

THE LIVING STYLE INVESTIGATION: A UNIQUE JAPANESE HOUSING STUDY METHOD

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There are many housing researchers and some institutions that actively participate in housing studies in Japan. The most traditional area of housing studies is architecture. The Architectural Institute of Japan (AIJ) was established in 1947, although it dates back to 1886. As of January 1, 1998, there were approximately 39,000 members of AIJ. The last general conference, in September 1997, had about 1,400 reports related to housing issues.

The Japan Society of Home Economics (JSHE) will reach its 50th Anniversary in May, 1998. The number of members whose subject area is housing is 269 out of a total of 4,430 (as of the end of 1997).

Interdisciplinary institutions include the Japan Housing Council (JHC, established in 1982) and the Institute of Urban Housing (IUH, established in 1992). Both these institutions have targeted improvement of urban housing, with quite different approaches. JHC is an organization of academics, citizens, and professionals, while IUH focuses on the partnership with central and local governments, private firms, and universities. Although housing field or research methods vary, the most characteristic method is the living style investigation.

The living style investigation is when a visitor/researcher describes the plan of a house, the arrangement of the rooms, furniture and all therein, then suggests a living style: what to do where, by whom, how to sleep, to eat, etc.

This is an anthropological approach. But the living style investigation makes and plans improvements in a house or in a room, while the ethnologist's method is to examine the entire culture. The living style investigation can not only discover housing problems, but can also improve housing and styles of living.

The living style investigation was introduced by Uzo Nishiyama (1911-1994), an honorary professor at Kyoto University, in a series of investigations about working and lower class urban homes during the 1940s. Since traditional Japanese rooms, were decorated with Tatami mats and very little furniture, these rooms could be easily turned to some other purpose. When the Architectural Institution (formerly AIJ) and the Ministry of Welfare formed the National Housing Scheme standard in the 1930s and 1940s, they adopted an idea which would utilize only one Tatami room as a sleeping room, using Futons (Japanese bedding). Opposing this idea, Nishiyama implemented a number of living style investigations, and then recommended that the dining space and sleeping space should be separate even in a small house.

The law of separation of dining room and sleeping rooms was applied to public housing after the Second World War.

In 1966, Japan Public Housing Corporation (JPHC), one of the public housing providers (presently the Housing and Urban Development Corporation), introduced <Living type> units (Living room with one or more Tatami rooms and a dining room), as

a result of many implementations using the living style investigation. After that, the method was applied not only in public housing planning, but also in private housing planning market research.

The living style investigation is very popular in housing studies today. Recently, in the field of elderly housing, the method has been applied as a practical measure to help adapt their houses/ rooms to their living behavior. Public health nurses, helpers, and visitors draw furniture, equipment, and living arrangements of family members, including the elderly person, on a house plan map. Then visitors, officers, and other concerned professionals (architects, doctors, etc.) examine potential problems in the house, living style improvements.

The significance of this method, the traditional method now used in housing studies in Japan, is the following:

- 1) It is possible to discover conflicts between people's behavior/ living styles and spatial conditions. We can visualize the confusion of the functions of a Tatami room, or the confusion caused by a mixture of Japanese and Western styles. For example, housing planning is usually based on [BR+L+D (a main bedroom for husband and wife and children's bedrooms + living room + dining room with a kitchen)]. This is the typical Western living style, but sometimes, or in some cases the husband and wife sleep separately, and a living room is not used in daily life.
- 2) It is possible to improve the house/room from the details of the whole housing plan and surrounding areas, and this improves the living style. Using the living style investigation, conflicts become visually clear, and people who are concerned with the improvement of a house/room or living style are able to understanding and deal with them more effectively.

The method of the living style investigation was born from the uniquely Japanese living style, and has developed in that culture. This method would be effective in all Asian countries, where Western living styles have permeated traditional living styles. Western countries might also find this method useful.