
THE LIFE AND WORKS OF PROFESSOR YORIFUSA ISHIDA (1932-2015): A PIONEER OF PLANNING HISTORY IN JAPAN

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Professor Yorifusa Ishida (1932-2015) was a planning professor at Tokyo Metropolitan University, who was an active researcher for over 40 years from the early 1960s to the early 2000s. His research interests originated in rural communities and then expanded to land-use controls and planning in metropolitan peripheries, to historical studies of land-use control tools, to planning history in general, to international activities and comparative studies, and to his own planning theory and philosophy. Ishida was a leading planning scholar, active in post-war Japan, who deeply and widely analysed, and actively presented his views about, current planning administration and systems, as well as their historical development. He has left many high-quality writings which will serve as rich research records of the Japanese planning system and its history, and also as a stimulating repository for further research by future generations.

Keywords

Yorifusa Ishida, Land-use controls, land-use planning, Japanese pioneer

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FIGURE 1 Professor Yorifusa Ishida (© 2000)

INTRODUCTION

On November 4, 2015, Dr. Yorifusa Ishida, Professor Emeritus of Tokyo Metropolitan University, died from pneumonia in Tokyo at the age of 83. He was a long-time IPHS member as a pioneer in Japanese planning history, and served as a council member of the Planning History Group (present IPHS) from 1989 to 1991 and on the Planning Perspectives editorial board.

Ishida was a leading scholar in postwar Japan, in the fields of land-use controls and planning, city and rural planning, and planning history. He was active in international contacts and in domestic government services. He has left many high-quality writings which may become the subject of further research by future researchers.

The purpose of this paper is to present a comprehensive picture of the life and works of Professor Ishida, and to identify the change and range of his research interests and attainments. Such a picture will guide the readers to rich, challenging and unrevealed treasures of Japan's planning history research.

FAMILY

Yorifusa Ishida was born on February 7, 1932, as the first son, with both an elder and a younger sister, of Shinpachiro Ishida and his wife, Kunie. Their home was a wooden rented house located in Tokyo's western periphery of Kokubunji Village (present Kokubunji City), located about 30 km west of Tokyo Central Station.

The next year, the family moved to their own wooden detached house in Musashino Town (present Musashino City), located about 10 km nearer to Tokyo Station. The new house was designed by his father, who was an architectural engineer. Ishida's interest in architecture seems to have come from his father's profession.

Their house was in a newly developing suburb, and retained much of the natural environment. Ishida grew up there as a boy, interested in insects and watching the environment changing as a result of urbanization. All these experiences seem to be the roots of his later professional interests in urban and rural planning, and in his personal hobby of bird-watching. Ishida lived in that house all through his student days, until he moved out when he got married in 1960.

EDUCATION

In 1950, Ishida graduated from the Architecture Department of the University of Tokyo. His graduation thesis was entitled: “Land Acquisition Problem in Public Housing” and his graduation design: “Residential Unit Planning.” He then pursued graduate studies under Professor Eika Takayama, a leading figure in city planning in the academic community, such as the City Planning Institute of Japan (CPIJ), and in various committees of the Ministry of Construction, which was responsible for city planning administration.

Professor Takayama’s Lab was one of the top groups of scholars in the emerging field of city planning at that time. The graduate students included Hidemitsu Kawakami, one year senior, and Shigeru Ito, two years junior to Ishida. Both of them later became city planning professors at the University of Tokyo as leading planning scholars.

Like other Japanese universities, the graduate education of the Takayama Lab was a training system similar to an apprenticeship with fewer class-room lectures and more free personal activities. Ishida joined a group of young scholars who were studying the problem of rural villages and agriculture. It is interesting to note that they were inclined toward Marxism and had advanced research methods in social science. The later academic Ishida owed them both Marxist and methodological influences.

In 1957, Ishida finished his master’s course with a thesis entitled: “Study on the Provincial Cities and Their Peripheries,” in which he empirically analysed the urban-rural relationship in provincial towns and villages in Nagano Prefecture, and developed some abstract and philosophical arguments about the urban-rural relationship in the process of urbanization.

In 1960, Ishida started work as a Research Fellow in the Architecture Department of Tokyo Metropolitan University and, the next year, obtained a doctorate degree from the University of Tokyo. His dissertation was entitled: “Study on the Land Use Control System for Urban Sprawl Areas in the Metropolitan Peripheries.” He investigated the actual reality of the disorderly development, or urban sprawl, in the metropolitan peripheries, which was a very serious urban problem in Japan at that time, from both urban and rural viewpoints. After examining the existing land-use control techniques against sprawl, Ishida proposed a new land-use system, as explained later (1961).

The same year, Ishida married Miss Yuko Kogikuya and moved into a small wooden rented apartment room in Kamakura City, about 42 km south of Tokyo Station. The severe housing shortage caused difficulty for the newlywed couple, who had to commute to their working place for 50 to 70 minutes in overcrowded trains. This urban, rather metropolitan, problem gave Ishida new energy to study city planning for a practical solution.

RESEARCH STARTS

Ishida fully started his research activity in the 1960s, and continued to work in the field of urban planning for over 40 years until around mid-2000.

Post-war Japan, after recovering from the war damaged economy, entered the stage of rapid economic growth around the 1960s. As a result, population and industries began to concentrate into major metropolitan areas, especially Tokyo. There, a whole variety of serious urban problems occurred, such as land inflation, housing shortages, traffic congestion, long-distance commuting, air pollution and, above all, urban sprawl in the metropolitan peripheries.

It was strongly felt necessary to amend the half-century old City Planning Act of 1919 by providing a stronger land-use control system against urban sprawl. Ishida's doctorate dissertation (1961) provided empirical data about the actual sprawl problem and presented a proposal for a stronger land-use control system, which seemed to have some influence in the law-making process through Professor Takayama.

In 1968, a drastic amendment was made to create the new City Planning Act, which is still the current planning law, through many minor later amendments. The Act institutionalized a new system of controlling "development," which is defined as altering the lot shape or quality of land to make it available mainly for the purpose of the construction of buildings or special structures. This development control is implemented differently according to Areas, where development is basically allowed in Urbanization Promotion Areas, and not allowed in Urbanization Controlled Areas.

Ishida's proposal, however, had been more sophisticated in that, not only development, but also various land-related activities were to be controlled, and the Area classifications were not two but four, namely: Existing Urban Area, Urbanization Area, Urbanization Restraint Area and Conservation Area.

Ishida was not extremely happy about the new system (1981). It would be fair to say, however, that he began his academic career with a rather happy start in that his own research result contributed to some degree to the new City Planning Act. Since then, he believed that he owed Professor Takayama a great deal during his entire academic career (2000).

In 1967, Ishida was promoted to tenured Associate Professor at the age of 35. In 1984, he moved from the Architecture Department to the University's Centre for Urban Studies, as Professor, and served as Director from 1991 till his retirement in 1995.

PLANNING HISTORY

Ishida did not start his academic career as a planning historian. As seen above, his starting point was land-use controls in the urban peripheries. His basic interest lay in the planning tools for land-use controls like building lines, zoning and land readjustment. As he searched for the more fundamental nature of these tools, he realized the importance of their historical development in Japan and their relationship with the western countries, from where many of them had come.

According to his own statement, Ishida started to study planning history in the latter 1970s (1993b: 20), although he had written a paper on the brief history of post-war reconstruction planning in 1960 (Kawakami and Ishida 1960). He admits that the 1979 paper on the historical analysis of Tokyo's central area planning in 1880 was the first genuine paper on the history of Japan's modern city planning (1993b: 23).

Ishida's historical works covered a wide range of topics. They center on land-use controls and planning like: zoning (1978), building lines (1983), land readjustment (1986), development benefit, or English "betterment" (1990b) and intensive land utilization (1992). Tokyo was his main research field and he wrote the histories of: Capital Region Planning (1968), Tokyo's urban structure (1991) and Tokyo's unbuilt projects (Ishida ed. 1992). His early historical works include individual case studies of the Meiji Era like: a slum clearance project (1980abc), a Japanese industrial village (1990a) and Ogai Mori, a famous great writer (1999). In his later days, he wrote histories on more general topics like: historical periodization (1987c), urban design (Ishida and Dunin-Woyseth 1993), urban land policy (1994b), contemporary planning issues (2000a) and decentralization of planning powers (2001).

Ishida was, probably, the first professor in Japan who taught “planning history” as an independent classroom subject. Based upon his lectures, he published a book on the first general history of Japan’s modern planning in 1987. The book was entitled: *The Hundred Years of Japanese Modern City Planning (1987; 2004a)*, which is still the only book by a Japanese author on this topic, and is widely referred to in the Japanese planning community.

In the following years, his historical interest expanded to the more general topic of the Japanese planning system as a whole, with a strong sense that historical research should have practical implications for future planning practice. One of the highlights in this line is “A Planning History towards 2019” (1996), which he presented as his retirement lecture in 1995. Ishida was not satisfied with a historical study that presents past history only, but believed that it should provide something useful for our future actions. His target was the year 2019, which is the 100th year of the first City Planning Act of 1919. In this paper, by identifying feasible and desirable future planning goals, he tried to examine how we can attain them in the course of our future actions. Although it is rather doubtful if this kind of “future history” approach is methodologically possible or not, this paper clearly illustrates Ishida’s passion towards, and basic philosophy of, planning history study.

In short, his historical study is characterized by width and depth. His interest is wide enough to cover the entire period of Japan’s modern city planning, from even before the first legislation of the Tokyo Urban Improvement Ordinance of 1888 to the current planning practice. His analysis is deep in terms of digging and examining the historical data and in terms of elaborate arguments. Also it should be noted that he believed historical study should be able to produce practical guides for current and future planning systems and practice. In this sense, Ishida was a pragmatist.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITY

Ishida made his international debut rather late in his professional career. In 1979, at the age of 47, he made his first overseas trip to Europe, visiting Stockholm, Hamburg, Lübeck, Amsterdam, the Hague, Delft and Paris. Subsequently, he made about 23 overseas trips, often for international conferences. He visited western Europe 15 times, but the USA only twice, which may show that his concern was directed more toward European than American modern planning. He made 6 trips to China, South Korea, India and Australia-New Zealand, but showed little research interest in planning in those countries and regions, as his “modern” city planning seemingly meant “western” or “European” city planning.

In 1982, Ishida attended for the first time an international conference held at the United Nations Centre for Regional Development in Nagoya, where he presented his first paper in a foreign language (1982). The paper was on the District Planning system, which is the detailed land-use planning system at the district level, institutionalized two years ago. Ishida had contributed to its law-making process, although he was not completely satisfied with the District Planning system as institutionalized because its land-use controls were weaker than Ishida had expected.

With the 3rd International Conference of the Planning History Group (present IPHS) in Tokyo in 1988 as a turning point, he began his international activities, energetically writing and attending conferences. He participated in the PHG-IPHS conference six times, always with interesting papers. They are: Tokyo (1988a), Birmingham (1990a), Hong Kong (1994a), Thessaloniki (Ishida and Shoji 1996), Sydney (1998a) and Helsinki (2000b). In the 2006 New Delhi conference, he could not attend but presented a paper on the preservation of urban farmland (2006b). Ishida also attended EAJS (European Association for Japanese Studies), presenting papers five times from 1991 to 2003.

Ishida was a very generous mentor to many young researchers, including several foreigners whom he personally coached during their research times in Japan, and with whom he co-published (2003; 2006a) and became a personal friend. Ishida was proud of collaborating with them when he named them as Gordon Cherry, Françoise Durand, Marc Bourdier, Vincent Rounard, Natacha Aveline, Augustin Berque, Winfried Flüchter, Carola Hein, Uta Hohn, Jeffery Diefendorf, André Sorensen, Jeffery Hanes and Son Jeong-Mok (2004b: 34-35).

When Ishida wrote papers in a foreign language. He tried to make them easy for western readers to understand by analysing and explaining the current situation and historical development of land-use problems and their control system in Tokyo and Japan at large (1988a; 1991; 1993a; 1994a; 1994b; 1998a; 2003; 2006a; Ishida and Dunin-Woyseth 1993; Ishida and Shoji 1996; Hein and Ishida 1998). Therefore, these writings are good guides for foreign scholars to the history and current system of Japanese city planning.

For Japanese scholars, Ishida also wrote papers on: an overview of the past contacts between Japanese and overseas planning (1984), and the western influences upon Japanese modern city planning (2002), which is an elaborated version of the 1984 paper and was the record of his presentation at a study meeting of the Architectural Institute of Japan. It is interesting to note that Ishida often elaborated his former preliminary individual works later in a wider context. As a result, many of his writings are interconnected to each other and make it possible for us to trace the progress of his research thinking.

PLANNING THEORY

As mentioned before, Ishida started his professional career in a happy way because his research direction headed toward needs of the time, and his research results played a comfortable role in the law-making process of the new City Planning Act of 1968.

Ishida believed that a good planning system is a detailed and strict land-use control system (1988b: 81). Society was headed certainly in that direction. The Area system of the 1968 Act and the District Planning system of 1980 followed this line, though not fully satisfactorily, according to his theoretical framework.

From the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, many local governments where actual city planning was being carried out were administered by progressive heads, often based upon the collaboration of Socialist and Communist parties. Ishida, sympathetic toward the Marxist camp, considered this situation a favorable development towards “democratic city planning administration” (1987b: 317).

In the early 1980s, however, the political atmosphere changed to a more conservative mood. In 1982, the Nakasone administration started a deregulation policy and applied it also to land-use controls that were the core tools of city planning. It was a favorable situation for urban land owners and developers, who wanted to use urban space more intensively for more profits. Ishida saw the policy as “breaking the cage of ‘the detailed and strict land-use control system’ which the 1968 Act had started and the 1980 District Planning system had reinforced, and letting loose a tiger of land price in the field” (1988b: 81). Thus, the deregulation policies paved the way towards land price inflation and then the “bubble economy” that started in 1986 and ended in 1991.

Now, the gap between Ishida’s research paradigm and society’s paradigm became decisive. To him, the Nakasone deregulations meant “anti-planning.” Although it was not a well-established term in the planning community, he instituted “anti-planning” as the crucial keyword for the decade from the early 1980s in his planning history (1987b: 325-332; 2004a: 271-286).

The Nakasone deregulations were, in a sense, a fundamental challenge to the total research attainments that Ishida had built up over the years. In order to meet the challenge theoretically, he took the following approach. He raised such abstract questions as: “What is the plan?” and “How should planning be?” Then he tried to answer these questions concretely by analyzing the concept and function of “plan” and “planning” in the context of land-use controls in particular, and Japanese planning history in general (1987a; 1988b; 1993b; 1998b).

As a result, Ishida argued that planning should “have the collective will and goal of urban people and to provide the method and means rationally to materialize these most effectively.” The deregulation policy, which lacked in the concept of such a collective goal, was against his image of planning, as described above, and so, Ishida concluded, was “anti-planning” (1987a: 804).

Thus, Ishida’s research stance changed dramatically in the late 1980s. Previously, he had empirically examined individual aspects of land-use controls and planning in order to discover ways to improve them. Then, he tried to understand theoretically the basic nature of the Japanese planning system as a whole by means of historical analysis and international comparison.

This theoretical and holistic approach was in fact another way to search for practical solutions for the future of city planning on a wider scale, looking towards the 21 century (2000a; 2004a; 2004b), typified by the above-mentioned “A Planning History toward 2019” (1996). In this sense, Ishida was a pragmatist who sought for practical implications from the historical and international research of planning systems.

ACADEMIC INSTITUTES

Ishida’s academic activities in Japan were concentrated in three academic organizations.

In 1956, he joined the City Planning Institute of Japan (CPIJ). Six years later, he was awarded the Ishikawa Encouragement Prize for his doctorate dissertation, and, in 1965, was awarded the Ishikawa Prize jointly with Ryoichi Ura and Hisato Ide for their plan of the new rural settlement in Hachirogata Polder in Akita Prefecture. In 1982, Ishida was awarded the Academic Prize for his long-time series of research activities into the urbanization process and its controlling tools (1983), and was again awarded the Distinguished Service Prize in 2001. Ishida served as Academic Committee Chair from 1985 to 1989 and Vice-President from 1989 to 1991, and was recommended as an honourable member in 2001.

In 1957, Ishida joined the Architectural Institute of Japan (AIJ). In 1991, he was awarded the Academic Prize for his series of historical studies of Japan’s modern city planning and, in 2004, the Grand Prix, which is given to only two persons every year, for his achievement in research into the history of Japanese modern city planning. He was recommended as an honourable member in 2006.

In 1982, the Association for Rural Planning (ARP) was established by a group of academics and practitioners who were working for a better rural environment and community. Ishida joined ARP at that time and later served as Vice President from 1992 to 1993 and as President from 1994 to 1996. He was recommended as an honourable member in 2002.

GOVERNMENT ACTIVITY

Like other leading university professors, Ishida served as a member of various planning-related committees of both central and local governments.

At the central government level, Ishida served twice as a professional member of the Central City Planning Council of the Ministry of Construction. The first term was from 1978 to 1980, when the members discussed the designing of the basic structure of the District Planning system. As mentioned earlier, the legalized system was not very satisfactory to him, but he was not too unhappy. The second term was from 1982 to 1989, when the members encountered the unfavourable political mood of deregulation policies and, finally, could not submit their recommendation reports, with which Ishida, in particular, was much frustrated.

Ishida was also invited to the Diet as an expert witness four times in 1990, 1999, 2000 and 2002. On each occasion, he insisted that the core of city planning should be detailed and strict land-use controls and planning. His testimonies became increasingly critical of government policies over time.

At the local government level, Ishida served on various committees, often as chairperson. He worked for such Prefectures as Tokyo, Kanagawa, Saitama and Toyama, and for such municipal governments as Tokyo wards like Meguro, etc., and cities like Yokohama, Tachikawa, Fujimi, Hachioji, Kamakura and Ageo. Most of them are within the Tokyo metropolitan area. Generally speaking, he was rather happy with his services there.

RETIREMENT AND AFTER

In 1995, Ishida retired from Tokyo Metropolitan University and became Professor Emeritus. The same year, he became Special Professor of the private Kogakuin University in Tokyo and served until 1999, when he became 67 years of age. Then came a complete retirement, which gave him more time for enjoying research and his hobbies of community activities and bird-watching.

In 2004, when Ishida was awarded the AIJ Grand Prix, he published a little booklet written in Japanese and entitled: *Historical Research of City and Rural Planning for Future Perspectives and Planning* (2004b), which became more or less the last message that Ishida presented to the Japanese planning community. On the last page, he wrote, "I do not know how much time is left to me, I will still continue my research activity" (2004b: 55). That time, as revealed later, was only five years.

On May 10, 2009, we were preparing a party with Professors Akimoto and Nakajima at my home, honouring Ishida for his 77th birthday. However, he did not appear. After several telephone calls, we sadly learned he had had stroke and had been hospitalized. Since then, he was mostly confined to bed and never regained complete consciousness for nearly six years until his death in 2015.

Ishida was survived by two sons, a daughter and two grandchildren; his wife Yuko had passed way 14 years before. Now, Professor Yorifusa Ishida is laid to rest together with Yuko in the family tomb in Kodaira Cemetery, located 5 km north of the place where he was born.

RESEARCH RECORDS

Ishida has left rich records about his life and works, which he seemingly updated regularly during his active professional days. He provided a curriculum vitae (last updated in May 2006) and a detailed chronological record of the main events (last updated on September 28, 2003).

He made a list of his writings twice. As they record almost all of his writings, we can identify any of his writings by the following system, similar to the Köchel catalogue number in the case of Mozart. In this “Ishida List Number” system, <1-25> means No. 25 item of Classification 1.

The first list was made around January 2003 (c.2003), although he had seemingly made earlier lists many times before. This is a detailed comprehensive list of about 820 writings from December 1954 to January 2003, and is classified as:

- 1 Books (<1A> Authored or co-authored books; <1B> Authored or co-authored articles in books)
- 2 Academic papers
- 3 Academic conferences (<3A> International conferences; <3B> Domestic conferences)
- 4 General articles and planning critiques
- 5 Lectures and round-table talks (<5A> Lecture records; <5B> Round-table talks, interviews and comments)
- 6 Book reviews and comments
- 7 Essays, addresses and brief reports
- 8 Reports

The second list was made around January 2008 (c. 2008) and has 41 items from February 2005 to January 2008, classified differently from the above as:

- 9 a / Books
- b / Research article
- c / Essays (city, planning and Machizukuri)
- d / Essays (nature etc.)
- d / Book reviews

As a result, there are two blank periods. The first is about a roughly two-year period from February 2003 to January 2005. Although the classification is different between the first and second lists, there are clearly many missing numbers in between, which suggests there is another list missing in the first blank period. Ishida’s last booklet (2004b) has a list of about 100 works, although limited to planning history, from 1960 to May 2004, which fills up some of the missing works in the first blank period. The second blank period is from February 2008 to May 2009, when he was hospitalized.

A group of Japanese scholars is currently preparing to establish the “Ishida Archives” in order to complete the lists and preserve his works in digital form, so that researchers can have easy access to them.

Another noteworthy point about Ishida’s research style is that he has publicly left personal commentaries about his own research works. When studying or writing, he was always conscious of where he stood within the total system of his planning research. In another words, he was always positioning himself against the preceding works of other people as well as against his own works. Some of the early examples were the 1993 paper dealing with planning theory (1993b) and the “Planning History toward 2019” paper (1996).

The highlight in this respect is the paper in which Ishida selected the best 30 works out of the huge number of his writings and put a short comment against each of them (c.1998). The paper starts with his oldest article, which he wrote in his graduate days (Kawade, Asatani and Ishida 1957), and ends with the 1998 paper (Hein and Ishida 1998). These papers as a whole clearly show the entire research body that he built up for over 40 years.

Another work of similar nature is the 2004 booklet: *Planning Research of City and Rural Planning for Future Perspectives and Planning* (2004b) as discussed above. There, Ishida presented a personal history of his past research activities and attainments, and stimulated younger researchers towards planning history. As the title of the booklet shows, he identified his field of study as “city and rural planning,” which was the result of a synthesis of his entire research activities. With all these commentaries, he has provided us with good guides to understand his entire research world.

CONCLUSION

Professor Yorihisa Ishida (1932-2015) was a planning professor at Tokyo Metropolitan University, who was an active researcher for over 40 years, from the 1960s to the mid-2000s. His research interests originated in rural communities and then expanded to land-use controls and planning in metropolitan peripheries, to historical studies of land-use control tools, to planning history in general, to international activities and comparative studies, and to his own planning theory and philosophy.

Ishida was a leading planning scholar, active in post-war Japan, who deeply and widely analysed, and actively presented his views about, current planning administration and systems as well as their historical development. He has left many high-quality writings, which will serve as rich research records of the Japanese planning system and its history, and also as a stimulating repository for further research by future generations.

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Notes on contributor

Shun-ichi J. Watanabe was born in Tokyo (1938); graduated from the Architecture Department of the University of Tokyo (1961); was awarded MCP from Harvard University (1964) and DS in Engineering from the University of Tokyo (1974); was Research Fellow there (1965-78); worked for the Building Research Institute of Ministry of Construction (1978-1990); was Planning Professor of Tokyo University of Science (1990-2014); and is now Professor Emeritus (2015-). He has been a PHG-IPHS member since 1977, serving as council member for many years, and is Chair of its East Asia Planning History Prize Committee.

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Image Sources

Figure 1: Shuichi Ishida, the son of Yorifusa Ishida