The Ways in which Domestic Japanese Architecture of the Meiji Period (1868 – 1912) Accommodated and was Affected by the Country’s Social Habits and Rituals
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Introduction

The Meiji period (1868 - 1912) was a time of great change for Japan, in terms of its leadership, economy and principles. The 1868 Restoration saw the rise of Meiji as Emperor, who moved to the newly declared capital of Tokyo. Western influence started to infiltrate into architectural design, creating ‘fashionable “high city” residential areas [in contrast to the] “low city” streets lined with pretty little shops from the [previous] Edo period’. In this study, the ‘traditional house’ refers to that which existed at this turning point in Japanese history, with only minimal Western influence emerging. To better understand the relationship between the nation’s domestic architecture and social habits, it will question as to whether it was the architectural form that guided rituals, or the rituals themselves that influenced and changed the built environment and inevitably, areas in which these two perspectives overlap. Three pieces of Japanese literature, set during the Meiji period, underpin this analysis, giving insight into the home’s ability to accommodate daily life, ceremony and environmental conditions:

1. A Daughter of the Samurai is an autobiographical novel by Etsu Inagaki Sugimoto (1874-1950), retracing her early years growing up in Japan, through to her later life in both America and Japan.

2. Daidoji Shinsuke: The Early Years, A Mental Landscape, from the collection Rashomon and Seventeen Other Stories by Ryunosuke Akutagawa (1892 –1927), translated by Jay Rubin. This is also an autobiographical source, in which Akutagawa describes his upbringing, lifestyle and values.

3. Kokoro is a work of fiction that depicts the relationship between the narrator, a middle-class student, and a man he calls ‘Sensei’ (the meaning of which comes closest to the English word ‘teacher’). It is written by Natsume Soseki (1867 –1916, and translated by Edwin McClellan.

By focusing on such personal, largely subjective texts, supported by non-fictional texts, a more sensitive attitude towards the home is gained, as it is perceived through the eyes of individuals with direct experience of Japanese culture. Inevitably, '[the] customs of all countries are strange to untrained eyes', and so to break down this alienation, it seems appropriate to take evidence both from those who have had a first-hand experience of living within it, in addition to my own personal experiences of visiting Japan. In order to better understand the houses and activities of the Meiji

period, I have visited a number of buildings and places in Japan so as to clarify and enhance my understanding of the country’s culture and rituals. Specific to this study, are the following buildings:

1. The Murin-an Villa in Higashiyama, Kyoto, visited in April 2010. This is a relatively small scale house, designed and lived in by Marshal Yamagata Aritomo, a leading member of the Meiji government.

2. The Shitamachi Museum in Ueno, Tokyo, visited in April 2010, which consists of both replicas and original artefacts from the Edo period (1603–1868).

3. The Kyu Asakura House in Dainkayama, Tokyo, visited in April 2010, is an expansive property, built and designed by its owner Torajiro Asakura in the twentieth century.

4. The Arts of Japan exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, January 2011, included artefacts and paintings from across the Japanese eras, giving insight into their built environments and living rituals.

5. A Ryokan in Kyoto, visited in April 2010. This inn was run in a very traditional style, and gave first-hand experience of Japanese cuisine, dress and lifestyle habits.
1. Context

The Physicality of the Home

The traditional home of the Meiji period, was one of timber frame construction, commonly with either one or three central columns situated at the centre of the structure, supporting the roof with very deep beams running across the entire span of the house, which due to their sheer size, rather than securing the frame, ‘actually endanger[ed] it’.\(^4\) (226, Engel) Numerous non-structural, furnishing pillars were also incorporated, allowing decorations, partitions and window frames to be integrated into the various spaces of the house.\(^5\) The seemingly heavyweight supporting columns of the Japanese home contrast the ‘frail and perishable nature of these structures’\(^6\) that is so often assumed of Japanese architecture. One significant factor in Japanese construction was the lack of diagonal bracing, making structures being inherently weaker. The traditional home was in many ways delicate, largely due to its incorporation of sliding shoji screens, used to divide interior spaces and also define the relationship between interior and exterior spaces.

Another crucial aspect of the traditional home was the roof, giving a distinctive identity, as well as thermally and climatically improving their performance. It can be asserted that ‘Japanese architecture is roofs, whereas western architecture is walls’,\(^7\) illustrating its integral role in the building’s aesthetics and function alike. Windows also gave spaces a distinctive identity, after the influence of Chinese literary culture resulted in people’s desire to admit natural light into spaces, ‘[creating] the unique Japanese interior space in which the distinction between light and shadow [was] somewhat vague [...] which, in turn, nurtured the in’ei (shadow) culture that [gave] special character to the whole of Japanese culture’,\(^8\) as described by Jun’ichiro Tanizaki (1886-1965). Since glass windows were not introduced in Japan until after World War One, it was light-admitting shoji panels that improved the

\(^7\) Ueda, *The Inner Harmony of the Japanese House*, p. 22.
day lighting of spaces (Plate 1). Another important physical aspect of the Japanese home at this time was the raised floor, which became widespread in both lower and upper class homes after the Meiji Restoration. Yuka floors were crucial in ventilating living spaces, as air passed under structures, increasing air circulation and thus cooling inhabitants in summer months. Together with numerous secondary features, such as the charcoal brazier, the tokonoma and futon storage cupboards, these key structural and decorative features characterised the traditional Japanese home.

Climate

The Japanese climate has greatly impacted the country’s architecture, from their ancient pit dwellings, which were severely damaged due to their inability to prevent moisture accumulation, to the timber frame constructions that are dealt with in this analysis, through to modern-day attempts to minimise the impact of overheating, dampness and significantly, natural disaster. A number of microclimates exist across Japan, created by proximity to the Asiatic mainland; contact with the Pacific Ocean; and differences in latitudes and altitudes, each impacting the country’s architecture and daily lives of inhabitants. Generally, Southern areas experience warmer, finer weather, whilst Northern provinces endure periods of heavy snowfall and overcast skies. The whole country is renowned for intense rainy seasons, which strongly influences housing design, but is essential to Japan’s rice cultivation. As vividly demonstrated in recent months, Japan is prone to natural disasters, particularly earthquakes and typhoons. The architectural response to climate and geographical phenomena is without question significant.

In many ways, the Japanese house was a result of environmental concerns, as its pillars were loosely embedded in foundation stones (allowing movement in earthquakes), working alongside sloped roofs, which provided both a thermal buffer zone and prevented damage from snow and water accumulation. It can be seen that in the majority of design decisions, the Japanese believed that ‘a house should be built for summer. In winter one can live anywhere, but dwellings unsuited to the hot season are unbearable’,9 expressing a strong prioritisation in designing houses for hot weather, rather than cold. This preference had great impact on people’s lives, as inhabitants not only change their dress, but also the places and manner in which they sat within the house, so as to be more comfortable. It is fair to suggest that although in the context of Western expectations, Japanese homes were almost unbearably cold in winter, this was not a view shared by Japanese people. Adaptations to climatic conditions were relatively minimal. The introduction of the veranda and sliding shoji screens certainly increased ventilation during summer months, but was largely inadequate; even when ‘the paper doors had been lifted off [...] and] the entire fronts of the rooms

9 Ibid., p. 38.
facing the garden were open’,\textsuperscript{10} inhabitants often found indoor conditions too warm for comfort. In winter, people ‘would sit on the floor with a foot warmer between [them], and a large quilt covering the foot warmer and [their] bodies from waist down’\textsuperscript{11} for much of the day, and would sleep next to the brazier, demonstrating an adaptive lifestyle that increased their thermal comfort (Plate 2). It is clear that rather than adapt the physical design of architecture itself, the Japanese people of the time were insistent that ancient principles of design and lifestyle must be upheld, and adapted their social habits and rituals so as to suit climatic conditions.

\textsuperscript{10} Sugimoto, \textit{A Daughter of the Samurai}, p. 280.
\textsuperscript{11} Soseki, \textit{Kokoro}, p. 49.
2. Daily Life

Family Roles and Relationships

So as to analyse the commonplace rituals that existed in Japan during the Meiji period, it is important to note the different roles and responsibilities of family members. Ancient Japanese teachings emphasise the strength of the family, rather than the individual and although families traditionally had a head of house, their responsibility was to protect the welfare of the group, rather than themselves. Japan was a patriarchal society, in which women were expected to care for the home and children, whilst men provided family income. Children were taught obedience and respect, learning to ‘talk a little lower, to laugh a little less, to walk a bit more noiselessly on the matting, and to sit silent and attentive with bowed head when her elders were speaking’. 12 From a young age, girls were taught three rules of obedience, based on Buddhist ethics, whereby their loyalties were ‘to the father when yet unmarried, to the husband when married, to the son when widowed’ 13. It is in keeping with such obedience that women in the Meiji period carried out the majority of daily chores and rituals. It was seen to be ‘a great sorrow to have all sons and no daughter – a calamity second only to having all daughters and no son’, 14 emphasising the superiority of men during this era. Young girls were taught to ‘select without assistance the proper flowers, the suitable roll picture and tokonoma ornament, and see that the house was always arranged according to certain established rules’. 15 With respect to marriage, family councils would agree on suitable courtships, as ‘the Japanese marriage [was] not an affair of individuals’, 16 but rather involved both families agreeing the terms of partnership based on ‘the laws of [the] family system [which] were planned in consideration for customs [...] based on ancient beliefs, all of which were wise and good – for their time’. 17 In Kokoro, the narrator explains ‘the person [his uncle] suggested as a suitable bride was [...] his cousin’, 18 illustrating how Japanese people were often denied the right to choose a marital partner, but instead had to follow the guidance given by their elders. The impact of this social structure on domestic architecture is largely related to the role of women, as it was their ‘flower-arranging, tea-serving, koto music, and other womanly accomplishments’ 19 that directly transformed the domestic environment.

12 Sugimoto, A Daughter of the Samurai, p. 271.
14 Sugimoto, A Daughter of the Samurai, p. 216.
15 Ibid., p. 92.
16 Ibid., p. 224.
17 Ibid., p. 216.
18 Soseki, Kokoro, p. 136.
19 Sugimoto, A Daughter of the Samurai, p. 265.
The Centre of the Home

The idea of the centre of the house, or ‘core’ as is often described, is very prevalent in domestic Japanese architecture, since ancient pit dwellings consisted of a central pillar acting as the lynchpin of the entire structure. In Meiji period houses, it can be argued that the fireplace, most often a charcoal brazier, was the core of the home, due to its provision of heat in an often uncomfortably cold environment (Plate 2). Although there was certainly emphasis on designing for summer in domestic architecture, a ‘lack of the little brazier glowing charcoal brought the temperature down to that of outside’, making it essential to the well-being of inhabitants. The fire served to warm both its immediate area and the floor surface surrounding it. As Sugimoto describes her Japanese residence, ‘the long, square-cornered fire-box with drawers – the invariable adjunct of every dining room in Japan – was a handsome one of white birch’. Families would spend much time sitting, eating and socialising around the brazier in winter, giving it a sense of importance in traditional living spaces. The role of the brazier was galvanised as it provided hot water for the essential tea ceremony: ‘the softly glowing charcoal, [was] always waiting with warmth and comfort for anyone who wanted a sip of tea’. The fireplace was also commonly used to dry clothes and smoke food, using a lattice-like framework (a hidana) that was installed above.

In addition to the fire, the tokonoma, that is the alcove in which a hanging scroll and flower arrangement was placed, also provided a key focus to the Japanese home and if a guest was present in the house, they were seated in the most honoured position, directly in front of the alcove (Plate 3). The tokonoma has been an indispensible element of the traditional Japanese home since ancient times and can still be seen today. Important items belonging to the family are often placed in it, such as the narrator’s certificate of graduation in Kokoro, whereby ‘[his] father looked at it for a while,'

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20 Ibid., p. 22.
21 Ibid., p. 250.
22 Ibid., p. 251.
then got up and went to the ornamental alcove of the room, and placed it where everyone could see it.\textsuperscript{24} During special occasions, it would often be ‘covered with straw matting and decorated with all the sacred Shinto emblems’.\textsuperscript{25} In domestic spaces that were largely devoid of decoration and ‘clutter’, the tokonoma is an example of how people adapted their built environment to accommodate their desire for aesthetic exhibition in the home. The charcoal brazier may have been the functional and physical centre of the house but the tokonoma was their spiritual centre, providing an opportunity to express individuality. With respect to such exhibition, it is fair to assert that it was the habits of the Japanese people that influenced their architecture, rather than them responding to existing infrastructure.

The Importance of the Floor Plane

One clearly established social habit of the Meiji period, which is still prevalent today in some cases, is that ‘[in] Japan, when one enters a house, the shoes, wrap, and hat are removed’,\textsuperscript{26} as it is considered a major offence to wear outdoor shoes within interior spaces. Traditional houses have a ‘“shoe-off” entrance’,\textsuperscript{27} (Plate 4), in which outdoor footwear is removed, often accompanied by a ‘bow of “I have come back”’.\textsuperscript{28} Appropriate footwear for indoor spaces is then used, for which specific servants were traditionally employed to care for in wealthy Japanese homes during the Meiji period.\textsuperscript{29} Such ritual upon entering a domestic space transforms what is usually considered a basic daily habit into something more ceremonious, as is emphasised by Soseki’s observation that ‘since [he] was wearing sandals that day, and not those boots which took so long to unlace, [he] was very soon in K’s room’,\textsuperscript{30} again portraying the notion that merely walking into one’s house requires a degree of thought so as to respect ancient behavioural rituals. Akutagawa describes such care of appropriate footwear, as he ‘hurriedly switched from slippers to shoes and walked down the deserted corridor’.\textsuperscript{31} Often, floor levels within Japanese dwellings indicate where a change of footwear is required. Specifically, entrance spaces

\textsuperscript{24} Soseki, \textit{Kokoro}, p. 83.
\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 295.
\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 257.
\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 164-65.
\textsuperscript{30} Soseki, \textit{Kokoro}, p. 195.
\textsuperscript{31} Akutagawa, ‘Daidoji Shinsuke’, in \textit{Rashomon and Seventeen Other Stories}, p. 213.
are lower than living spaces, highlighting where shoes should be removed and people should either remain in socks or change into indoor footwear. This spatial distinction can be traced back to the *yuka* floor, that is, a raised floor ‘originally nothing but a couch which ran around the sides of the hut [...which] was gradually increased until it occupied the whole interior’, 32 an example of Japanese people adapting their domestic environment to better suit their way of life.

‘Upper’ and ‘lower’ floors also related to the primary function of rooms and often the role and status of those inhabiting them. Areas with lower floors, often made of clay and earth, were usually spaces occupied by servants, particularly in wealthy homes. In *A Daughter of The Samurai*, Sugimoto describes in detail the materiality and functions within the servant’s hall, in which ‘One half of the board floor had straw mats scattered here and there. This was the part where the spinning, rice-grinding, and the various occupations of the kitchen went on’. 33 She goes onto describe the other half, ‘where rough or untidy work was done’, 34 consisting of clay floors, separated from the boarded side by ‘the fireplace - a big clay-lined box sunk in the floor’. 35 The materiality of floor surfaces traditionally helped define the purpose of different areas within the house, with inhabitants ‘slipping quickly into [their] sandals each time [they] crossed the door-sill to the kitchen’, 36 and other such spaces. Such sensitivity to floor surfaces, with different footwear used for each, emphasises the relationship between activity and materiality within the Japanese home.

Furthermore, there was a very practical reason for the habit of removing shoes in the Meiji period, as outdoor footwear caused severe damage to the delicate materiality of the *tatami* mats (Plate 5). Additionally, the *tatami* was a multi-functional surface at this time, used for both sitting and sleeping. ‘“In Japan [...] there is no dishonour to sit on floor”’ 37 and it would therefore be unsanitary to walk through Japanese dwellings in shoes, as often occurs in the West. Specific slippers were also worn in bathroom and kitchen areas, so as to maintain cleanliness in living spaces. Slippers were seen as a ‘public vehicle’ 38 in the Japanese home, used by

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34 Ibid., p. 8.
36 Ibid., p. 114.
38 Ueda, *The Inner Harmony of the Japanese House*, p. 93.
family members and guests alike. Even more distinguished are the set of clogs used specifically for walking in the garden. Such specificity of footwear is strongly embedded in the mind-set of Japanese people and is a subconscious act of daily life, demonstrating people’s adaptation to their built environment. This further demonstrates how the architecture of the time responded to people’s ways of living, as did the yuka floor, which gradually increased in size so as to accommodate a lifestyle of eating and sleeping at floor level.

The concept of living at floor level imposed a number of spatial considerations on the traditional dwelling. ‘[The] Western style, with desk and some chairs’ only began to emerge in the Meiji period, usually in the homes of more wealthy, progressive families. In contrast to the Western use of cushions as a supplementary item, generally, for the Japanese, ‘cushions were [their] chairs’ and historically, women were required to sit with one knee drawn up, whilst men could cross their legs. It was believed that ‘every Japanese housewife had to know how to make cushions as they were [their] chairs and [their] beds’, emphasising the importance of the object in the context of the home. Inhabitants often possessed ‘cushions of every kind – soft, thick ones of heavy silk for winter; (...) woven grass for summer, braided bamboo for the porch, woven rope for the kitchen, some round, some square, some plain, and some elaborately dyed in patterns – for cushions were our chairs, and every house had to have a supply always on hand’.

A relationship between traditional Japanese dress and the custom of sitting on the floor is also apparent, as ‘it is difficult to sit quietly in Japanese fashion while wearing American clothing, and yet it is inexcusably rude at a ceremonial gathering to move – however slightly – the lower part of the body’. Often, inhabitants would spend the majority of their time sitting on tatami mats, respecting the ancient belief that ‘hardship of body meant inspiration of mind’. Meals were also taken at low dining tables, with members sitting on the floor for the entirety of the meal. Sitting methods were adopted, however, as seen in Daidoji Shinsuke: The Early Years, as ‘Yasukichi lowered the seat of his trousers to the mat – not in the formal position on his heels [...] but cross-legged to

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39 Soseki, Kokoro, p. 33.
40 Sugimoto, A Daughter of the Samurai, p. 20.
41 Ibid., p. 92.
42 Ibid., p. 305.
43 Ibid., p. 244.
44 Ibid., p. 20.
keep his legs from going numb’, demonstrating the ways in which inhabitants adapted their behaviour so to ensure their own comfort, without disregarding ancient beliefs. The impact of such living conditions in the Japanese home was that any room could be used as a bedroom or living space, as cushions and futons could be placed in whichever room was required.

Sitting on the floor had become an established custom in the Heian period (794-1185) and although there is little evidence for why the Japanese adopted such a lifestyle, their domestic architecture directly responded to it. This is further evidenced by predominantly low level windows, allowing people to see out from floor level (Plate 6). Lower ceilings also formed a distinctive aspect of Japanese architecture, providing a sense of security to those who ‘sit conversing on [...] tatami mat [floors]’.

Whether this way of living was a response to their architecture, or indeed a cause of it, many people in Japan are still living at floor level today, despite Western influence, as seen in Plate 7. The understanding that ‘chair legs ruin the soft mats, and foreign furniture is wholly inartistic in a Japanese room’ illustrates not only the practicality of not incorporating furniture, but also the aesthetic impact such items would have on the traditional home, again demonstrating how Japanese daily rituals worked in harmony with the traditional architecture that surrounded them.

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48 Sugimoto, A Daughter of the Samurai, p. 258.
Activities and Routines

The activities and games of Japanese people in the Meiji period were suitable to both their low eye-level existence and also the flexible and largely climate-driven architecture in which they lived. Many rituals were directly related to the art of tea ceremony, which ‘[made] man’s everyday activities of living an instrument for experiencing the beauty of existence’. 49 Tea ceremony introduced various arts into the home of Japanese people, such as poetry-writing and flower arranging, as well as emphasising the importance of tea drinking as a daily ritual.

The veranda was also very important to the traditional house, forming the bridge between house and garden. In Kokoro, the narrator comments upon Sensei, as he ‘moved his cushion towards the veranda, and [leant] against the sliding door’. 50 It was customary for people to spend much of their time, older generations often sewing and chatting to neighbours whilst the children played, on the semi-external space that wrapped around the main structure of the home. Such enjoyment within this space can be seen in Plate 8, drawn in the Edo period (1615-1868), in which two young girls are playing ball on the veranda, whilst two women converse in the adjacent garden.

In the Meiji period, it was not unusual for a husband to have both his mother and grandmother living in the same quarters as his wife and children. It is an ancient Japanese belief that older generations must be respected, and children would spend much time with their grandmother, ‘listen[ing] to [her]

50 Soseki, Kokoro, p. 71.
reading around the fire-box, as stories were an important part of Japanese childhood, used to pass on lessons and morals.

Penmanship was also an important activity in Japanese society, as ‘it was believed that the highest training in mental control came from patient practice in the complicated brush stroke of character-writing.’ Such emphasis on control and obedience was something very much present in the Japanese home, in many ways reflective of the minimal, controlled and fragile nature of the domestic spaces’ physicality. Indeed, an almost spiritual nature was given to the art of learning, whereby ‘even the tools [...] used were considered almost scared’. Other popular activities, including ‘tea ceremony, the arrangement of flowers, and [reading] poetry’, were not only made possible by the architecture, but in some cases improved the aesthetics of the internal spaces, such as the art of flower arranging in relation to the tokonoma.

Another distinctive contrast between traditional Japanese culture and many Western countries is the approach to the daily custom of bathing. Communal baths existed from the very early ages of Japanese civilisation, used by people from both lower and higher classes as a place to not only wash, but also socialise. The ritual of bathing required a certain set of spaces in homes so as to work effectively. The same water was left in the bath throughout the day, its temperature maintained by regularly feeding wood into the stove below, with each family member and guest using this water in an order dictated by their family ranking. ‘The hot bath which is always ready in old-fashioned Japan for the expected visitor’ was a great tradition of the Meiji period, as the guest was considered the most honoured person in the house and was therefore given the privilege of bathing first. To keep the water sanitary, inhabitants washed prior to bathing, squatting or sitting to the side of the bath on a low stool with a handheld shower. The process of bathing not only fulfilled the purpose of washing, but also helped to cool the body during the hot summers and warmed the body in winter. Sugimoto describes her family enjoying each other’s company on a summer’s evening, ‘each fresh from a hot bath and clothed in the coolest of linen’, highlighting the importance of this ritual in the context of everyday life and as a climatic response to the environment.

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51 Sugimoto, A Daughter of the Samurai, p. 17.
52 Ibid., p. 21.
53 Ibid., p. 21.
54 Soseki, Kokoro, p. 132.
55 Sugimoto, A Daughter of the Samurai, p. 294.
56 Ibid., p. 273.
The ritual of sleeping was another aspect of traditional Japanese life that is unfamiliar to the Western world. As with other furniture, beds were absent from the home. That is, ‘beds’ in the conventional meaning, as a piece of furniture that remains in one place during both day and night. The Japanese equivalent to a bed was the futon, which could be placed in any room and stored away during the day (Plate 9).

Inhabitants would ‘spread out the bedding on the floor’ each night. In winter, inhabitants would keep warm by living and sleeping in whichever room contained the fire box or charcoal brazier, emphasising the Japanese custom of never truly defining spaces as serving just one function. As Akutagawa describes ‘[his] mother [lying] on a futon in the eight-mat parlous directly beneath her upstairs room’, it is clear that the futon allowed an adaptation of space to suit particular needs, in this case, his mother’s illness, which prevented her from sleeping upstairs. Due to the multi-functional nature of Japanese rooms, specific closets were incorporated, ‘where [...] bed cushions slept in the daytime, gathering, in their silken flowers, talk, music and laughter to weave into pleasant dreams for [one] to find hidden in [one’s] pillow at night’. This description almost personifies the futon, emphasising its importance in the home and the impact it had upon the function of spaces, as they were transformed from a place to eat, talk and play, into a place to sleep. Often, ‘closets were hidden by sliding doors covered with tan-coloured tapestry’, integrating them into the overall design of rooms. The position of futons was not only driven by climatic considerations, but often by superstition, as it was believed unlucky for inhabitants to sleep with their feet towards the West, seen to be the direction of the ‘Pure Land where the dead abide’.

Such caution was accommodated by the domestic architecture, as the predominately matted surfaces and lack of furniture provided flexibility in where people sat and slept.

A number of cleaning rituals also formed an important part of life. Traditionally, two major house cleans were carried out each year, removing dust and moisture accumulation, which caused rotting of the wooden structures. The methods and utensils used for chores in the Meiji period were appropriate for the surfaces within the home, as people ‘wiped the entire woodwork of the house

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57 Soseki, Kokoro, p. 209.
59 Sugimoto, A Daughter of the Samurai, p. 251.
60 Soseki, Kokoro, p. 250.
61 Ibid., p. 229.
every day with a cloth wrung out of hot water, without the use of soap or other such products. Due to the fragile materiality of the Japanese home, much was left in its most natural state, and it would therefore have been inappropriate to apply polish to surfaces. With the use of water and lacquer, porches ‘kept [their] satiny polish for years’ preserved by careful cleaning methods and the ritual of removing outdoor shoes before stepping into the house. The fragile shoji panels also required delicate treatment, as they could easily tear. In A Daughter of The Samurai, Sugimoto recalls a time when she heard ‘a constant pata-pata-pata from the next room, where Sudzu, with her sleeves looped back and a blue-and-white towel folded over her freshly dressed hair, was vigorously cleaning the paper doors with a shoji duster – a bunch of cut papers tied on the end of a short stick’. This description implies that although the cleaning process required in a traditional home was a ‘vigorous’ task, it was also important to use the correct implements. In the kitchen, cooking pans were mainly used for vegetables and so only required water, whereas ‘for fish [they] had special dishes and washed them with charcoal ashes’, again implying specific methods for certain tasks. The ways in which Japanese people carried out the processes of cleaning is a vivid example of how they adapted to their physical environment, possessing a great sensitivity to the materials from which their houses were made.

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63 Sugimoto, A Daughter of the Samurai, p. 166.
64 Ibid., p. 166.
65 Ibid., p. 264.
66 Ibid., p. 165.
3. Ceremony

Special Ceremonial Events

To better understand the Japanese approach to domestic architecture in the Meiji period, it is helpful to observe the ceremonial rituals that were so central to many people’s lives at the time, and assess the impact they had on the built environment, and to what extent the architecture itself shaped them. As already discussed, understanding the behaviour of people in their domestic environment aids our understanding of how and why certain architectural decisions are made. It can be seen that ceremonies acknowledged by Japanese people in the Meiji period ranged from relatively understated events through to hugely flamboyant rituals, such as the celebration of New Year. The nation also observed the yearly seasons, with different rituals and activities celebrated in each, transforming their built environment to reflect the occasion.

One of the earliest of such rituals in Japanese life was the “seventh year” celebration,67 which proved ‘a very important event in the life of a Japanese girl’.68 Here, family and friends gathered to mark an important milestone in her life. Marriage, as previously discussed, was orchestrated by family councils rather than individuals, and took place at the home of the bridegroom. The bride’s departure from her family home was ‘always elaborate’,69 as she became a part of her husband’s family, only to return to her own residence as a guest. The arrival of guests at the Meiji home was also cause for celebration, as servants ‘trimmed the trees and hedges, [...] swept all the ground, even under the house, and [...] carefully washed off the stepping stones in the garden. The floor mats were taken out and whipped dustless with bamboo switches [...] making the air resound with the “pata-pata-pata” of paper dusters against the shoji, and [...] steaming hot padded cloths [were] pushed up and down the polished porch floors’.70 Such order and cleanliness in the home was accompanied by hosts ensuring ‘the most treasured roll pictures were hung, the rarest ornaments placed on tokonomas’,71 demonstrating the householder’s obligation to honour visitors, placing objects of greatest value on display and presenting an immaculate domestic environment.

On a larger scale, and of particular relevance to this era was the anniversary of ‘the day on which all power was removed from Nagaoka castle by the new Government’,72 marking the beginning of the

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67 Ibid., p. 16.
68 Ibid., p. 16.
69 Ibid., p. 68.
70 Ibid., p. 74.
71 Ibid., p. 283.
72 Ibid., p. 37.
Meiji period. This day held various meanings, as people were affected in different ways, but for the majority this celebration was a time of feasting, sport and games, with particular foods eaten and activities deemed to be appropriate for the occasion. Women ensured that, upon their husband and sons’ return from outdoor activities, ‘straw mats were spread on the grass and many fires were kindled in the garden over which, tied to a tripod of strong branches, swung large iron kettles holding game seasoned with miso’.73 Processions were enjoyed by friends and family, who ‘ran out to the big gateway and waited between the two tall lantern stands with the welcoming lights’.74 Such frivolity, against a backdrop of traditional Japanese homes, evokes an image of people inhabiting spaces with their own beliefs and customs, transforming the infrastructure into something more exciting and almost magical. Another celebration was the ‘Weaving Festival, when swaying bamboos were decorated with festoons of gay sashes and scarfs, and hung with glittering poem prayers for the sunshine’,75 again showing an adaptation to the built environment. During such festivals, people often took to poetry writing and recitals, particularly enjoyed at the Flower Viewing Festival, which took place in Spring, as the spectacular cherry blossom spread across towns and villages, at which ‘Japanese people often [gathered] – a group of friends – and [wrote] poems’.76

**Seasonal Celebrations**

The Flower Viewing Festival was just one example of Japanese people celebrating the often extreme seasons, each of which affected both their house and lifestyle in different ways. It can be asserted that Japanese people ‘live in full awareness of the great rhythm of the seasons’,77 and it can certainly be seen in the country’s literature that people embraced the changing weather and the celebrations that marked each one. Such a psychological desire to experience the seasons existed on a large scale, as the entire house was opened up to the elements, but also on a minor scale, as the choice of hanging scroll and flowers in the tokonoma of each house related to the time of year, demonstrating great attention to detail in the transformation of the home.

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73 Ibid., p. 37.
74 Ibid., p. 37.
75 Ibid., p. 207.
76 Ibid., p. 217.
The games and rituals enjoyed in each season are illustrated in Plate 10, which depicts ‘Activities of the Twelve Months of the Year’ (*Tsukinami-e*). Although these images are from the Edo period (1615-1868), they were still prevalent in the Meiji period, particularly in communities that resisted Western influence and maintained ancient customs. Arguably, a number of the adaptations made by Japanese people were a result of the structural deficiencies of their domestic environment in dealing with the country’s climate. However, it is clear by observing the activities seen in each season that people enjoyed seasonal changes, rather than merely adjusting to them out of necessity.

The arrival of spring was (and still is) enthusiastically celebrated in Japan. Night braziers were stored away, *fusuma* screens were exchanged for lighter panels, exterior wall panels were removed and often a separate reed carpet, designed to cool the feet, would cover the existing matted floor. Although spring and autumn often brought typhoons, both seasons were generally celebrated, with spring coinciding with the arrival of the first Emperor and the coming of the cherry blossom\(^78\), demonstrating a desire to welcome new life and beginnings. The narrator in *Kokoro*, recalls ‘one day during the flower-viewing season, Sensei and I went to Ueno’.\(^79\) The cherry blossom period is still very much celebrated today, and in many major parks, gardens and scraps of space throughout Japan,

\(^{79}\) Soseki, *Kokoro*, p. 25.
one can witness huge crowds socialising and enjoying food and games underneath the impressive blossom (Plate 11).

Plate 10e. ‘May: Festival for Boys’.

Summer months were also celebrated, despite the high rain levels and very humid conditions. A major ritual during the Meiji period were midsummer airing days, where both house and godown (storehouse), were emptied and either family members or servants were seen ‘brushing, folding, or carrying, and at the same time all chattering gaily’.80 Such enthusiasm for cleaning was a result of the sacred nature of such events, for they not only presented an opportunity to clean the house, but also to display the family’s treasured items, transforming the house with ‘long ropes stretched in the sunshine, on which were hung torn banners bearing [the family] crest [...and] beneath the low eaves were piles of clumsy horse armour bound with faded rope of twisted silk; and old war weapons’.81 This depiction emphasises the sense of celebration given to such rituals. The harvest season was traditionally celebrated as the ‘Good-luck season when the rice fields bow with their burden’.82 Indeed, the importance of rain to Japanese rice cultivation was acknowledged in the Meiji period and thus a feeling of celebration existed in this predominantly wet season too. In a similar vein to Western Halloween celebrations, the Japanese held a Harvest Festival, ‘when pumpkins were skilfully scraped into lovely pictures of shady gardens with lanterns and flowers’.83

Plate 10f. ‘June: Swimming in the River’.

In contrast to the outdoor celebrations of other seasons, activity greatly slowed down in the traditional Japanese house in winter, even in the most basic of rituals. Thicker, woollen clothes replaced lightweight summer kimonos, and inhabitants would spend the majority of their time huddled around the charcoal brazier. There was however, an opportunity to celebrate, most notably at New Year. This was traditionally the

80 Sugimoto, A Daughter of the Samurai, p. 141.
81 Ibid., pp. 140-41.
82 Ibid., p. 47.
83 Ibid., p. 207.
‘only social gathering where boys and girls play together’\textsuperscript{84} and arguably the most celebrated time of the year, with great reverence for the worth of new beginnings. Celebrations lasted for seven days, and ‘above every doorway in [...] crowded streets was stretched a rope of ragged rice-straw with pine trees growing on either side’.\textsuperscript{85} This is yet another example of how Japanese people embraced the changing seasons and adapted their domestic environment accordingly.

Another powerful influence on the traditional Japanese home in the Meiji period was that of religion. As previously discussed, Japanese people have historically adjusted their dwellings to suit the nature of their activities, and the presence of religious ceremony is no exception. The boundaries between religion and superstition are often blurred in Japanese society, due to their belief in the importance of both ancestors and spirits, which are thought to inhabit all spaces within and around the home. From ancient times, building structures and orientations were based on sacred principles of orientation and measures were taken to ensure family routine and rituals were in keeping with Shinto Buddhist principles. Since the Asuka period, houses were designed to contain a Buddhist alter, in which families placed both religious and personal items, such as ‘a small framed portrait of “Little Hatsu” [which] adorns the Buddhist altar’\textsuperscript{86} in the house of Akutagawa’s parents in \textit{Daidoji Shinsuke}. Many homes possessed two shrines; one Buddhist and one Shinto, though these two religions are largely overlapped in Japanese culture.

It was also believed that ‘all living things bear within themselves the essence of Buddha’,\textsuperscript{87} including the house and garden, thus resulting in great care being taken over the treatment and protection of both. Japanese people demonstrated great respect for the spirits thought to inhabit the home, and the shrine traditionally played an important role, as demonstrated by Sugimoto’s description of ‘family gatherings in Honourable Grandmother’s quiet room with the lighted candles and curling incense of the open shrine; and the consciousness of the near-by protecting presence of the ancestors’.\textsuperscript{88} A further example of such spiritual presence can be seen at the ‘anniversary when married sons and daughters with their children gathered for a feast of red rice and whole fish, gossiping happily while they ate, with the shrine doors open wide and the spirits of kindly ancestors watching over all’.\textsuperscript{89} It was believed that when guests were staying, the spirit guest would also be present for the entirety of their visit,\textsuperscript{90} making the social act of visiting family and friends a far more

\begin{footnotes}
\item[84] Ibid., p. 47.
\item[85] Ibid., p. 208.
\item[87] Soseki, \textit{Kokoro}, p. 10.
\item[88] Sugimoto, \textit{A Daughter of the Samurai}, p. 124.
\item[89] Ibid., p. 207.
\item[90] Ibid., p. 75.
\end{footnotes}
significant event in the lives of Japanese people. The shrine would be decorated for guests and events, as shown by Sugimoto’s return to home, finding ‘the Jiya covered the floor before the shrine with a fresh, rudely woven mat of pampas grass and placed on either side a vase holding bunches of the seven grasses of autumn’,\textsuperscript{91} demonstrating the pride of Japanese people in creating a welcoming environment. Prior to the introduction of Buddhism in the Asuka period, shrines would not have been an essential part of the Japanese home. Yet as a result of this religious transition, the architecture itself was made to accommodate the needs of inhabitants.

\textsuperscript{91}Ibid., p. 75.
4. Flexible Spaces

Standardisation

In domestic Japanese design, a number of elements were traditionally standardised, which arguably made its ‘most unique accomplishment [...] to be] its influence upon the common classes’.\(^\text{92}\) Despite this seemingly positive impact, this approach in fact went against Buddhist teaching, which condemns formalisation in the place of individuality. It can be asserted that standardisation reduced individual expression in homes, but in looking at Japanese literature, it seems that Japanese people succeeded in transforming spaces so as to suit their ceremonial and habitual needs. A huge step in making such standardised rules available to the common man was the emergence of woodblock-printed manuals, which were largely responsible for the sukiya style of architecture that followed. The repetitive forms, geometry and motifs were largely in accordance to three forms of expression: shin (true); so (a calligraphy term implying something to be loose, or free); and gyo (another calligraphy term, referring to continuous writing). These three guidelines for expression were used in art, life and indeed architecture, guiding both its design and principles.\(^\text{93}\)

Arguably the most notable standard feature of the Japanese home is the tatami mat (Plate 5), which for many centuries resulted in standardised room sizes and rigid geometry. Originally, the mat was fixed at a size of 180 cm x 90 cm, relating to the average size of a human being. In the Meiji period, this resulted in the creation of regular, standardised rooms within the dwelling. In some cases, a \(\frac{3}{4}\) sized mat was used, known as daime, resulting in some variety of room sizes, but generally references such as ‘we were in our little six-mat room’\(^\text{94}\), and ‘it was an eight-mat room’,\(^\text{95}\) were common during this era.

The garden was also an organised space, often incorporating standardised features that were accessible to both the rich and poor. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, rules were written down regarding garden design, the teachings of which were used by many in their own homes. The two most standard forms of garden were the tsuki-yama (the hillock garden) and the hirakiwa (the flat garden), both of which can still be seen in Japan today. With a fairly limited palette of colours and ornaments, each garden was seen to be an ‘individual creation within an order of predetermined and universal principles’.\(^\text{96}\) This description can also be seen to apply to the house

\(^{93}\) Ibid., p. 267.
\(^{94}\) Soseki, *Kokoro*, p. 165.
\(^{95}\) Ibid., p. 147.
itself, which in many cases was based on the ken grid, a means of controlling the structure’s plan. Similar to the manner in which people individually influenced their garden, inhabitants manipulated their predominantly standardised internal spaces too. Examples such as exposed floorboards in between tatami mats, personal decorations in the tokonoma and shoji screens transforming spaces into either larger or more intimate environments, all demonstrate the manner in which the Japanese people adapted their living spaces to suit their social customs, rather than allowing their built environment to constrain them.

**Internal Divisions**

The spatial arrangement within the Japanese home in the Meiji period was largely defined by a series of shoji screens, which could be pushed open and closed easily, transforming spaces in terms of size and visibility (Plate 12). In the most extreme situations, these delicate dividers converted whole floors into one space, allowing versatility of form and function, despite the previously mentioned standardisation methods. Shoji screens originated in the Heian period (794 - 1185) and were made from wooden boards to which thick, heavy paper was added to create fusuma screens, creating one of Japanese architecture’s most renowned features. As a result, there were ‘no permanently enclosed rooms; and as for furniture, no beds or tables, chairs or similar articles, - at least, so it appears at first sight’.

This flexible treatment of living spaces is closely related to the rituals previously mentioned, as the versatility of space allowed large numbers of people to inhabit the home, particularly when celebrating one of the country’s many festivals. Furthermore, spaces were adapted to the daily lifestyle of Japanese people, with such loose internal boundaries allowing people to inhabit spaces as and where they wished.

Plate 12. *Shoji screens in the Kyu Asakura House, Tokyo, own photograph.*

It is notable, however, that in all three pieces of literature discussed the characters define rooms as being their own, with numerous references to Sugimoto’s ‘grandmother’s room’ and similarly in *Kokoro*, in which the narrator refers to both his own room and that of his friend’s as separate spaces. But such moveable boundaries certainly changed people’s perspectives of the home, at times when ‘the sliding doors [were] left open, and [one] could see right into the house’. The adaptations such flexibility provided can be seen to be on a smaller scale than changing the overall function of rooms, as shown in *Kokoro*, in which the narrator explains, ‘for this occasion, the table had been put in the drawing room, near the veranda’, demonstrating a minor adjustment in the furniture of the house so as to adapt to warmer weather conditions. It is clear that although Japanese people predominantly slept and lived in the same spaces each day, the notion that ‘sets and props are brought out from the wings and spread around the stage’, holds true for the architecture of the Meiji period, as certain elements were either displayed or stored away so suit particular occasions and events.

Such openness also influenced levels of privacy in Japanese homes, as the lightweight panels did not block out sounds, smells and vision as do the more solid divisions of the Western world. With regard to the relationship to the outside world, sounds would often pass through exterior walls very easily, as described *Kokoro’s* narrator, who ‘heard the wheels of rickshaws approaching the house [...] they were [...] unpleasantly noisy, and one could hear them from quite a distance’. One was also constantly aware of other inhabitants, as the narrator of *Kokoro* explains, ‘I knew that Sensei’s wife was in the next room, busy at her sewing or some such work. And I also knew that she could hear what we were saying’. Such delicate barriers created a certain atmosphere and elegance within the Japanese home, with descriptions such as ‘sliding doors of silk separated the parlour from my own and the children’s rooms, side by side, just beyond’, emphasising the effect of such insubstantial divisive elements.

A lack of privacy existed for individuals and families living in traditional houses, particularly when they opened up the house to ‘public gaze’ in summer months for the purposes of ventilation, whilst in winter months coldness drove them to spend the majority of their time around the fire-box. Arguably, this had a positive effect within the house, as family members were brought up to show greater respect towards one another, not least because they were required to live almost constantly.

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99 Ibid., p. 69.
100 Ueda, *The Inner Harmony of the Japanese House*, p. 145.
102 Ibid., p. 29.
in each other’s company throughout the seasons. The impact of the *shoji* and *fusuma* screens was to imply one continuous space, denying the standardised rigidity that could otherwise be caused by the *tatami* mat floors. The prevalence of the sliding screens can be considered an example of the impact the Japanese lifestyle has upon the architecture in which they inhabit, although the physical form of the architecture, in turn, seems likely to have influenced privacy levels in the home. During the Meiji period, the popular use of sliding screens demonstrated an ability to manipulate architecture so as to best suit the needs and spatial requirements of both their daily and ceremonial habits.
5. Thresholds

Public and Private

The spatial organisation of the domestic Japanese home in the Meiji period was integral to their way of life, and can be seen to have both dictated certain living habits, as well as being affected by particular rituals. An important feature of the Japanese home was the wall or fence, which surrounded people’s property and usually included a relatively elaborate gateway (Plate 12), and essentially defined the space owned by inhabitants. In towns, as of the Meiji period, *inbashuri* (walkways) were transformed from originally public thoroughfares, with low, protective eaves above, into individually owned spaces, defined by fences running along the edges. Akutagawa walked through a ‘lane [that was] hushed and empty, enclosed on either side by the bamboo fences’,104 illustrating this sense of enclosure in what was originally a public space.

The need to prevent fires from easily spreading also had impact on structures, as wooden and masonry side walls were added to such fences so as to further contain individual houses. Although the desire for privatisation was largely a result of European influence, the property wall or fence itself was always an important aspect of domestic Japanese architecture, both in towns and rural areas. It can be argued that ‘design of the hedge or fence [was] ultimately the most important’ consideration in terms of garden design.105 Often made of woven bamboo, they allowed views through, framing the ‘miniature world’ that is created in Japanese garden design. Traditionally, only noblemen and temples would have an individual gateway, but they began to transcend into the homes of ordinary civilians during the Edo period (1603-1867), and continued to prevail throughout the Meiji period. The opening of the Japanese gateways at the start of the day and closing at night was an everyday ritual carried out by either servants or the family themselves.106 As gateways

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105 Ueda, *The Inner Harmony of the Japanese House* p. 177.
became more widespread, it was often the case that moderate houses would consist of, for example, ‘five rooms (including the entryway), a small garden, and a rather impressive gate’.  

**House and Garden**

Another important threshold existed between the garden and house, as although the exterior spaces were considered part of the overall concept of ‘home’, there were still clear distinctions between indoor and outdoor.  

In addition to closing the entrance gates, Sugimoto describes how a servant ‘fastened the front and kitchen doors [...] sliding the wooden panels which ran along the outer edge of the porch overlooking the garden’. She goes on to explain further, ‘these were for protection in the stormy weather and to keep us safe at night, but when closed they shut out the air completely’. The sliding screens around the perimeter of houses were important in not only establishing a boundary between house and garden, but also as a means of protecting the relatively fragile internal structure from the harsh climatic conditions, evocatively illustrated in Plate 14.

The connection between the Japanese home and garden has been extensively analysed, and it is commonly thought ‘that the Japanese did not actively love, but passionately submitted themselves to the destructive elements of nature’. It can be asserted that the Japanese endorsement of nature strongly contrasted the rigid geometry that existed in traditional house design. However, gardens were maintained with such precision and care that often they were as rigidly structured as the architecture itself. In the context of social rituals, it is important to note the effect that such a relationship with nature had on Japanese people, and the extent to which they adjusted their habits to allow a strong connection with the outside world. As previously suggested, traditional Japanese architectural design was largely a reactive product to the harsh natural environment. On a smaller scale, one can analyse the ways in which houses and inhabitants worked in cohesion with gardens, so as to improve their quality of life. In recent times, western influence has lost much of this cohesion, as many traditional dwellings are being replaced with multi-storey

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110 Ibid., p. 247.
structures. Although one cannot generalise the Japanese garden, it can be argued that there are certain influences, elements and uses that were common to most homes in the Meiji period, which can help us to understand their importance and influence. The connection between home and garden not only emphasised the openness of Japanese architecture, but also clarified their belief that ‘nature does not hasten, and Japanese are Nature’s pupils’, implying that it was nature that guided their ways of life.

Plate 15. Image from Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, own photograph.

The philosophy driving the Japanese attitude towards nature, particularly with respect to the domestic environment, was largely responsible for their ‘open’ approach to gardens. Much like other ancient civilisations, their early respect for nature was based on fear of the elements, thought to be overcome with the offering of gifts to the gods. The Shinto religion, however, was largely based on the divinity of trees, which closely links to the ancient Japanese perception that nature was not something to fight against, nor overcome, but was rather a thing to embrace. It can be asserted that such a philosophy was the ‘source of psychological intimacy with nature’ that can be observed in Japanese culture. With particular reference to domestic architecture, the structures did not, as was common in European civilisation, protect inhabitants from external forces but were designed to embrace them, making the garden ‘just another room’. Often this was quite literally true, as a limitation of floor space in built-up areas resulted in people including courtyard gardens in the centre of their homes. The Zen sect of Buddhism particularly encourages a connection with nature, promoting the belief that man, animal and nature should exist as one, rather than as three detached entities.

Traditional houses of the Meiji period were orientated towards the garden, and the key spatial element that linked these spaces was the veranda, commonly used as an extension of the living

112 Sugimoto, A Daughter of the Samurai, p. 216.
114 Ibid., p. 268.
space, in which inhabitants would carry out their daily activities in summer months (Plate 15). Whether the veranda is an outdoor or indoor space is debatable, as it sits under the low, exposed eaves of the main structure, but its front is open to the adjacent garden, most often with the exterior shutters open to the elements. Often perceived to be a ‘connecting space’, it is an example of how Japanese architecture performed as a reaction to ancient traditions and beliefs; in this instance providing a close connection with the natural world. This physical adaptation ‘made indoor life part of the outdoors’ and expressed the ‘psychological need for beauty’, which they believed to be necessary in order to achieve a fulfilled and happy lifestyle. This desire for beauty relates to the purpose of Japanese gardens as spaces to view, rather than inhabit. This concern is emphasised by the raised floors that existed in Japanese dwellings, as gardens were designed to provide optimum views from this raised level, from which Japanese people carried out the majority of their daily rituals. Although there is evidence to suggest gardens were used for certain activities and ceremony, the main concern was that the garden provided a viewpoint from the most important internal spaces, so that inhabitants could ‘[draw] close to the open doors overlooking the garden’. As described by Sugimoto, ‘the gardens of Japan [were places of] shut-in beauty for the few’, implying a sense of privacy in the garden environment, contrasting the perceivably exposed nature of Japanese architecture. Great pleasure was taken in observing the garden, as inhabitants would ‘[sit] up in [their] futon in the room opened to the veranda’, enjoying both the view and feel of the outdoor elements from the security of their own home.

The thresholds that exist between the traditional Meiji period dwelling and its surroundings demonstrate a carefully considered set of principles that have driven the physical form of houses since ancient times. The importance of the gateway can be seen to exemplify the desire to mark territory, often in a particularly grand manner, and also emphasised the traditional Japanese custom of celebrating guests’ arrival to their home. This furthers the argument that ‘the morals of society were made manifest in building’, along with the incorporation of the veranda in domestic design, which served to provide an intermediate space in which inhabitants could experience a connection with nature, whilst still carrying out their daily routines and activities. This evidence serves to show that, with respect to embracing nature, Japanese people made progressive steps towards adapting their domestic environments, rather than sacrificing their social rituals.

117 Ibid., p. 258.
118 Sugimoto, A Daughter of the Samurai, p. 125.
119 Ibid., p. 188.
120 Akutagawa, ‘Daidoji Shinsuke’, in Rashomon and Seventeen Other Stories, p. 234.
121 Engel, The Japanese House, p. 221.
Conclusion

The relationship between Japanese people’s daily customs and domestic architecture in the Meiji period was influenced by a number of factors, including their religious and spiritual beliefs, the organisation of their family system and the connection they had with the natural world. These aspects are important in analysing the ways in which they were influenced by their built environment, and the ways in which they manipulated it. Through both personal perception and literary sources, the relationship between Japanese people and their built environment can be clearly recognised.

By studying the daily rituals of Japanese people, it is apparent that their religious and revered ancestral principles transcended into the physical make-up of their houses. Practical details such as ‘upper’ and ‘lower’ floors, distinguishing where footwear must be changed, is just one example of their ability to create architecture that informed inhabitants of expected behaviour and custom. The very act of removing one’s shoes was not just an act of politeness, but was directly linked to their low-level living where they slept and ate at floor level, only standing to walk between spaces. The removal of outdoor footwear not only maintained sanitary conditions, but protected the all-important tatami matted floor surface from the inevitable damage that shoes caused. This argument can be seen to both illustrate the effect of social rituals on their architecture, with respect to the incorporation of different floor levels, but also indicates a habitual reaction to the materiality of homes, requiring people to change footwear so as to preserve it.

Daily habits, such as sleeping and eating in the same place, demonstrated manipulation of space, as inhabitants had to find flexible strategies to deal with limited space in the typical home. The minimal and easily movable furniture was an important feature as it allowed the use of certain spaces for the various daily functions in order to achieve optimum thermal and aesthetic comfort. Such flexibility can largely be related to the easily transformed spaces within the Japanese home, made possible by the shoji and fusuma screens that were so closely associated with East Asian architecture of the time. Despite the standardised room sizes created by the tatami mat, these screens allowed areas to be either opened up into expansive rooms, or closed to create more intimate spaces, depending on the season, event or ritual taking place. The rigidity of Japanese design, as decided by ancient principles of geometry and form, could be perceived to limit the activity within houses, but through intuitive design and spatial arrangement, the Japanese people made it possible to both adapt their built environment to their daily rituals and also demonstrated a personalisation of space, through aspects such as the tokonoma.
The outside world and natural elements played an important role in traditional Japanese life and celebrations, which is again emphasised by the distinct closeness to nature seen in the traditional Meiji period home. Perhaps more than any other evidence, the Japanese ability to completely rearrange internal spaces and the relationship between indoor and outdoor areas illustrates the architectural adaptations they made so as to best suit their social habits.

Overall, it must be noted that in many ways, the Japanese home was a reaction to the country’s climatic conditions, as heavy rainfall, extreme temperatures and natural disasters had direct impact on building techniques and styles. However, what is important here is the impact such design had on those that inhabited it, and further still, the counterargument that it was the rituals and activities of these people that guided and impacted design itself. It can be seen that ‘there is an unforgotten reason [...] for every motion in etiquette – indeed, for almost every trivial act of life’\textsuperscript{122} in Japanese culture, which can be particularly observed in literature of the time. Such stories provide more personal, and largely more sensitive, accounts of Japanese people’s inhabitation of domestic spaces. Taking such evidence into account, alongside non-function texts and my own observations of Japanese society, it can be fairly asserted that during the Meiji period, whilst certain aspects of life were dictated by the built environment, it was generally the case that inhabitants ensured ‘the morals of society were made manifest in building’,\textsuperscript{123} as people manipulated and adjusted spaces so as to most comfortably suit their ways of life.

\textsuperscript{122} Sugimoto, \textit{A Daughter of the Samurai}, p. 180.

\textsuperscript{123} Engel, \textit{The Japanese House}, p. 221.
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