This paper analyzes the unique features of Kamikitazawa, a residential town in the suburbs of Tokyo. It was the first investment by a Taiwanese developer after the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923 and one of the leading models of suburban residential township and life style in Japan. The town almost entirely maintains the original landscape, which survived World War II and post-war urbanization in Tokyo. It has unique architectural features, such as: 1) a symmetrical diagonal street layout, 2) adoption of a perspective drawing method which makes the town appear larger than it actually is, and 3) preservation of an original Somei-Yoshino cherry line. It is only recently that people in the town recognized the importance of the landscape and the cherry tree line, and started a number of preservation movements. Based on those observations, Kamikitazawa can be characterized as “a suburban residential legacy” from a historical, architectural and landscape point of view.

KEY WORDS: Kimura Taiji, diagonal road, perspective drawing, cherry tree, Garden City, suburban residential

1. Introduction

Kamikitazawa in Setagaya City of Tokyo is a town located about 8.7 km in the west of the Shinjuku station of the Keio Railway (Figure-1). It was a Taiwanese private company’s first investment project in Tokyo, and it still maintains the original design almost as it was when it opened in 1924. It has a picturesque landscape featuring a line of cherry trees along the main street and a symmetrical layout with streets stemming diagonally out from the main street (Figure-2).

Kamikitazawa is one of the earliest residential towns following the concept of “Garden City” developed in the suburbs of Tokyo in the 1920s, but little attention has been paid to it from an urban planning perspective. Past scholarship such as Katagi, Fujiya and Kadono (2000) and Sorensen (2002) have overlooked the case study of the Kamikitazawa development. Local historical records of Tokyo, Setagaya City and Kamikitazawa Town scarcely refer to the development of the town. The only past scholarship that explored the history of Kamikitazawa from an urban planning perspective was by Chen (2003). Chen analyzes the role of a private development company - Taiwan Tochitatemono Company - in urban planning and housing supply in Taiwan, based on an analysis of its projects, including those in Keelung, Taipei, Kamikitazawa.

This paper will focus on the features of Kamikitazawa from the perspective of suburban residential history in Japan, its architectural uniqueness and its landscape.

I will introduce the history of Kamikitazawa, including the relationship with Taiwan, in the first section, analyze the architectural features of the town in the second section and highlight the preservation movements that have emerged in the town in the third section.

2. History of Kamikitazawa

2-1 Projects carried out by Taiwan Tochitatemono Company

Kamikitazawa was developed by a company called Daiichi Tochitatemono (The First
Land and Building Company, hereafter “DTC”) immediately after the Great Kanto Earthquake (hereafter “the Earthquake”), which had destroyed much of the metropolitan areas of Tokyo in 1923. This company was established as a subsidiary of Taiwan Tochitatemono Company (Taiwan Land and Building Company, hereafter “TTC”). TTC was the first major private developer in Taiwan and completed developments in cities such as Keelung, Taipei, Kaosiung and Chiayi.3)

“Taishomachi” was a residential town originally designed for Japanese people in Taipei.1) The total land area of the town was 280,500 m² (Tsubo 85,000).5) TTC decided to build the town after a powerful typhoon inflicted severe damage on the city of Taipei in 1911 (Figure-2). This was the first suburban residential town in Taiwan reflecting the “Garden City” concept advocated by Ebenezer Howard in that the residential town was separated from business and commercial centers. It was also the first residential town in Taiwan featuring Japanese style detached houses.

Kimura Taiji(2), President of TTC, having learned about the Earthquake on a business tour in Japan, decided to build a new residential town in the suburbs of Tokyo. He thought that he could contribute to the reconstruction of metropolitan Tokyo based on his experience in building “Taishomachi” after typhoon damage to Taipei.7)

2-2 Kamikitazawa in the Context of Suburban Residential Development in Tokyo

With industrialization and urbanization, major cities in industrialized countries came to suffer from urban problems in the late 19th century. Howard started to advocate the “Garden City” concept in 1898 to restore the humanity of people in big cities, by creating an ideal residential town in the suburbs with a good natural environment distant from business and commercial areas. In Japan, some volunteer bureaucrats in the Ministry of Interior also echoed this idea and published a report on “Den-en Toshi” (garden city) in 1907.8)

The history of suburban residential towns in Japan is not very old. Private railway companies took the strategy of connecting the center of the cities to suburban towns by railway and selling pre-acquired land along the railways for residences. This business model started in the suburbs of Osaka City. Kobayashi Ichizo developed a residential town called “Ikeda-Muromachi” in 1910 and “Sakurai” in 1911 along the Hankyu Railway. Those towns marked the beginning of suburban residential towns in Japan, although resort towns such as Karuizawa and Kugenuma had been developed in the 1880s to 1890s.9)

In Tokyo, Shinmachi (currently the Fukazawa 7th and 8th districts and Sakura-Shinmachi in Setagaya City in Tokyo, Figure-1) was the first residential town in the suburbs of central Tokyo, developed by the Tokyo Trust Company in 1914. It was originally developed as a resort area and was called “Karuizawa in Tokyo.”10)

Unprecedented economic growth, and the increasing number of the middle class white-collar workers during and after the World War I, stimulated the demand for better housing supply in Tokyo. The expanding network of suburban railways in Tokyo served such needs. The Keio Railway was established in 1915, the Meguro-Kamata Railway in 1922 and the Odakyu Railway in 1927.

Shibusawa Eiichi and Nakano Buei, the Chairman of the Tokyo Metropolitan City Assembly and the President of Tokyo Chamber of Commerce, tried to materialize the vision of
constructing an ideal residential town in the suburbs of Tokyo and established the “Den-en Toshi Company” in 1918. Both of the business leaders promoted the development of such residential towns in Japan, because they shared the idea that it was necessary to detach business zones and residential zones based on their observation of cities in the United States. Although the Den-en Toshi Company faced difficulty in raising funds in the recession after the end of World War I, the company started to sell houses in the Senzoku area in 1922 and in the Tamagawadai area in 1923. (10) Hakone Tochi-Tatemono Company, which had developed Karuizawa, also developed Mejiro Bunka Mura (Cultural Village in Mejiro) in 1922.

It was the Earthquake that stimulated the rapid expansion of suburban residential towns in Tokyo. The Earthquake proved that the suburban towns were safer than central city areas. Jiji Press described such a situation as follows: “Tokyo has been expanding outward like a drop of oil spreading on the surface of water, after the watershed of the Earthquake.” (12)

Separating residential districts from overcrowded metropolitan areas and building suburban residential towns was a major agenda in international city planning discussions in the 1920s. (3) This idea attracted Japanese policy makers who were in charge of the reconstruction of Tokyo after the Earthquake.

Kamikitazawa was among the earliest towns built and sold after the Earthquake in Tokyo and the first in Setagaya City. DTC was founded in May, 1924 and started to sell residential property in October, 1924. The development of Seijo-Gakuen commenced in 1924 and people began moving to the area in 1927. Hakone Tochi-Tatemono Company started to sell residential land in developments that each aimed to attract a university: Oizumi Gakuen-Toshi in 1924, Kodaira Gakuen-Toshi and Kokubunji Digaku-Toshi in 1925, and Kunitachi in 1926. (13)

Prompted by the Earthquake, a number of land readjustment projects were implemented to provide houses in the suburbs in accordance with the Urban Planning Law stipulated in 1919. As a result, suburban agricultural areas in Tokyo were changed into residential areas.

“History of Tamagawa” offers this description of such an expansion of suburban residential areas in Setagaya City: “At that time, a western design modern house was called ‘Cultural House’ and a circuit of such houses was called ‘Cultural Village.’ Den-en Chofu, Seijo, Jiyugaoka and Kamikitazawa were such examples.” (14)

Those private housing projects, including Kamikitazawa, played a leading role for the following suburban residential town developments in Tokyo, and presented a new suburban lifestyle.

2-3 Development of the Township of Kamikitazawa

Kimura Taiji established DTC in April, 1924 “with a plan to expand the business of residential district development and house building business based on our experience we have nurtured for a long time in Taiwan on a financially sound basis.” (15)

When Kimura proposed his plan to invest in Japan, he faced a strong opposition from stockholders in Taiwan, who insisted that it was not appropriate to develop a town in Tokyo with the money earned in Taiwan. (10) But Kimura persuaded these stockholders by saying that “I will never bring a loss to TTC. Please watch the project quietly for the sake of Japan.” TTC then decided to loan 1.5 million yen to DTC. (17)

The project proceeded surprisingly speedily. DTC started to sell the land within only six months after the establishment of the company. The acquisition of land was smooth with the
help of Suzuki Muneyuki, a resident in this village. Electric power and water were provided earlier than those in the surrounding areas. A history of the town postulates that this was because Motoyama Bumpei, the governor of Taichung Province from 1924 to 1926, and senior military officers were associated to the development of the town.18)

This indicates that Kimura effectively took advantage of the personal network that he had established in Taiwan. Moreover, Kimura must have secured support from the city of Tokyo through Goto Shinpei, who was the Minister of Interior and the Minister for the Imperial Capital Reconstruction Board just after the Earthquake. Goto had been the Director General of Interior Affairs of the Japanese Governor’s Office in Taiwan from 1898 to 1906 and the Mayor of Tokyo City from 1920 to 1924.

It should be noted that the reconstruction of the City of Tokyo after the Earthquake was planned by Goto, who had extensive experience in urban development in Taiwan and tried to introduce this experience in Tokyo.19) In fact, it is confirmed that Kimura approached Goto just after the Earthquake.20) Goto may have taken into consideration Kimura’s opinions on how to readjust the lands in Tokyo after the Earthquake.

It is also highly likely that Suzuki Sanai, the mayor of Matsuzawa village where Kamikitazawa is located as well as a large land owner in this area, supported this project strongly.21) It is possible that the city of Tokyo gave instructions to the Matsuzawa Village to facilitate the project.

The total land area of Kamikitazawa was 97,792 m² (29,633.96 Tsubo). It was divided into 124 sites. The road ratio of the site is 13.6%. The average land area for an individual house was 640.2 m² (194 Tsubo). From October 16 to December 15, 1924, 85 units of land were sold. The average price of the land was 30.46 yen/3.3m².22)

Kamikitazawa was designed for the middle class people who were commuting to offices in the center Tokyo by railway or bus. It was a new urban life style at that time, separating the place for work and home. (4)

The advertisements for Kamikitazawa posted in October and November, 1924 proclaimed the following advantages of the new town.23)

Best town in the suburbs:
- Convenient Transportation: having a bus stop at Koshu-Kaido (national road) and 20 minutes from Keio Shinjuku Station by railway
- Beautiful Environment: surrounded by forests, clear air and clean water
- Neat District: wide roads running throughout the town
- Reasonably Priced: from 22 yen per 3.3m²
- Installment Payments: payments allowed every month for five years
- Buyback Provision: buyback at the original price after one year
- Size of Sites: from 330 m² to 3300 m²

Other advertisements emphasized that Kamikitazawa was an ideal garden town with wide roads and a sewage system, surrounded by rural landscape and convenient for commuting, even though it was neither resort area nor retirement community.

Since it was not yet common for office workers to live in the suburbs or near farmland, DTC emphasized the attractiveness of such infrastructure as wide roads, an open sewage system to handle rainwater and sewage from houses and hedges (instead of traditional wood fences), as well as financial incentives.24)
3. Architectural Features of Kamikitazawa

3-1 Wide Main Street with Symmetrical Diagonal Streets

Kamikitazawa has four sets of symmetrical diagonal streets stemming from the wide main street in the shape of the rib bones. DTC intentionally avoided laying out the streets in a grid pattern, reflecting their experiences in Taiwan. This was Kimura’s invention. He explained the reason that he avoided the grid design as follows: 25)

All of the towns I had developed in Taiwan had streets with a grid design. I did not use any wide diagonal streets at all in the town. I was keenly aware that such a street design had a problem. Therefore, I stared at the map of [Kami]Kitazawa on my desk everyday for a week, thinking about what I could do. Then, a friend of mine happened to visit me and advised me that I should draw a diagonal street from the edge to the end. I thought that it was very a good idea and felt ashamed for not thinking of such a simple idea. This is how Kamikitazawa opened and it prospers together with Den-en Chofu now [1960].

This rib-bone-shape symmetrical street design is rarely found in other towns. This idea reflects Kimura’s rich experience in urban planning in Taiwan. Unfortunately, he did not explain in depth the problems he perceived with the grid shape. This is a subject that should be further studied, but I would like to point out four advantages of the rib-bone-shape street layout in this paper.

1) First, the diagonal streets shorten the distance from a house to the station compared to grid-pattern streets. If you compare model A (Figure-4) and model B (Figure-5), the average distance from a house to the station is about 20% shorter in the case of model A than model B.

(Note) Explanation of the model A (Figure-4) and B

Assumptions:
(1) Each house site is divided in 16 equal areas in the isosceles right angle shape in the model A, and in the square shape in the model B.
(2) Each house has a gate at the sign of intercept.
(3) The mark “S” represents the station.
(4) The length of the one edge of the largest square in each of the figure is 2 units.

Result:
The average distance in terms of unit from the gate of each house to the station is calculated as $(1+\sqrt{2})/4 (= 0.6)$ in the case of Model A, and $3/4 (=0.75)$ in the case of Model B.

2) Second, the main street and the station have a strong centripetal force in the town as a result of the diagonal layout of the streets. The flow of people from each of the house gathers into the wide main street directed to the station and the flow of the people from the station...
spreads through the main street to their houses in Figure-4.

(3) Third, when you look at the main street from one end of the stemming street, the perspective from the point  to the point  is blocked by the main street in Figure-4. On the other hand, the perspective from the point  to the point  tends to appear too long and stretched.

(4) The landscape from intersections between the main street and stemming streets appears more dimensional. Because of the symmetrical diagonal streets stemming from the main street at an angle of 45 degrees, the whole residential area site appears wider and more dimensional in Figure-6 than in Figure-7.

(Figure-6)  (Figure-7)

3-2 The Effects of Perspective Drawing

Viewing the main street in the town from the northeast end of the town toward the southwest, the street appears much longer and the whole town appears wider than it actually is. The tunnel created by flowers or leaves of cherry trees makes the street appear all the more distant and picturesque (Figure-8 and 1). This reflects the effect of perspective drawing, whether originally intended or not.

Model C (Figure-9) illustrates such a case. A regular street has a parallel road edge (a-m) and (c-q). By narrowing the street at points m and q, corresponding to Narrowing Point M in the Figure-9, the road edges changes to (n-f) and to (p-h). This change makes the distance (a-m-n-f) and (c-q-p-h) appear much longer than (a-b) and (c-d).

In the case of Kamikitazawa, the width of the road is narrowed at Narrowing Point M by 50% from 14.5 m to 7.7 m (Figure-8). The total length of the main street is 296 meters, with a wider portion of 86 m and a narrower portion of 209 m.

From a real estate business point of view, the economic efficiency of the area development will increase by using this kind of road plan, because the developer can secure...
more land for residential sites by narrowing the street and also draw the commercial function to in front of the station. Other suburban residential towns, like the town of Hiyoshi in Yokohama city, followed such a road plan.

Kamikitazawa is a leading case in Japan of introducing this design in a suburban residential town. It is also unique because of the effectiveness of perspective drawing is enhanced by the cherry tree tunnel along the street.

3-3 Preservation of the Original Cherry Tree Lined Street

Kamikitazawa preserves one of the oldest Somei-Yoshino cherry tree lines in a residential area in Japan.

The history of cherry trees used for road side trees in urban areas in Japan is not very old. There are a number of scenic spots throughout Japan with Somei-Yoshino cherry trees, but they are mostly located in the mountains, along a river, pond or moat, in the garden of a shrine or temple or in a park or school yard. The town of Ginza, which was the symbol of westernization of Japan, planted cherry trees along the main street in the 1870s. But those cherry trees were changed to willow trees over time. The city of Tokyo selected 40 kinds of trees for road side trees in 1907 and planted about 19,000 roadside trees from 1907 to 1919, but not a single cherry tree was planted.

This was because cherry trees had many disadvantages as roadside trees. They were vulnerable to air pollution and strong wind, and prone to catch diseases and attract bugs or caterpillars. Therefore, a gardening expert recommended in 1926 that cherry trees should not be planted along urban streets but along moats, rivers or banks.

Against this negative evaluation of cherry trees as roadside trees, however, Shinmachi started to plant Somei-Yoshino cherry trees as roadside trees. More than one thousand trees were planted each separated by a distance of four to five meters. The cherry tree lines became a famous scenic spot in Tokyo. In this manner, Shinmachi revived cherry trees as roadside trees.

Aizeki points out that “the move of population into the suburbs created cherry tree lines in newly developed areas. It was fortunate for cherry trees to find a new soil. Beginning with Sakura-Shinmachi in Setagaya City, cherry tree lines had started to spread in many suburban towns.”

The cherry trees in Shinmachi, however, were trimmed in turns before WWII, and many of them also died after the war. Moreover, National Road 246 divided the town of Shinmachi into Sakura-shinmachi and Fukazawa. In 1971, an elevated highway was constructed above the National Road 246. As a result, the landscape of Shinmachi with its beautiful cherry tree lines was destroyed.

Kimura Taiji also chose the Somei-Yoshino tree for the road side tree in Kamikitazawa next to Shinmachi. Unlike Shinmachi, however, it still preserves most of its landscape, the symmetrical design of the street layout and the original cherry trees line. The town fortunately survived the World War II and the rapid and unplanned urban development during the period of brisk post-war economic growth.

Hence, Kamikizawa is the oldest suburban residential town in Japan, and could be even
the oldest in the world, that preserves the original Somei-Yoshino cherry tree line as well as the landscape of the district.

It should also be noted that Kimura Taiji planted cherry trees not only in Japan but also in Taiwan. When he left Taiwan for Japan in 1940, he donated 10,000 cherry trees to the Mt. Datun in Yangmingshan. After the war, he developed Dake-Onsen in Fukushima prefecture in Japan and planted cherry trees along the main streets as he did in Kamikitazawa.


Kamikitazawa has a unique landscape and played a leading role in presenting a new urban lifestyle starting in the 1920s in Tokyo. Unlike Den-en Chofu, Seijo, Ashiya and other suburban residential towns in Japan, however, the history and features of Kamikitazawa remains relatively unknown.

The government of Setagaya City selected the cherry tree lines in Kamikizawa as one of “The 100 Scenic Landscapes in Setagaya” in 1984. Setagaya City also selected the cherry tree lines in front of Kamikitazawa station as a regional landscape asset in 2002.

It is only recently that movements started to recognize and preserve the distinctive features of the town. In 2004, “Sakuranamiki Kaigi” (Conference for the Cherry Tree Lines) was established by the people interested in preserving the cherry trees. It initiated various activities, including inviting tree doctors to inspect the health of the trees and raising public awareness regarding preservation of the trees, as the original cherry trees became older and weaker.\(^{32}\)

In 2009, originally 363 people (and a total of 415 people by May of 2010) in the district signed the “Declaration of the District to Preserve the Landscape.” It was registered by Setagaya City in accordance with its code. Many of the members who signed the Declaration also formed a group called “Kamikitazawa Midori Mou-hitotsu no Kai” (Association of One More Greenery by Each in Kamikitazawa) to preserve the landscape of the town featuring its symmetrical street layout and to promote greening.\(^{33}\)

Is this kind of historical legacy sustainable? Legal and administrative mechanisms to preserve national cultural heritage have been developed over time to deal with the conflict between such heritage and urban planning. The Landscape Law enacted in 2007, contributes to preserving various forms of landscape in Japan. Further methods of preserving such a living residential legacy should be explored from academic, administrative and legal perspectives.

5. Concluding Remarks

In this article, I studied the features of Kamikitazawa from the historical, architectural and landscape points of view. This analysis demonstrates that the town can be characterized as “a suburban residential legacy.”

Further research is required to understand better the influences of Taiwanese urban planning in Kamikitazawa and Japan. Various techniques used in this town, such as the symmetrical diagonal street layout and perspective drawing method, should be studied from the urban planning and the architectural perspectives. Methods of preserving such a living residential legacy should also be explored from academic, administrative and legal perspectives.

Notes:

(1) “Taishomachi” is located around the area of the Zhongshan North Road and the Linsen North Road in present day Taipei.
Kimura Taiji was a son of Kimura Kensai, who taught Japanese and Japanese culture to a missionary from Russia, St. Nicholas in 1860s. St. Nicholas is known for Holy Resurrection Cathedral, Nicholai-do in Tokyo. Kimura Taiji started his career as a news reporter for the Taiwan Nichi Nichi Shimbun through the introduction of Futabatei Shimei to Naito Konan, who was the writer in chief of the newspaper. Then he joined TTC in 1909. He became the president of TTC and DTC and was engaged in a number of urban development projects in Taiwan. He was also a board member or auditor of major companies in Taiwan, including Taiwan Gas Company and Taiwan Power Company. He served as the President of the Chamber of Commerce in Taiwan.

The International Town Planning Conference was held in Amsterdam in the summer of 1924. The major theme of the conference was metropolitan planning. Japanese officials who attended the conference were influenced by the discussion of how to create suburban residential towns in the circumstance of metropolitan areas.

Kamikitazawa was called “Kitazawa” when sales started.

I would like to express my appreciation to Mrs. Hamako Saida for her observation on this point.

This figure shows the current condition of the cherry trees line in Kamikitazawa. Kamikitazawa Sakuranamiki-Kaigi, Sakura-no-Kansatsujokyo (condition of cherry trees), Japanese, http://www.sakuranamiki.org/present.html#present_1 (final access June 20, 2010).

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4) Chen Cheng Che (2003), Shokuminichi Toshikeikan no Keisei to Nihon Seikatsu Bunka no Teichaku ± Nihon Shokuminichi Jidai no Taiwan Tochitatemono Kabushikikaisha no Jutaku Seisan to Toshikeieii (Creation of Colonial Landscape and Establishment of Japanese Life Style in Taiwan ± Housing Production and Urban Management by Taiwan Tochitatemono Company during the Colonial Period of Taiwan), Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Tokyo.
5) The management of TTC was substantially influenced by Japanese people. There were 15 executive members and auditors from 1908 to 1922 in total. Among those, three people were chosen from Taiwan business circle and a bank. (Chen Cheng Che (2002), Taiwan Tochitatemono Kabushikikaisha – Shokuminchi-jidai no Toshikennsetsu-soshiki no Kenkyu (A Study on the Architectural Organization during the Colonial Period), Proceedings of the Kanto architectural research meetings: architectural planning and design, urban planning, rural planning, building economics, history and theory of architecture, Architectural Institute of Japan).
6) Chen(2003), p.76.
12) Jiji Press (December 1 and December 2, 1925), Jiji Tsushinsha.
16) The composition of the original stockholders was as follows - number of stock holders: Taiwanese 51 (1/5), Japanese 194 (4/5) of which 9 were Japanese in Japan; number of shares of stock: Taiwanese 6,930 (1/3), Japanese 13,070 (2/3) of which Japanese in Japan held 884. (Chen(2003), p.37.)
20) A letter from Nakagawa Kojuro to Goto Shinpei dated October 20, 1923. Nakagawa introduced Kimura to Goto as a developer who readjusted the lands and notably built a new town in Taipei after severe damage caused by a typhoon, and recommended Goto to listen to Kimura’s opinion closely as a reference to the reconstruction of Tokyo City. (goto shinpei shokanshu [ denshi shiryou ] (2009), 391-1, goto shinpei kinenkan shozo de divuid fo windou, Yushodo).
21) Tokyo-to Setagaya Kuyakusho(1951), Setagaya-ku Shi Jo-kan(History of Setagaya volume 1), p.387. This area was called “Sanai-Chō” in the neighborhood. Kamikitazawa, Sakurajosui Kyodoshi Hensankai(1972), p159-160.
23) The Daily Yomiuri, October 19, 26 and November 30, 1924, Yomiuri Shimbunsha.
24) Chen (2003), p. 120.
28) Hayashi, Jiro(1980), Tokyo no Namikimichi (Road with tree lines in Tokyo), p.32-34, Kyogakusha.
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