



A study of unorthodox town making by Akira Tamura: the transmission of Tamura's vision to younger generations

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This thesis intends to assess how Akira Tamura's "Town making" vision has been passed down to and utilised by younger generations, focusing on the experiences of a study group in which Tamura's successors have utilised his vision. Tamura promoted the group as an informal place to convey and understand the essence of town making, and insisted on the importance of flexibility in consideration of stakeholders. This thesis sets out to answer the following questions: (1) what are the key features of Akira Tamura's town making that have been passed on, and (2) how can they be applied by town planners now and in the future? In preparation for writing this thesis, I conducted semi-structured interviews of 4 former Yokohama public officials and referred to documents in the "Akira Tamura archives" of Yokohama city's historical library. This case study demonstrates that Tamura aimed not only to improve the law and revise the planning system itself, but to imbue urban planning with greater fluidity.

Keywords: Development with consideration of stakeholders, Town making and local governance, Planning and coordination within city administration

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to assess how Akira Tamura's "town making" vision has been passed down to and utilised by younger generations. Although the Japanese urban planning legislation regulating the control of urban space is largely based on modern Western city planning, its practical application has a strongly centralised and business-centred character.¹ At the same time, however, there is a lack of political will and social support for central government-led planning, and the principle of "architectural freedom" in urban spaces leaves planning to the forces of *laissez-faire* market capitalism. Against this background, a unique contrivance for the control of urban spaces called "town making" emerged at the level of Japanese local government entirely independent from the amendments to individual urban planning and building standards laws. According to Koizumi Hideki, an urban engineer, the essence of town making is "to create a relationship/framework among citizens and local communities that controls the market instead of the central government doing so"²

As shown in the paper presented by Chihiro Tamura and Toshio Taguchi, Akira Tamura talked about urban planning in easy-to-understand terms and attracted a great deal of interest in town making through his books. In past studies, Tamura has been referred to as just one of the respected intellectuals behind the Asukata-led Yokohama city government (1963-1978) and his actual work and how it impacted on local governments across Japan has not been reviewed.³ However recent studies, which have corresponded to the increasing popularity of town making in Japan, have begun to assess Tamura as a pioneer who understood city planning in the context of local governance issues.⁴

I do not believe Tamura's town making was intended as a theory for controlling built environments. Tamura was not originally a theorist of urban planning but instead built his own town making theory through responding to the needs and circumstances of Yokohama city. As urban engineer Shunichi Watanabe has aptly said, those who try to define "town making" are "basically practitioners—not theorists—who abstract their unique experience to their definition" and "their definition is inductive and lacks deductive discussion based on theory or discipline".⁵ Nevertheless, Akira Tamura's town making theory opened the subject of town making to a wider range of people, which in turn led to a plurality of understandings, making it difficult to precisely define the impact of town making on Japanese urban planning.

Therefore, the question to be asked is, given his fluid and responsive approach, (1) what are the features of Akira Tamura's town making that have been passed on and (2) how can they be applied by future town planners? In this paper, I focus on the mutual exchanges between Tamura and members of the study group on town making in Yokohama as a case study to solve these questions.

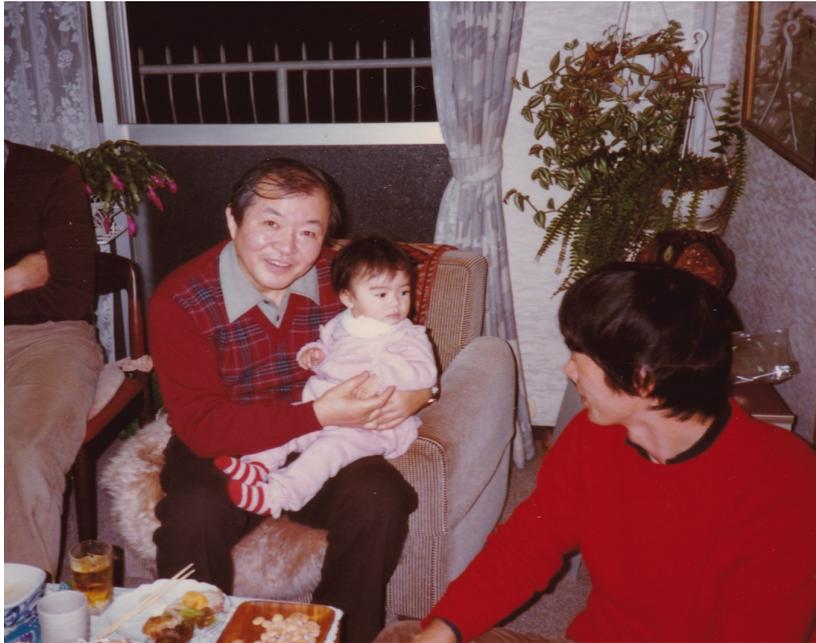


Figure 1: Portrait of Akira Tamura

Approach and Data

To conduct this study, I referred to documents in the “Akira Tamura archives” of Yokohama city’s historical library. The data in the archives are preserved in order to remember Tamura’s work. His family offered those documents to the city historical library. Prior to using those documents, I obtained their permission.

I also conducted semi-structured interviews of 4 former Yokohama public officials. All survey respondents were male and started their careers during the Asukata-led city government period (1963-78). The main questions asked respondents to (1) describe their relationship with Tamura, (2) their points of view regarding Tamura’s “town making”. I adapted the actual questions to correspond with the job descriptions and length of service as appropriate. These surveys were conducted on the understanding that their names would be anonymised, in order to elicit frankness and honesty in their responses.

Fluctuation in Tamura’s town making—The practice in Yokohama

Akira Tamura once said:

Urban design became a hot topic in architectural journalism in the early 1960s. However, it ignored the social relationships which are comprised of many stakeholders. In the late 1960s, there were few people who disputed the importance of urban design. However, one objective I had in entering Yokohama city was to make urban design possible in practice.⁶

The city of Yokohama in the late of 1960s existed in an era when urban policies addressing issues related to post-war reconstruction and high economic growth were a top priority of the Asukata-led Yokohama city government. The city government framed their city policy as “Making a city in which everyone would want to live” and had to find new ways to combat the problems caused by drastic industrialisation and urbanisation. Under these circumstances, Yokohama’s Six Spine Projects were launched, mainly by the Planning and Coordination Bureau (“PCAB”) led by Akira Tamura, as an advisor to Asukata. A key advantage of the PCAB was that it made the urban development required for the Six Spine Projects possible by coordinating each of the departments of the city office prescribed in the centralised city planning related laws and regulations. The motif underlying the approach had already been described as a lack of “comprehensiveness” in urban planning in the 1960s. For example, Tange Kenzo had the following criticism:

I do not find any vision for the future in the legal system for urban planning in Japan. It is quite out-of-date. Furthermore, the laws related to urban planning have lost comprehensiveness, lost sight of the system,



reflecting the sectionalism of the government agencies. Hence, urban planning has lost its substance and become just an ideological consolation.⁷

Various discussions being brought into the public domain through vehicles such as the “urban design movement” made the issue of how to ensure urban planning was a more comprehensive process into a lively subject in architectural journalism. Tamura was also actively involved in these discussions. In 1965, Tamura criticised Japanese architects who could only draw “pictures” of urban design:

The problem of urban design has been taken up keenly among architects. They have argued that it is important for architects to commit to further urban planning. But in the majority of the projects, they have only been able to draw pictures of ideal urban planning⁸

Interestingly, in the mid-1960s, Tamura was focused mainly on the physical environment of the city: His views regarding the “coordination” of the actors which were positioned at the centre of the discussion of the town planning had not yet solidified. Tamura said:

Who can solve the urban issues? Politicians, economists, sociologists, lawyers, bureaucrats are given their respective roles and it is necessary that they develop solutions to it. However ultimately, the city is an object constructed by iron and concrete. Thus an important role should be given to the new age urban planner — the general planner.⁹

It seems clear that Tamura envisioned not just that multiple stakeholders would participate in solving urban problems, but also that he foresaw urban planners having more comprehensive skillsets. In short, it appears that Tamura believed in the determinism of physical structures. This is in contrast with his views after he committed to Yokohama. Tamura later described his views in the pamphlet of the PCAB as follows:

Urban planning, as with architecture, deals with space and environment, and plans are shown in the form of pictures and figures. But urban planning is used to change the space and urban environment, and never to realise the picture itself. And if it is merely realised, it is likely that it will have caused problems in the process. Urban planning is not necessarily just about building objects.¹⁰

As can be seen concisely here, Tamura emphasised the importance of flexibility, not just building. In other words, what was important for Tamura was not to improve the law and revise the planning system itself, but to carry out urban planning fluidly. For that purpose, it was necessary to “create relationships and frameworks among stakeholders”. It goes without saying that such changes were made in his practice in relation to Yokohama city. That is, the objective of creating of relationships and frameworks among stakeholders is not only to improve the physical environment of the city but also to capture the city from a comprehensive point of view, and to facilitate collaboration between stakeholders for better development. He also emphasised that the involvement of the local administration is beneficial. My interviews asked the question of how far his flexible theory could be utilised, but for the accommodation by the Asukata-led city government. Naoyuki Kuniyoshi, belonging to the PCAB’s design team, said:

In the 70’s, I felt that the members of the design team of the PCAB didn’t recognise ourselves as members of a government office but as challengers for new age city planning. Thus we didn’t have a long-term vision. I thought it was our job to challenge the city office of Yokohama as much as possible in terms of urban design... While there are some people who criticise Tamura, there are also a lot of people who stand for his work as well. It was an era when various people were professionally maturing under him... But after mayor Asukata left Yokohama, we had no choice but to work more conservatively as an organisation within the agency. So we had to make another strategy for that period. If we had continued to act in the same way as we had before, we would only have been ignored.¹¹

The Asukata-led city government provided a place for experimental urban development. As a result of the end of Asukata-led city government, the establishment of a formal organisation in the city government (the PCAB) also meant a loss of flexibility and pragmatism. However, it is also true that there were staff members who showed enthusiasm and support for cultivating a new approach to urban development that included the practical implementation of a flexible organisation that characterised the approach of the Asukata-led city government and Tamura’s urban design. What did those people learn and inherit from Tamura? I will address this next.

Inheritance of Tamura’s point of view—From the perspective of activities of “Machi-Ken”

One interviewee, who served Yokohama city before Akira Tamura left Yokohama city, had believed that there was no place for Japanese municipalities to practice urban planning as he thought it ought to be practised, and hence he was impressed by Tamura’s urban design, and decided to become involved himself in the planning of Yokohama city.



Originally, I did not think that there was anyone doing such work in Japan, well, I wondered what was good in Japanese urban design. I was looking in Japan for the innovation in local governance seen in the UK at the time... so I was so excited when I saw that Tamura was actually doing something new. It was awesome. It was on that basis that I decided to enter the Yokohama city government too.¹²

In his case, he was originally interested in urban design, and he made the decision to join the Yokohama city government because he saw that such innovative practices could be done even in Japanese municipalities. There were also other staff members who were impressed by Tamura's thought processes and design practice in the development of Yokohama city after entering the city government. Another interviewee, who is a convenor of the "town making research society" (known as "Machi-Ken", and hereinafter referred to by this name), described Tamura's personality as follows.

Mr. Tamura embodied a kind of civic value which I don't myself possess. That is, he was cognisant of how to manage the common interests of various stakeholders, not just of individual or specific interests.¹³

By this, we can see that the key elements of Tamura's town planning were the skilled management of diverse actors, and the refusal to be bound by the determinism of physical structures. Tamura retired in Yokohama in 1982, but in 1980 he received a request from a young member and became an advisor to Machi-Ken. It was an informal study group and a place of interaction between workers, companies, and researchers. Tamura's views towards the activities of Machi-Ken were stated ten years after its founding, when recalled as follows.

"Machi-Ken"... It neither wanted to have expertise nor project anything outside, it had no contracts or officials. It was merely a voluntary study group for inner members of city governments. Also, all the members were very young and comprised a modest study group. To me, as I was retiring, my concern was not only for people who were already in management positions, but also for those who were furthering their expertise in urban development.¹⁴

Tamura seems to have participated quite enthusiastically in the group's activities. Another interviewee, who was a former Yokohama municipal official and a member of the research group, reflected as follows.

Mr. Tamura attended more than 90% of the activities of "Machi-Ken". Enthusiastic, wasn't he? Although he sometimes couldn't attend as he needed to go abroad for business trips, he mostly came and listened to the presentations by young group members, and gave advice to them.¹⁵

Another organiser of the research group, said:

There were plenty of city government departments facing problems, so we contacted the department and requested that the chief or section chief make a presentation about them to the study group. Presentations took about an hour and then discussion lasted about an hour... afterwards we went for a drink. Of course Mr. Tamura came with us. He summarised the presentation of the day and gave advice within 10 to 15 minutes. He spoke very quickly. Come to think of it, attending that study group was my greatest source of knowledge about city planning during my lifetime.¹⁶

To summarise the characteristics of Machi-Ken above, (1) it was a place for young city government workers to share their respective problems, (2) Tamura left it to its autonomous operation by its members, and served as a consolidator, (3) the study group itself functioned as a mediator between city government employees and outsiders. An official of the Building Bureau who was participating in Machi-Ken, described the significance of the study group as follows.

Our common understanding was that every aspect of urban development and town planning had to be approached from a broad perspective. It was important for us to expand our network through the study group, and to improve our individual skills for work... We wanted to secure new participants to expand the network. Therefore, we decided to invite new recruits as well as trying not to use technical terms to make it easy for newcomers to understand our approach to urban development. It was a way to build awareness among those interested in town planning. Indeed, it was a place to cooperate and coordinate.¹⁷

The main axis of Machi-Ken was to acquire broad knowledge on town making. At the same time, however it was a place to expand the network for young city government workers who did not have substantial authority in the city government apparatus. Through the study group, they acquired know-how to implement their own flexible planning style. Of course, there were deviations in terms of how much incentive the participants had to attend, and the research group itself did not have concrete abilities. It depended entirely on the individual skills and consciousness of its members.



Year	Main areas of study	Year	Main areas of study
1980	Overview of town making Assessing the region of Yokohama Participation in the Japan Design convention How to develop the seafront area holistically Recycling industrial waste	1985	about the impact of information technology Considering stakeholders when planning
1981	General planning in Yokohama Expressways in Yokohama Industrial structure Museums and cultural administration What is town making? Green master plan	1986	Department stores and development Town making and restaurants Urban designs now
1982	Participation in The Regional Congress of Local Authorities for Development of Human Settlements in Asia and the Pacific The institution of land use A new transportation system Spatial extent and authenticity Focus on the MM21 area	1987	Is it possible to attract overseas university students? Waterfront observation in Tokyo bay Olympic Games in Seoul All about the Yokohama Exposition
1983	Economic growth of Yokohama Aging population problems Internationalisation and local government Yokohama as a model city	1988	A concept—Yokohama as an art centre Waterfront observation in Yokohama Yokohama Flash (art event) Waterfront development Night life in Yokohama
1984	MM21 and the ship “Nihon-Marū” The Yokohama port and economy One region, one product campaign	1989	Challenges of internationalisation Town making from the perspective of a developer Partnership between Yokohama and overseas cities Town making in the Kanazawa district Soundscapes and town making Town making in Hong Kong
1985	Local government in Asia Railways, roads and airports	1990	Housing, environment and the community Machi-Ken 10 year anniversary forum

Figure 2: The activities of Machi-Ken (1980-90).

However, Tamura promoted the group as an informal place as a place to convey the essence of town making, and kept insisting on the importance of flexibility in the interests of stakeholders. This informal place of discussion itself had great significance. Tamura’s town making theory was reinforced and developed through these discussions, and they have formed the basis for practices followed by younger generations. Whilst it is not a very difficult task to set up projects itself, the question is always who would benefit from the project being considered? Tamura’s approach urges attention to seeking consensus. Therefore, Tamura insisted on the necessity of flexibility at all times. Another of the members of Machi-Ken looks back on the practice of Tamura as follows.



Previously, I thought of urban design as altering the physical environment such as by making plazas or creating blueprints for malls. But, well, afterwards, I got to know how much Tamura had discussed with people in the field and how much he had struggled in the city government office. And then finally I came to understand, “Oh this is what urban design actually is.”¹⁸

The essence of Tamura’s town making which developed from the determinism of physical structures to encouraging the participation of and responding to stakeholders has undoubtedly been transmitted to younger generations. At the same time, however, the problems of Yokohama city could no longer be dealt with in the same manner as during the era of the Six Spine Projects in the Asukata-led city government. In Japan, the local government’s planning documents reflect a change in mood that caused planning staff to “rush into planning and make grand promises that are not possible to deliver upon. This has been pointed out as a problem facing Japanese municipalities. This would not be consistent with Tamura’s intention for town making. With reference to Tamura’s practice, the people who gathered at Machi-Ken thought about their town making and would consider pragmatically how ingenious ideas could be possible in the face of real constraints. Rather than adhering strictly to urban planning instructions given by the government, it was important for them to think flexibly with reference to Tamura’s town making.

From the activities of Machi-Ken, a new type of administrative staff who “do not just carry out policy as a matter of budget execution and desk work, but are adept in policy and legal affairs, and actively go outside the government office to discuss matters flexibly with citizens and business operators”¹⁹ has also arisen. One of the administrative staff states as follows.

I went to meet everyone who was involved in the redevelopment project one by one, listening to various stories and talking about how to transfer that person’s rights altogether. Sometimes drink together. By doing so, we can have a heart-to-heart talk about development.²⁰

However, the current approach to municipal town planning does not necessarily have an appropriate distance sense with citizens. He says as follows.

If a single mistake occurs, then the government becomes extremely concerned that it will spread to the project as a whole. So when you do town making, the distance between government and stakeholders is too far. If you want to improve problems affecting them, then you must enter their world and talk more.²¹

In Japan, when the development of an area is carried out, residents do not necessarily establish the goals and rules for collaboration. Therefore, it is necessary to listen to the interests of actors such as local residents, companies and government, and to coordinate collaborative goals and rules for the various actors. There is now a demand for local government that can act within such agreed requirements and can make remarks in a “way sensitive to residents’ concerns”²² as pointed out by urban sociologist Naoki Yoshihara. Responsiveness to residents’ needs cannot be established only by regulation by individual laws and regulations and municipalities’ planning in advance. Municipalities are formal organisations, and being overly flexible may lead to disorder. But working to create a city certainly requires a great deal of fluidity. Therefore, it is important to secure as much flexibility as possible in the institutional design. Also in the future, it is important to actively consider how to conduct town making by consensus.



Figure 3: Machi-Ken members on a study trip to Taiwan.

Conclusion

My conclusion from this study is that Tamura was able to create a signature approach that made town making universal and inclusive through losing his position at the Asukata-led city government (1963-78). His legacy was not to change the appearance of Yokohama city merely by modifying the built environment, but to think about how individuals should respond to dynamic and fluctuating urban changes. Hence, for those wishing to adopt and continue Tamura's vision, the important question is not what Tamura did, but what Tamura would do.

In other words, they should approach problems in town making by internalising Tamura's approach to town making. Consultation with stakeholders and the exchange of views among those who take part in town making is indispensable for that purpose. Too often successful cases of urban planning are praised and standardised. However, from the perspective of Tamura's town making, it is not necessarily desirable to adopt a standardised approach to certain problems. Rather, it is essential to control urban space by creating a relationship/framework among citizens and distinct communities that takes a flexible, "no-fixed-form" approach of the kind adopted by Tamura.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor(s)

Atsuhiko AOKI graduated from the Faculty of Letters, the University of Tokyo (Bachelor of Arts) and completed a Masters of Sociology at the University of Tokyo Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology. Atsuhiko continues to major in urban sociology and is conducting research focusing on the historical relationship between urban growth strategies and municipalities as a factor determining the nature of urban restructuring. Currently, Atsuhiko is interested in continuity and discontinuity in the Yokohama city policy of the Asukata-led city government (1963-78), which has underscored Yokohama's creative city strategy in recent years.

Endnotes

¹ Watanabe, Shunichi. *Concept and function of urban planning* (Tokyo: The University of Tokyo press, 2001), 139.

² Koizumi, Hideki. *From urban planning law to town making law: Problems of utilization, planning and regulation of land use in the 1968 edition of urban planning law and town making ordinance* (Tokyo: The University of Tokyo Press, 2001), 236.

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⁷ Tange, Kenzo. *The point of view toward the laws related to urban planning* (Tokyo: The Tokyo Institute for Municipal Research, 1960), 91-92.

⁸ Tamura, Akira. *City problems and architects*. *International architecture* 32. (Tokyo: Art publishing, 1965), 7.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ PCAB pamphlet, undated but believed to have been first issued in 1972.

¹¹ Interview book issued by the Yokohama city university (pp 128-9). The book consists of 20 interviews to those who engaged in city planning in Yokohama. The title: *Works to design cities; 20 interviews of those who engaged in town making in Yokohama and urban design* (supervised by Suzuki, Nobuharu)

¹² The interview on 28, June, 2017.

¹³ The interview on 22, August 2017.

¹⁴ The preface of Machi-Ken 10 years anniversary book

¹⁵ The interview on 24 August 2017.

¹⁶ The interview on 22 August 2017

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ The interview on 24 August 2017

¹⁹ Matsumoto, Yasushi. *Urban regeneration and creative city: focusing on the old city center of Yokohama city* (Tokyo: Kuon, 2014), 112.

²⁰ The interview on 24 August 2017.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Yoshiwara, Naoki. *Logic and Ethics of Town making* (Tokyo: Toshindo, 2009), 167.