

Traditional and Contemporary Houses in Japan:

Anatomy of the physical features and the relevant cultural variables

1. The influences of natural environment and culture on the traditional house

1-1. Characteristics of natural environment in Japan

- a. Geography (Topography):
 - mountains/ forest/ limited plain = highly populated
 - timber-framed construction (vs. masonry)
- b. Climate: the monsoon
 - Four distinct seasons:
 - spring/ summer/ autumn/ winter +rainy/typhoon seasons
 - annual events (Hanami, Tsukimi)
 - agriculture/ rice → sensitive to season/ time
 - Japanese house is designed for the warm and humid season
 - Attitude toward nature/ seeking communion between human and nature
 - preference of natural materials, natural texture and color
 - no clear-cut boundary between inside and outside of the house
- c. Natural disasters:
 - (The Japanese saying about the most fearful things:
earthquake, thunder, fire, and father)
 - Earthquake → building construction system (light timber frame, joint)
(Volcanic activity)
 - Typhoon → tile roof (disadvantage to the earthquake)
 - Attitude toward nature
 - Shinto (animism)
 - Jichin-sai: Ground-breaking ceremony; the Shinto ceremony of
purifying a site
 - geomancy (Fenshui: a folk belief in the direction of fortune/ misfortune)

1-2. Socio-cultural and psychological aspects

- Father's role in the family (Large family for agriculture)
- lack of individual privacy → open plan
- Sensation of touch → tactile experience of texture
- choice of building materials: wood, paper, clay, bamboo, TATAMI
- Human body size
- building module (KEN system)
- Preference of asymmetric configuration and sequential experience
- approach, circuit style garden

1-3. Anatomy of the physical features in the Japanese house and the relevant cultural variables

- a. Elemental features:
 - Tatami-mats -- multi-sensory experience / texture sensation
 - Tokonoma (ornamental alcove) -- hierarchical order of seating
 - Furniture -- simplicity, multiple use of the room, manner of sitting
 - Material (Natural) -- attitude toward nature
 - Textural experience
- b. Spatial features:
 - Scale – human body size, custom of sitting on the floor
 - Openness – concept of privacy/ family
 - Raised floor -- inside/ outside boundary
 - Flexibility (sliding screen) -- multiple use of the room
- c. Features of rooms:
 - Entrance hall – custom of removing shoes
 - Bathroom – manner of taking bath
 - Public bath
 - Kitchen – wife's status in the family
- d. Garden
 - Transitional spaces between interior and garden
 - sequential experience

2. The present state of housing in Japan

2-1. Living in a city

2-2. Suburbia?

2-3. A house in Yokohama

Natural Environment

Geography

mountains, forest, limited plain

Climate

hot and humid summer

Natural disasters

earth quake, typhoon, volcanic



House form



- △ Natural materials
- X Absence of furniture
- △ Flexibility
- △ Openness
- △ Scale
- X Kitchen
- △ Bathroom

Culture

Activity patterns

multiple use of rooms

△

Custom

manner of sitting

△

Life-style

manner of taking bath

○

removing shoes

○

Idea/ Norm

individual privacy

X

Worldview

wife's status

X

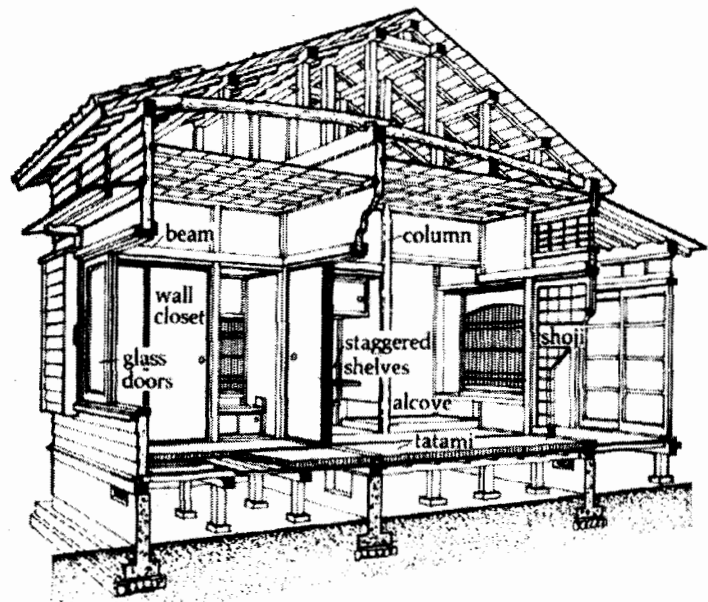
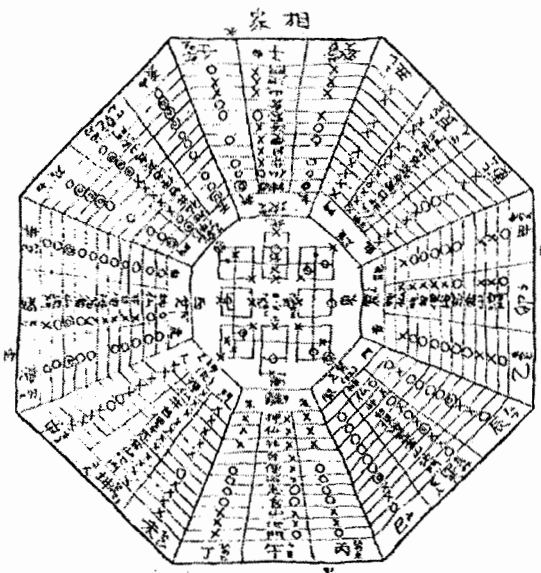
Belief

attitude toward nature

△

geomancy (Fenshui)

△



Cross section.

