active. He has worked as a member or a chair of the important committees of the national/local governments as well as academic organizations. For example, he was a vice president of Architectural Institute of Japan during June 2016–May 2018.

He has written many academic papers as well as more than ninety books. Although this book is his first English one, some have already been translated into Chinese and Korean. His most recent book is *Akiya wo Ikasu (Effective Use of Vacant Buildings)*, published in 2018.

“Too little attention has been paid in English language publications to contemporary developments in Japanese architecture and built environment, aside from the “starchitects” or the embattled vernacular traditions. Yet inside Japan, a lively discourse is ongoing into much deeper transformations of Japanese architecture. At a time of depopulation and resource limits, coupled with a deep cultural reverence for traditional social structures, Japanese architectural production is subtly but inexorably changing. This book makes a significant contribution to understanding these transformations.”

*Stephen Kendall, PhD (MIT’90 – Design Theory and Methods)
Emeritus Professor of Architecture, Ball State University
Co-Director, Council on Open Building*

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First published 2020
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
and by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Chapter 2 to 5 published in Japanese by Chikumashobo Ltd.,
10 October, 2016.

Chapter 6 published in Japanese by Asahi Shimbun Publications Inc.,
30 November, 2018

English translation by: Shuichi Matsumura, Kaori Fujita, Toru Eguchi,
Shiro Watanabe, Yuki Takemura and Jessica LeClair

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this title has been requested

ISBN: 978-0-8153-6156-5 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-351-11610-7 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by Swales & Willis, Exeter, Devon, UK

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Preface

Why I chose to discuss open architecture

“Architecture” versus Buildings

The Robie House designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, Villa Cook and the La Tourette Monastery by Le Corbusier, Villa Karuizawa by Junzo Yoshimura,¹ Daikan Yama Apartment House by Fumihiko Maki,² Sea Ranch by MLTW. It may be puzzling to those who do not specialize in architecture, but these structures are masterpieces designed by world-renowned architects of the 20th century.

When I entered the Department of Architecture at the University of Tokyo, my classmates' and my first assignment was to draw a colored perspective of these masterpieces. However, the plan and elevation, which the professor distributed, did not depict color. As a result, every weekend we would go to architecture bookstores, searching for books with pictures of these architectural masterpieces. Exchanging information among classmates was also critical. Through these processes, we eventually became familiar with each architectural work and the architect who designed it. I brought a huge drafting desk into my small dorm room and drew many colored perspectives. Students living in the same dormitory, who were working with other professors in other departments, regarded me as an “architect.” By the time I started sleeping underneath the drafting desk, I felt a surge of pride to have undertaken such a peculiar and specialized profession.

This is only one example, but I think most people who enroll in the Department of Architecture probably have more or less the same kind of experience when entering this world of Architecture. I can easily imagine what happens next. Every day, you learn more and more names of architects and their works. Then, in order to understand those works objectively, you start reading criticisms. You will be living in the world of Architecture. You would naturally start observing and evaluating architecture as “works” by “architects.” Eventually, those buildings which are not “works” will become invisible to you. You will walk straight to the target “work” with a camera in hand without looking once to the other buildings.

Such architecture students often do not regard the buildings which form their town as “Architecture.” Those buildings do not appear in architecture magazines, and according to what they learned in design courses at university, are not designed at all. However, we live our daily lives in towns made by buildings. The vast majority of us do not live in Architecture.

Sooner or later, students in the Department of Architecture recognize this contradiction. In my case, I may not have come to this realization until I was in graduate school. Buildings were not my concern as I was dreaming of Architecture. However, as soon as I realized this contradiction, I reached the understanding that Architecture and Buildings are made in the same way. Each land parcel has an owner with his/her own circumstances, plans, and preferences. The results corresponding to the taste of each just happened to be Architecture or Building. When I reached this understanding, the distinction between Architecture and Building became inconsequential. More than that, I developed an antipathy, from an architect’s perspective, towards the possibility of building anything according to each owner on such cramped plots. I resented the crowds of “Pencil Buildings” competing to be original but each equally ugly. I think this is a typical pattern for architectural students.

My rather conventional sense of aesthetics was totally turned on its head by a single phrase. I was riding a taxi through Tokyo with a professor from the Delft University of Technology, looking at the street full of Pencil Buildings. The professor told me, “This is why I like Tokyo. Buildings can be built according to each person’s taste on each piece of land. This is exactly the ‘landscape of democracy.’ In Europe, this can never happen. We are ordered to make uniform the color, the height, and the wall line. There is no freedom in design. I envy Tokyo so much.”

Since hearing these words, my positive feelings have grown towards the chaotic townscape of Japan, made up of freely designed Buildings. This view is certainly a minority within the Japanese architectural community, but I cannot help feeling this way.

The professor’s word “democracy” touched my heart, as an architectural student torn between Architecture and Building. By raising the walls of academic, artistic, and technological expertise to guard the world of Architecture, had we not forced a utopian image of architecture onto people outside of the profession?

Let’s take “democracy” to mean a system conceived to foster happier and more prosperous lives of the people. In that case, merely because Architecture and Buildings are built according to each owner’s taste on each privately-owned piece of land, is it really fair to call that the “landscape of democracy”? Personally, I do not think so. In general, “democracy” seems much more preferable than the forced value created by the fortress of Architecture, guarded by high walls as a specialized discipline. But what can “democracy” in architecture really be?

A state that can be called “democracy”?

For a long time, I pondered this question. But the answer was not obvious. The walls protecting Architecture as a specialized discipline had been earnestly constructed during the modern era of Japan and, as a result, were tall enough and sturdy enough to withstand attacks. Looking at the lives of people living in Buildings, which were constructed everywhere, there were very few hints of greater happiness or prosperity.

Architecture and Building stood before my simple question. The same social situation established both Architecture and Building, namely modernization.

Modernization was a movement inspired by the motivation to redistribute unevenly distributed goods, energy, technology, and knowledge to every corner of the nation and the world. This movement was accompanied by the vision that everyone could enjoy a modernized life. Architecture was a symbol of this vision. Further, the prevalence of technology and knowledge provided the economic drive to construct a vast number of Buildings. During this grand movement, the opinions and self-motivation of the people, who were the users of architecture, were largely ignored. There were moments, especially after the 1960s, when this kind of attitude was criticized but overall the situation did not change.

However, today more than a decade into the 21st century, the situation has changed dramatically. There is an overflowing stock of technology and architecture accumulated by modern society. It seems to me that society is now ready for people to begin effectively using those accumulated stocks to forge new ways of living and working.

For example, the increasing vacancy rate of old apartment buildings posed a major problem for management. By modifying the contract so that the inhabitants can change the interior decoration and finishing, the uniform units could be colorfully designed according to each inhabitant's taste. New relationships blossomed in the neighborhood when neighbors started helping each other with DIY projects on the weekend, much like sports clubs. In this case, the apartment building was not only full but there was a waiting list of people who wanted to live there after hearing about it. Let us consider another example. In the center of a mid-sized city, where the increasing number of vacant houses and buildings showed no signs of stopping, a number of migrants from the city were able to rent the spaces cheaply and start small businesses. In less than five years, eighty of these small businesses had been created. An artist, who wanted to make an art center and share information around the world, remodeled a closed-down school in Tokyo into an art center where 800,000 people now gather every year.

The efforts by users, not architectural specialists, were able to convert existing buildings into happier and more prosperous living places for people. This movement is becoming apparent all around Japan. I think

that people have started following their aesthetic sense to edit the stock of technology and architecture, accumulated in modern society. I can now hope to see a “democratic landscape” – which once existed only in my imagination – built through the efforts of these people.

Opening the world of Architecture

This book looks ahead to the near future, when the world of Architecture, which was once heavily guarded by architectural experts, will be opened to ordinary people. Further, the future will be marked by efforts to understand the historical significance of this shift and to figure out ways to make this shift result in something better. Many have great expectations that a new world will arise, which is vastly different from the existing closed world of Architecture dominated by professionals.

However, nothing will change by waiting. What can we do to open the world of Architecture and create spaces for a happier and more fruitful life for the people? There should be a “manner” that is fitting to the era. In this book, I will look back on the history of architecture from the viewpoint of “Openness.” I will try to find the seeds of the “manner” buried in history. Further, I will consider the examples of activities undertaken by people in various places to find hints for the future, which began developing in this century. In the final chapter, I would like to describe the future “manner” of managing real estate. Please join me for this journey through Japan’s architectural history.

Notes

- 1 1908–1997. One of the leading modern architects in Japan. After graduating from Tokyo Fine Art University, Yoshimura worked for ten years under Antonin Raymond. Antonin Raymond came to Japan with Frank Lloyd Wright in the 1920s and continued living in Japan, as a pioneer of modernist architecture in Japan. Yoshimura became a professor at Tokyo Fine Art University in 1962.
- 2 1928–present. One of the leading architects in Japan. While studying in the Department of Architecture at the University of Tokyo, Maki was a disciple of Kenzo Tange. After his graduation, he studied at Harvard University and began working as an architect in the USA. In 1979, he became a professor at the University of Tokyo.

Acknowledgements

This book is based on English translations of “*Hirakareru Kenchiku – Minshuka no Sabou- (Open Architecture – Manners of Democratization)*” (Japanese) published by Chikumashobo Ltd. in October 2016 and “*Akiya wo Ikasu (Effective Use of Vacant Buildings)*” (Japanese) published by Asahi Shimbun Publications Inc. in 2018. In particular, Chapters 2 through 5 are nearly direct English translations of the original Japanese version of the former book and Chapter 6 is nearly a direct translation of a part of the latter.

In Chapter 1 of the original Japanese version, I did not explain the historical facts related to the production of Japanese houses and buildings from the post-war period through the end of the high economic growth era because I assumed readers were Japanese and would already be familiar with this history. Instead, I explained innovations in building technologies and philosophies from architecture in Europe and the United States after the Industrial Revolution until around 1950, which had more influence on post-war Japan. However, in this English version, the content of Chapter 1 has been significantly changed. I explain mainly the historical facts in Japan concerning the production of houses and buildings during the post-war period until the end of the high economic growth period, assuming that many English language readers would not be familiar with the post-war history and the basic matters of building production in Japan. For readers of this English version, I believe that this history and background on building production is necessary to thoroughly understand Japanese houses, buildings, and architecture.

When I wrote the former Japanese book, Mr. Shiro Nagata of Chikumashobo, Mr. Youji Makabe, who called himself “an architect never built,” and Mr. Akihiro Imai, a free editor, supported me in planning and editing the book. In the case of the latter book, Mr. Yutaka Kita of Asahi Shimbun Publications, Mr. Makabe, and Mr. Imai did so. Without their cooperation, the Japanese version would have never been published. I sincerely thank them.

For the English translation, I collaborated with the following people. I cannot thank them enough for translating my difficult-to-read Japanese

into English. Following the order of the English translation work process, Professor Kaori Fujita, Professor in the Department of Architecture at the University of Tokyo, Professor Toru Eguchi, an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Urban Innovation at Yokohama National University, Dr. Shiro Watanabe, a researcher at the National Institute for Land and Infrastructure Management in Japan, and Ms. Yuki Takemura, a doctoral candidate in the Graduate School of Frontier Sciences at the University of Tokyo. I appreciate their efforts very much.

The English translations written by the above individuals were good, but it was Ms. Jessica LeClair who made those drafts into truly excellent English. Ms. LeClair also translated Chapter 6. Ms. LeClair lives in the United States and has no formal training in architecture. However, she read other Japanese writings of mine and came to my office in 2018 to ask many interesting questions in Japanese. I appreciated her for her high level of interest in Japanese houses and architecture, as well as her wonderful Japanese ability. As soon as we met for the first time, I asked if she could support our translation of this book into English. Fortunately, her reply was “yes.” The English translation took longer than I expected, but thanks to Ms. LeClair, I was able to express exactly what I wanted to say in natural English. I am grateful to her from the bottom of my heart.

Professor Stephen Kendall, Professor Emeritus at Ball State University, also played a very important role for this book. Professor Kendall lives in the United States and has been one of my best friends for a long time. First, he said that he would like to read the English version of my book published in Japan in 2016. That sparked the planning of the publication of this English version. Second, he introduced me to the British publisher, Routledge. Finally, even while he was busy, he read over our English drafts and provided important and relevant comments on the content. I am also grateful to him from the bottom of my heart.

Scholars and individuals who were active in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s taught me directly about the actual housing and building technology development, as well as its organizations at that period in Japan. Unfortunately, some of them have already passed away. Even so, I would like to express my sincere respect to them all. Specifically, Professor Kazuo Goto, who was involved in the development of the reinforced concrete building system “PRECON” at the Tokyo Institute of Technology since the 1940s and was in a leading position in the industrialization of Japanese housing production; Mr. Mitsufusa Sawada, who led the national government administration related to Japanese housing and construction after World War II; Professor Yoshichika Uchida, who led the industrialization of Japanese housing production and who was my supervising professor; Mr. Yukichi Fukui and Dr. Tokusaburo Ishimoto, who developed Sekisui House Type A, one of the first prefabricated houses in Japan; Mr. Akio Kobayashi, who developed Matsushita No. 1, which was also one of the first prefabricated houses in Japan; Professor N. John Habraken, who

established a new methodology of the industrialization of housing production; and Dr. Katsuhiko Ohno, who developed a unique prefabricated house, Sekisui Heim M1.

Dr. Ohno was also a core member of the journal *Gunkyo*, which was periodically published in the 1980s and 1990s. Especially related to the discussion in Chapter 2 of this book, I was very inspired by members of *Gunkyo* from the beginning of its publication. Specifically, I am indebted to the chief editor, Professor Shuji Funo, who was a researcher and an architectural critic; two radical architects, Professor Osamu Ishiyama and Professor Toyokazu Watanabe; the issuer, Mr. Koichi Nobe, who was a consultant on the housing industry; Professor Yoshikazu Fujisawa, Professor Masao Ando, and Professor Tetsukazu Akiyama, who were occasionally involved in editing *Gunkyo*. I learned many insights through collaborating in research with them. I am grateful to them all.

I would like to thank the persons whose activities or ways of life greatly inspired me. I introduce their activities or ways of life in Chapter 4. Specifically, Mr. Yasuhiro Hoshina, a dye artist who emigrated to a small fishing village; the non-profit organization (NPO) COMFAMA in Medellin, Columbia, which transformed a big building, that had been ruined, into a beautiful welfare facility for an economically disadvantaged area; Mr. Masato Nakamura, an artist who transformed a former junior high school building in the central area of Tokyo into a lively art center; Mr. Kazuo Kasami, who runs an NPO to support both migrants and local governments that accept them all over Japan; Mr. Nobuya Ohminami, the central figure of an NPO, who has made a great impact by setting up programs for accepting various immigrants in a rural village with a declining and aging population; Mr. Hideki Ikeda and Ms. Saiko Ito, who were enjoying a new lifestyle of immigration from a big city to an old building in a rural area; Mr. Jun Aoki and Mr. Katsumi Yoshihara, who found a new way to manage rental flats, and are pioneers as rental flats owners; Mr. Manjyo Shimahara, who influenced many rental flats owners in Japan with his breakthrough report on the lifestyle in rental flats; Professor Yuko Nishikawa, who specialized in French literature and presents exciting thoughts about family problems in Japan; Mr. Jun Aoki, a world-famous architect, who used to be my classmate at Department of Architecture, the University of Tokyo; and Mr. Yoshinari Ohya, who transformed an unused temple into a beautifully organized welfare facility for the area.

As far as Chapter 5 is concerned, I received much intellectual stimulation from the team who worked together at the HEAD (Home & Environment Advanced Design) study group which I founded with my colleagues in 2008. I would like to thank them, specifically Mr. Yasumitsu Matsunaga, the architect who is the chairman of the HEAD; Mr. Sotaro Yamamoto, an architect who is an executive director of the HEAD; Mr. Yoshitsugu Shimizu, an urban planning consultant who is also an executive director; Mr. Hiroshi Nagaya, an entrepreneur who is also an executive director; Mr. Manabu Shinbori,

Mr. Yoshihiko Oshima, Mr. Masataka Baba, and Mr. Yohei Shimada, who are architects and members of the HEAD; two other members of the HEAD, Mr. Tomohito Yabe and Mr. Hirofumi Uchiyama, who are working in the field of area management and real estate business; another member of the HEAD, Associate Professor Mitsuhiro Tokuda at the Kyushu Institute of Technology; and Mr. Tomonori Kuraishi, Mr. Tsuyoshi Hirose, Mr. Kei Miyamoto, and Ms. Tamami Masuzawa, whom I met at the Renovation School led by HEAD or its relating opportunity. They are promoting advanced renovation machizukuri in Nagano City.

I also deeply appreciate the kindness of the following companies and persons that let me use their pictures and diagrams in this book. Namely, Dr. Nanae Nakano, Professor Meiji Fujita, Professor Kouichi Sato, Sekisui House Co., Ltd., Daiwa House Co., Ltd., Panasonic Homes Corporation, Sekisui Chemical Co., Ltd., Misawa Home Co., Ltd., Miyagawa Koki Co., Ltd., Hometown Migration Support Center, Yoshihara Jutaku Limited Company, Kitakyushu Yamorisha Co., Ltd., MY ROOM Co. Ltd., and Rivita Co., Ltd..

Without the understanding of Routledge, and Taylor & Francis Group, it would not have been possible to publish this book. I am thankful to Ms. Jennifer Schmidt, a senior editor in the field of architecture, Ms. Grace Harrison, an editor of landscape architecture and built environment research field, and Ms. Aoife McGrath, an editorial assistant, who helped me very much in the planning and editing phases of this book. I am deeply grateful to them.

January 4, 2019
Shuichi Matsumura