

Japan as seen from architecture (1)

Let's Restore Lost Japanese Landscapes:

Kaido & Shukuba-machi

By Nishi Kazuo

Ancient Highways & Travel

In the old days, people traveled on foot. Horses and palanquins were available, but they were for feudal lords or noblemen. Ordinary people had no other means than walking along *kaido* (roads) when they traveled. Ancient people had stronger feet and legs than modern people. On main national roads in those days, posting stations were set up at intervals of the distance covered by good walkers in one day. Posting stations for main national roads built in the Edo period (1603-1867) include *Tokaido*, which connected Edo (today's Tokyo) and Kyoto along the Pacific coast, and *Nakasendo*, which connected the two cities inland. A total of 53 posting stations were set up on *Tokaido*, and they were placed at intervals of the distance covered by a half day's walk. This is because the distance covered in one day's walk differed for different people and travelers' physical conditions differed on outward and homeward trips. Services offered by posting stations differed from place to place. Some had lodging facilities, but others had only resting facilities.

Old Houses Remain in *Shukuba-machi*

Posting stations, called *shukuba-machi*, had simple lodging facilities called *hatago*. A *hatago* is different from a Western hotel in that the former had no individual rooms and most travelers shared a room with companions or even strangers. Rooms in a *hatago* were separated only by partitions called *fusuma* (sliding screens), and practically there was no privacy there. But such a construction style was common to Japanese houses.

Traveling feudal lords stayed at the house of a local ruler or that of his deputy, built more impressively than *hatago*. The local ruler's house was called *honjin* (main camp) during the sojourn of a feudal lord and the deputy's *waki-honjin* (side main camp). In addition to *hatago* houses, both sides of the road of posting stations were lined with shops, Buddhist temples and *Shinto* shrines. Few posting stations of the Edo period remain, but some towns located along the defunct *Tokaido*, *Nakasendo* and other national roads still maintain some vestiges of *shukuba-machi*.

Restoration of Historical Towns

Contemporary people visit the erstwhile old towns that retain the atmosphere of *shukuba-machi* to sightsee. Accordingly, the vestiges of old towns are being reevaluated as tourist resources and the preservation and restoration of old towns are becoming increasingly necessary. At the request of various municipalities, my staff at the Engineering Department of Kanagawa University is conducting surveys on the conditions of old *shukuba-machi* and studying measures for replicating them.

The survey is intended to find out which former *shukuba-machi* retain old houses, what kinds of old houses have remained, what features such old houses have, and what architectural values they have. The work involves measuring room layouts of the houses and drawing blueprints, asking dwellers how they live and how they find the houses, searching the attic of each house for wooden plates mentioning the year the house was built and bearing the names of carpenters who built it. The survey sheds light on the architectural characteristics of each *shukuba-machi*, differences between such towns, characteristics of the design of each house, and the year of its construction.

On the basis of the survey, we draw up plans for restoring the atmosphere of *shukuba-machi*. Dwellers in the old houses were not necessarily cooperative in the survey from the outset. Many of them contend that though they hope to maintain the historical heritage, they wish to take down their decrepit old houses and build new ones because repair of old houses is difficult and new facilities are needed to keep abreast of the times so that they can live comfortably. To these people, we emphasize the importance of maintaining historical heritage and suggest that they innovate facilities while preserving the structures themselves. It must be noted, however, that even if we obtain support from a few house owners, the project will not succeed. Only after a large number of owners of old houses agree to preservation can the project be started as an undertaking involving the whole town.

Below, I mention several examples of old town preservation projects on which we have been consulted for advice.

Examples of Town Restoration Projects

1. Unuma-juku of *Nakasendo*

A waterway was running through the Unuma-juku posting station on the *Nakasendo* route in the Edo period. In the late 1920s it was filled in on grounds it hindered increasing traffic.

A painting of Otsu posting station on the Kisokaido road by master ukiyoe painter Ando Hiroshige

Photos: Nishi Kazuo

Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3



Now, the local community and administration are joining forces to restore the waterway. Some houses of Unuma-juku were built in the Edo period (see Photo 1), but others were built in and after the subsequent Meiji era. Our survey led to the discovery of an old town map prepared during the Edo period. A comparison with the present town map permits us to see that the current town layout and room arrangements of the houses have taken over their appearances of the Edo period. A plan is being drafted to modify the town's landscape. The plan includes restoration of the waterway and the underground wiring of electric power lines.

2. Honmachi area of Gotsu City

The Honmachi area of Gotsu City, Shimane Prefecture, is located where the *Sanindo* road converges with the Gonokawa river, and developed as a ferry port town. Cargo ships operating along the Japan Sea coast loaded and unloaded cargoes at the Honmachi port. Some of the houses built by merchants who made fortunes in the ferry business still remain there. The waterway on the left side of the road (see Photo 2) was reportedly used by small boats and the stones with round holes are said to have been used to moot the boats. When railways were laid in the region in the Meiji era, they ran along a seaside road on the opposite side of the mountain and Gotsu Station was set up there, not in the center of the town. That is why the main part of the town was left undeveloped and old houses have remained there. Ironically, the neighborhood of the station is now desolate with most shops closed, a situation prompting the Gotsu City office to make use of the historical value of the Honmachi area as a means of reactivating the whole town.

3. Katsumotoura on Iki Island

Old houses of various types, some two-storied, stand side by side along the curving main road in the Katsumotoura area of Iki City (see Photo 3). Iki is an island city, encompassing the whole of Iki Island, some 30 km north of Saga Prefecture in Kyushu. As we walk along the road, we can see that architectural features differ from house to house. The wooden brackets that support the roofs are engraved with figures of ocean waves, fish and other sea-related themes, perhaps because the area is a fishermen's town. The second floors of two-

storied houses have handrails, the design of which differs from house to house. The different architectural features give the town diverse faces.

Regional Reactivation by Town Restoration

In urban redevelopment, it is important to consider the following points:

- 1) Buildings which lost their historical atmosphere in the process of modernization should be redesigned in such a way as to restore such an atmosphere.
- 2) Electric lines should be laid underground. If that is not feasible, electric poles should be relocated to back alleys.
- 3) In on-the-spot surveys, staff should seek to find old documents, such as blueprints and maps, and obtain statements from local residents on matters related to the town as reference for restoration work.
- 4) Each old town's characteristics should be respected in restoration.

In the restoration of Unuma-juku now under way, for example, the waterway is being precisely replicated based on an old map showing its width and other data in detail. There is a South Korean town, Cheonggyecheon, famous for a waterway restored. We do not expect to emulate such a big project, but wish to restore the Unuma-juku waterway in a manner respecting water, greenery and history.

If water flows through a town, children will play there. The sound of a stream will give people comfort. The town's atmosphere will be further enhanced if trees are planted along the waterway and flowers bloom. The replication of an old town represents not merely the creation of a tourism resource, but the preservation of cultural heritage and the generation of regional vitality as well.

Efforts are going on to restore historical towns in various parts of Japan. If Japan is a country that respects history and culture, urban redevelopment taking advantage of historical heritage must be successfully realized. We bear this in mind in grappling with our work.

JS



the wooden bracket

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