

Kote-e Plaster Art in Ajimu, Oita, Japan:
The Difference between Meiji Kote-e and Heisei Kote-e

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Abstract:

Kote-e relief carving is performed on walls and window casings. It was developed in Japan and the reliefs are made from plaster and mortar. Using kote, craftsmen heap colored plaster and mortar on the window casings and outer walls of houses and warehouses. The art form is called kote-e because it uses kote. Kote-e is a symbol of wealth. It is also used to express the various wishes of clients, such as family safety, protection from fire, protection from illness, prosperity, perpetual youth, and longevity. There are various patterns, including gods (Ebisu, Daikoku, etc.), beauties of nature, scenes from legends, dragons, tigers, lions, and fantastic creatures. Kote-e may also be created as gratitude which was indebted until the plasterer has completed the house for a long time.

In this research, we surveyed kote-e of Ajimu and analyzed the kote-e itself, the relationship between kote-e and its building, and the relationship between kote-e and the town in order to clarify the spatial characteristics of kote-e and its influence on the people, the town, and the townscape in terms of creating and preserving kote-e. Considering the different scales of relationships between kote-e and its background is important. One must consider the human scale, the building scale, and the town scale.

Keywords:

kote-e, plaster art, relief, townscape, preservation, Ajimu

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1. Introduction

Kote-e is a traditional Japanese method of finishing building surfaces. Kote-e forms pictorial reliefs on walls and window casings (Fig. 1). Kote-e was developed in Japan and is made from plaster and mortar. Using kote, craftsmen heap colored plaster and mortar on the window casings and outer walls of houses and warehouses. The art form is called kote-e because it uses kote. Kote-e is a symbol of wealth. It is also used to express the various wishes of clients, such as family safety, protection from fire, protection from illness, prosperity, perpetual youth, and longevity. There are various patterns, including gods (Ebisu, Daikoku, etc.), beauties of nature, scenes from legends, dragons, tigers, lions, and fantastic creatures. It may also be created as gratitude which was indebted until the plasterer has completed the house for a long time.

It is said that kote-e was spread generally during the late Edo period. It was established by Chohachi Irie (Izuno-chohachi, 1815-1889). There are approximately 3,000 kote-e in Japan, with approximately 1,000 currently in Oita prefecture and approximately 100 in Ajimu town. In Ajimu, 60 kote-e can be seen; others have collapsed or are in very bad states. There are many existing kote-e in present-day Ajimu that were created in the Meiji Era. Many kote-e are concentrated in this small town, which boasts the highest kote-e density in the whole country. New kote-e have also been made. Kote-e of Ajimu reflect a climate and culture that is unique to Ajimu. There are also many unique and humorous kote-e. Ajimu has many kote-e because it was the home of numerous skilled craftsmen (Tetsuzo Nagano, Sato Mototaro, etc.), good plaster and mortar were easy to get, and there were many rich patrons.

In this research, we surveyed kote-e of Ajimu and analyzed the kote-e itself, the relationship between kote-e and its building, and the relationship between kote-e and the town in order to clarify the spatial characteristics of kote-e and its influence on the people, the town, and the townscape in terms of creating and preserving kote-e. Considering the different scales of relationships between kote-e and its background is important. One must consider the human scale, the building scale, and the town scale.

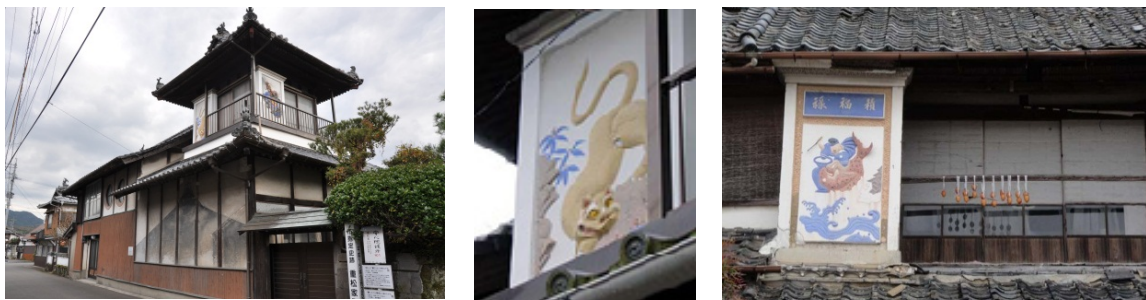


Fig. 1 Kote-e in Ajimu

2. Methods

2.1 Outline of survey

(1) Kote-e survey

A kote-e survey was carried out in order to clarify the spatial characteristics of kote-e and its influence on the people, the town, and the townscape. The actual kote-e were surveyed and


recorded in accordance with survey contents. Data sheets were created. The main survey contents are outlines of kote-e, kote-e itself, the relationship between kote-e and its building, and the relationship between kote-e and the town. The contents of the survey are shown in Table 1. An example of a data sheet is shown in Fig. 2.

Table 1 Contents of survey

outline of kote-e	investigation day, address, the place (indoor/outdoors) of kote-e, inspection (possible/impossible), building (structure, number of stories, finish and color), front road (kind, width), kote-e (total number, pattern), board of an outer wall (the contents of the description signboard of kote-e), circumference of kote-e (the situation of the circumference), others
kote-e itself	work name, maker's name, vintage, owner name, size, states (preservation state, etc.), existence of a move, impression from kote-e
relationship between kote-e and its building	location (number of stories), position (wall, window case etc.), type (plaster / wall tapestry), others
relationship between kote-e and the town	visibility from front road (in sight/in and out sight/out sight), facing front road (parallel/perpendicular/parallel and perpendicular), regionality (language showing the situation of the areas, such as a quiet residential section, busy shopping center, etc.), total number of kote-e around the kote-e, others

Kote-e No.10
1/2 Kote-e No.10
2/2


1. Outline of Kote-e



Explanatio n Board

The flower of a morning glory is drawn by using big compasses, and also clouds on the upper part, wave and water downward are drawn. This residence is 128-year old (2010), and is the city specification important cultural properties, and precious data are also saved. The black picture is drawn on the new small "insect cage window."


Around Kote-e



Note

This house is designated as the city important cultural property, and not only Kote-e but the building itself has great value.


2. Kote-e itself



Explanation of Pattern

Morning Glory	Because a morning glory is a plant of a vine and it is extended long, this means posterity prosperity.
Lightning	Lightning means wishing of the good harvest of a rice.

Name of work	Morning Glory and Lightning
Name of Artist	Tetsuzo Nagano
Year	1882
Name of Owner	Takuko Koshu
Size (long X wide)	90 X 120cm
Condition	Good
Moving/ Year	No
Impression	Decorative, Elaborate



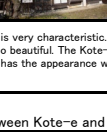


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3. Relationship between Kote-e and Building

Location	2nd floor
Position	Window Case
How to make	Plaster
Front	
Right side	
Left side	

Relationship ip between Kote-e and Building



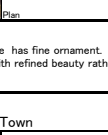
Note

This building is very characteristic. Kote-e is also beautiful. The Kote-e has fine ornament. This building has the appearance with refined beauty rather than beauty with familiarity.

4. Relationship between Kote-e and Town

Visibility	Visible
Orientation	To the road Parallel
Direction	South
Regional	part from central town
Kote-e around	2 (2houses)/ house
Frontal road from right side	
Frontal road from left side	
In front of the house	

Relationship ip between Kote-e and Town

Note

The new building built recently stands in the opposite side. The impression of the street view is a little odd and strange.

Fig. 2 Sample of data sheet

(2) Object kote-e

Object kote-e exist in Ajimu, Usa City, Oita Prefecture, Japan. Fifty-four kote-e were made in the Meiji Era (Meiji kote-e), 3 in Taisho (Taisho kote-e), 6 in Showa (Showa kote-e), and 25 in Heisei (Heisei kote-e).

(3) Interview

The subjects were five people who own kote-e made in the Meiji Era (Meiji kote-e owners) and seven people who own kote-e made in the Heisei Era (Heisei kote-e owners). The interviews were conducted in order to clarify the differences in consciousness between Meiji kote-e owners and Heisei kote-e owners. The contents of the interview are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Contents of interview

questions about the town with kote-e	Are you proud of your town with kote-e? Do you feel that your town with kote-e is beautiful? Do you want your town to be known as the town with kote-e in the future?
questions about their own kote-e	Are you proud of your own kote-e? Do you want many persons to see your own kote-e? Why did you decide to make your kote-e? (to people who made their kote-e recently)
questions about maintenance of kote-e	Do you take care of kote-e? Do you think that possession of kote-e is difficult? Do you want to continue to own your kote-e in the future?.
questions about communication by kote-e	Do you talk with your family about kote-e? Do you talk with your neighbours about kote-e? Do you talk with tourists about kote-e?

2.2 Analysis

Fifty-four Meiji kote-e and 25 Heisei kote-e were compared and analyzed in terms of “kote-e itself,” “relationship between kote-e and its building,” and “relationship between kote-e and the town.” The characteristics of the influence on the townscape were also considered. Similarly, the consciousness of Meiji kote-e owners and Heisei kote-e owners as expressed in the interview was compared and analyzed. On the basis of these analyses and interviews, problems were clarified and points of improvement were examined.

2.3 Period of survey

The kote-e survey and interview were conducted from August to December 2012.

3. Comparison between Meiji and Heisei kote-e

3.1 Kote-e itself

(1) Samples of Meiji kote-e and Heisei kote-e

Samples of Meiji kote-e and Heisei kote-e are shown in Fig. 3. While almost all Meiji kote-e have traditional patterns, Heisei kote-e have both traditional patterns and humorous or unusual patterns.



Meiji kote-e



Heisei kote-e

Fig. 3 Samples of Meiji and Heisei kote-e

(2) Patterns of kote-e

Although there are often two or more patterns in one kote-e, they remain divided. The number of Meiji kote-e patterns is 83 and the number of Heisei kote-e patterns is 40. The patterns of kote-e are shown in Fig. 4 and Table 3. Meiji kote-e have many traditional patterns such as tigers and hawks for talismans, dragons for fire prevention, rabbits for prosperity, and family crests. In contrast, Heisei kote-e have many commercial patterns such as terrapins and

carp which indicate the special and famous products of Ajimu, farming motors and carpenter's inkpads which indicate an owner's business goods, and individual relationship patterns in connection with the owner's name and the Chinese zodiac.

The meaning of kote-e has changed from wishes for happiness and prosperity of family to expressing the techniques of the region of Ajimu's business and products and original family's characteristics.

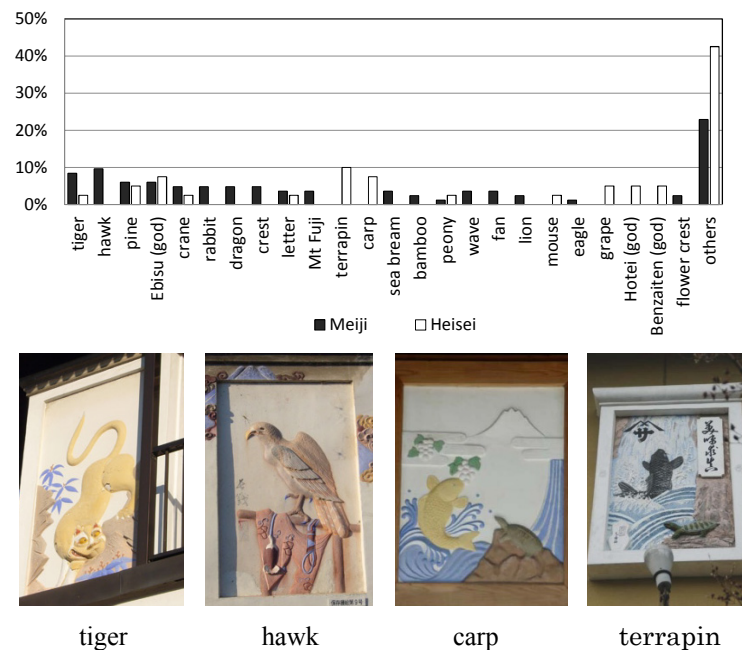


Fig. 4 Patterns of kote-e

Table 3 Patterns of others

classification	Meiji kote-e	Heisei kote-e
plants	iris, sweet flag, morning glory, lotus, eggplant, mandarin orange tree	digitalis
animals	goose	wild boar, horse
nature	moon, lightning	waterfall, ravine
tools	holy jewel, beckoning cat, the Rising Sun flag, small hammer, ship	
imaginary creatures	Shoujou (orangutan)	
good/buddha	Nannkyoku-rojin (god of Taoism), Geho (fish)	god of warriors, god of the wind
tales	Urashima-Taro	Bunbukuchagama
person/people		Kabuki actor
jobs/profession		farming motor, mailbox, carpenter's ink pad, bugles, express messenger, children's haircuts
name		fertile rice field: Toyoda
region/town/area		wine, Mt. Yufu

3.2 Relationship between kote-e and its building

(1) Building types with kote-e

The building types with kote-e are shown in Fig. 5. Approximately 90% of Meiji kote-e are in houses. Most of them are in the main house because the main house is the center of daily life and kote-e confer wishes of happiness and prosperity to the house and family. Heisei kote-e, however, are installed not only in houses with shops but also in buildings where people gather, such as shops, hotels, schools, the town hall, and post offices.

(2) Locations of kote-e

The locations of kote-e are shown in Fig. 6. Almost 85% of Meiji kote-e are installed in the window casings and gable ends of main houses and warehouses. The location and size of Meiji kote-e are decided according to the size system, and design of the building. However, 80% of Heisei kote-e are installed on the main house wall and vacant outer wall space. Therefore, the location and size of Heisei kote-e may not be decided according to the size system, and design of the building.

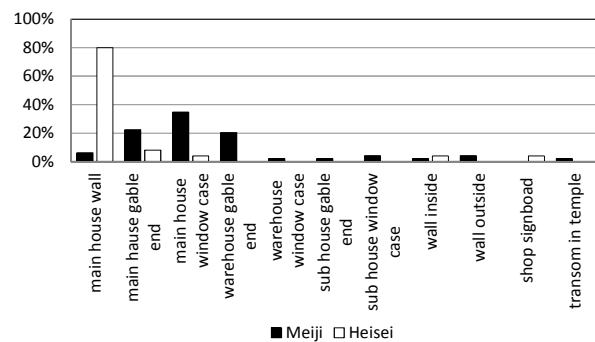
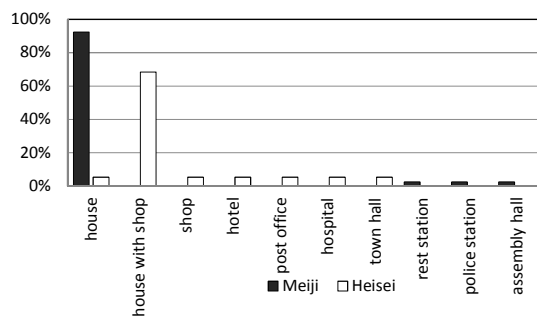


Fig. 5 Building types with kote-e

Fig. 6 Locations of kote-e

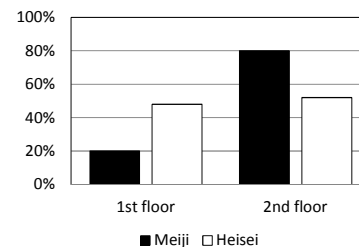
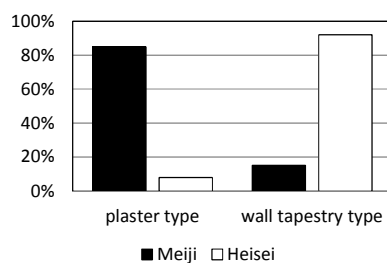
(3) Types of kote-e

The two types of kote-e are shown in Fig. 7. In the plaster type, kote-e is made directly on the wall by plaster and mortar. In the wall tapestry type, kote-e is hung on the wall like a picture or a tapestry. Because wall tapestry-type kote-e can be installed easier than plaster-type kote-e, Heisei kote-e can now be installed in various buildings and various places. Originally, kote-e is plaster type, however approximately 90% of Heisei kote-e are wall tapestry type, and they were hung on the vacant space of the outer walls of a building after it was built. The relationship

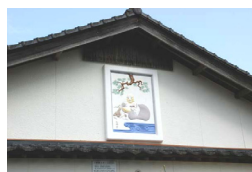
between kote-e and its building varies in terms of size, materials, colors, and location. As a result, the size, materials, colors, and location of kote-e may not suit the building. In addition, some kote-e have a strange appearance.

(4) Positions of kote-e

The positions of kote-e are shown in Fig. 8. Both Meiji and Heisei kote-e are installed on either the first or second floor. Eighty percent of Meiji kote-e and 50% of Heisei kote-e are installed on the second floor. It is believed that installing kote-e on the second floor was not done to make it easily visible from a distance but was done to prevent it from being damaged by rainwater. When kote-e were installed on the first floor, they risked being damaged by rainwater. More recent plaster and mortar have high durability and are waterproof so damage is prevented even if it is installed on the first floor. This may be why there are more Heisei kote-e on the first floor. Furthermore, kote-e on the first floor can be seen easily by those who pass along the road in front of it. It is also believed that one purpose of Heisei kote-e is to be seen by many people.



plaster type



wall tapestry type



1st floor in police station



2nd floor in house

Fig. 7 Types of kote-e

Fig. 8 Positions of kote-e

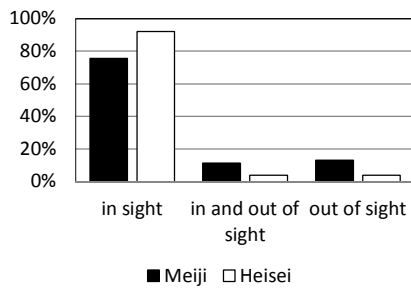
3.3 Relationship between kote-e and its town

(1) Visibility

The visibility of kote-e from the front road is shown in Fig. 9. Twenty-four percent of Meiji kote-e are out of sight and in and out of sight, despite the fact that they are outdoors. Since the building itself stands far back from the front road, kote-e cannot often be seen easily. However, Meiji kote-e is not necessarily installed so that it may be visible from the front road. In contrast, all Heisei kote-e are visible from the front road except for indoor kote-e. It is an important factor for Heisei kote-e to be visible from the front road.

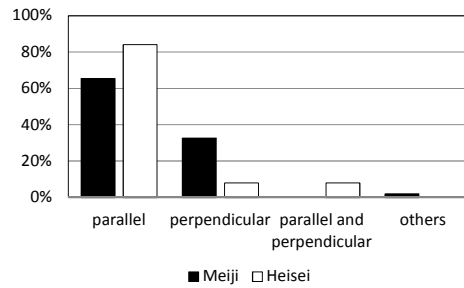
(2) Types facing the front road

The types facing the front road are shown in Fig. 10. Eighty-four percent of Heisei kote-e are parallel to the front road, while only 65% of Meiji kote-e are. It is also thought that Heisei kote-e are installed so that anyone can see them well from the front road.



Kote-e in and out of sight from the front road

Fig. 9 Visibility of kote-e



parallel

perpendicular

Fig. 10 Facing types to the front road

(3) Facing direction

The facing direction is the orientation of kote-e. The facing direction is shown in Fig. 11. Meiji kote-e do not have conspicuous deviations in the facing direction, whereas in Heisei Kote-e, 40%, the majority, face east. The reason for this is that a street called Hommachi-dori, on which Heisei kote-e are concentrated along, runs from north to south, and there are many Heisei kote-e parallel to this street. Moreover, the ratio of east is more than that of west, because two or more houses on the west side of Hommachi-dori own two or more kote-e. It was found that kote-e were not necessarily intentionally made in a specific direction and that their facing direction is decided according to the position and direction of the building and the direction of the front road.

(4) Number of kote-e per building

The number of kote-e per building is shown in Fig. 12. Works of both Meiji and Heisei kote-e are found at a rate of one per building, but three and four per building can also be seen. Kote-e is very expensive. When making kote-e directly on the surface of a wall, it may take one year or more to make. Possessing three or four kote-e works signifies great wealth. Kote-e of such wealthy houses become symbols which give dignity to the town and affect the townscape greatly.

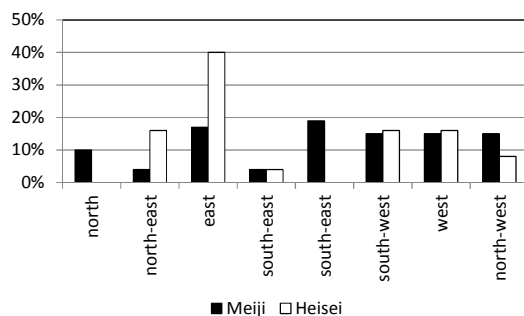
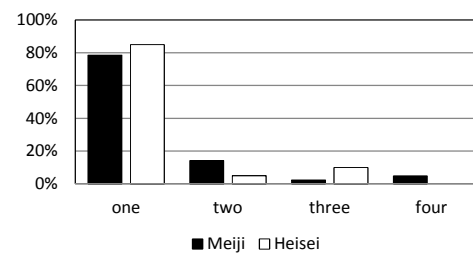


Fig. 11 Facing direction



3 works: Meiji kote-e

3 works: Heisei kote-e

Fig. 12 Number of kote-e a building

4. Consciousness of owners (from the interview)

4.1 Town with kote-e

(1) Pride of the town: “Are you proud of your town with kote-e?”

The pride of towns with kote-e is shown in Fig. 13. Eighty percent of Meiji kote-e owners and 86% of Heisei kote-e owners answered “Yes” when asked if they were proud of their town with kote-e. All owners seem to be proud of the town. Some owners who answered “Not either” said, “It is less than pride.”

(2) Feeling that the town is beautiful: “Do you feel that your town is beautiful because of kote-e?”

The feeling that the town is beautiful is shown in Fig. 14. Sixty percent of Meiji kote-e owners answered, “Yes.” Some Meiji kote-e owners who answered “Not either” said, “It is tasteful rather than beautiful,” “It is peaceful and good rather than beautiful,” etc. In contrast, only 43% of Heisei kote-e owners answered “Yes,” and one of them said, “Since this town is my hometown, I am attached to it.” Some of the remaining 57% owners who answered “Not either” said, “Although kote-e are wonderful, the townscape should be unified through arranged eaves and stone pavement in order to attract many people, including tourists, and to raise interest” or “The town is beautiful because of kote-e, but the town itself should also become attractive in order to carry kote-e over to next generation.” Eighty-six percent of Heisei kote-e owners answered, “I am proud of the town,” but 43% of them answered, “The town is beautiful.” They have pride in their town but they do not think it is beautiful. There are Heisei kote-e owners who are dissatisfied with the townscape. Moreover, there are kote-e owners who do not think the town is beautiful because they are accustomed to seeing kote-e.

(3) The town with kote-e in the future: “Do you want your town to be known as the town with kote-e in the future?”

Both Meiji and Heisei kote-e owners answered “Yes.” Both seemed to regard kote-e as the identity of the town. Other opinions included “I want tourists to come to see kote-e” and “I want to embrace kote-e because it is important and historical.”

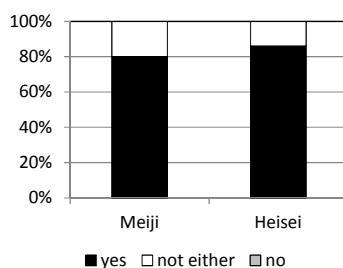


Fig. 13 Pride of the town with kote-e

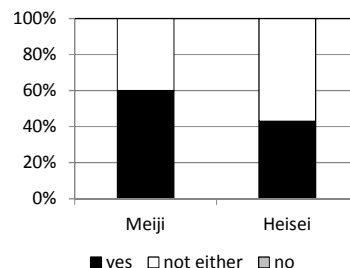


Fig. 14 Feeling that the town is beautiful

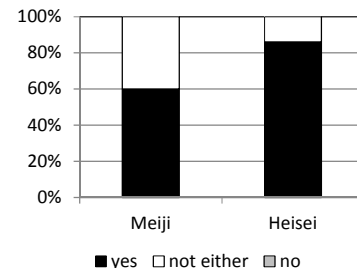


Fig. 15 Pride of their own kote-e

4.2 Their own kote-e

(1) Pride in their own kote-e: “Are you proud of your own kote-e?”

The pride in their own kote-e is shown in Fig. 15. Sixty percent of Meiji kote-e owners and approximately 90% of Heisei kote-e owners answered “Yes.” The ratio of Heisei kote-e owners is higher than that of Meiji kote-e owners. It is thought that since Heisei kote-e has many

patterns relating to the owners, they think it is reflected in their wishes and their roles played. Moreover, it is thought that the more proud individuals are of their own kote-e, the more they are proud of their town.

Eighty percent of Meiji kote-e owners are proud of their town, while 60% of them are proud of their own kote-e. The reason why they are not proud of them relates to their consciousness of low concern, their disinterest, and the insensibility of familiarity, as seen in statements like, “I don’t care about my kote-e because it is very old,” “I do not consider my kote-e at all since it is natural to be here,” “I haven’t lived here since the beginning,” and “I didn’t know that kote-e was here until now.” The reasons why Meiji kote-e owners are proud of their kote-e relate to attachments such as “I am attached to my kote-e because I have seen it since I was young” and “My kote-e is the best.” The reasons can be divided into the two poles of disinterest or strong attachment.

(2) Showing kote-e: “Do you want many persons to see your kote-e?”

All of the Meiji and Heisei kote-e owners answered “Yes.” A lot of owners are doing business, and they want many tourists to come to see their kote-e, which act as signboards and are made by the owner. They also want the town to prosper.

(3) Reason why they made kote-e (to people who made their kote-e recently): “Why did you decide to make your kote-e?”

Many people who made their own kote-e recently decided to make them because they could get a subsidy from the promotion enterprise of the town government. The owners who are doing business want to show their kote-e and want prosperity in business.

4.3 Maintenance of kote-e

(1) Maintenance of kote-e: “Do you care for your kote-e?”

All of the Meiji and Heisei kote-e owners answered “No.” There reasons given include “I don’t know how to care for kote-e,” “I worry I will damage it,” and “It is in a place I can’t access.” However, there are some owners who have attached a roof in order to prevent degradation damage and some who have covered their kote-e with glass.

(2) Difficulty of possession: “Do you think that possession of kote-e is difficult?”

All of the Meiji and Heisei kote-e owners answered “No.” Since the owners are accustomed to living closely with kote-e for a long time, they do not think that the possession of kote-e is difficult. However, there is an anxiousness and mental burden about whether it could be damaged by a typhoon, etc.

(3) Possession in the future: “Do you want to continue to own your kote-e in the future?”

All of the Meiji and Heisei kote-e owners answered “Yes.” All of them seem to recognize that the kote-e is important.

4.4 Communication about kote-e

(1) Communication with family about kote-e: “Do you talk with your family about kote-e?”

The communication with family about kote-e is shown in Fig. 16. Approximately half of Heisei kote-e owners answered “Yes” or “Not either” whereas all Meiji kote-e owners answered “No.” Some Heisei kote-e owners who made their kote-e as part of the Honmachi-dori promotion enterprise in Heisei 16 said, “I talked with my family about patterns of kote-e when I made our kote-e, and then I talked with my family about it for a while after it was completed.” Kote-e appears to be well discussed among families. However, some interviewees said, “I used

to talk with my family about kote-e after we had just made it, but since then the conversation has decreased and we no longer discuss it as we now take it for granted.” Some Meiji kote-e owners said, “Because we take kote-e for granted now, it is not a topic of discussion.” The concern over kote-e decreases as people grow used to it. There are some individuals who have no family to discuss it with as they live alone and who would like to talk with their children about kote-e as they have become interested in the art form.

(2) Communication with neighbors about kote-e: “Do you talk with your neighbors about kote-e?”

The communication with neighbors about kote-e is shown in Fig. 17. Sixty percent of Meiji kote-e owners and 30% of Heisei kote-e owners answered “Yes.” There were kote-e owner meetings where owners used to participate and talk with their neighbors. These meetings are no longer held. Some Meiji kote-e owners said, “At the meetings, I used to talk with my neighbors about the expense of the preservation of kote-e and to reminiscence about kote-e that used to exist.” Some of them also said, “Since kote-e in my neighborhood have been demolished and reduced, my talking with the neighbors has also decreased gradually.”

(3) Communication with tourists about kote-e: “Do you talk with tourists about kote-e?”

The communication with tourists about kote-e is shown in Fig. 18. All of the Meiji kote-e owners and less than half of the Heisei kote-e owners answered “Yes.” When looking at kote-e in central Ajimu, if tourists make a reservation in advance a volunteer guide can show them around. Many Heisei kote-e are in central Ajimu, and most Heisei kote-e owners depend on the volunteer guides. Since many Meiji kote-e are scattered away from the center of the town, it is difficult for a volunteer guide to show tourists around. Therefore, Meiji kote-e owners have to guide tourists around their kote-e themselves. They often meet tourists naturally, and the opportunities for Meiji kote-e owners to talk with tourists increases. Some of them are good speakers, lively storytellers, and knowledgeable resources. The contents of the talk are not only about kote-e stories, the meanings of patterns, and the pattern itself but also chat and gossip.

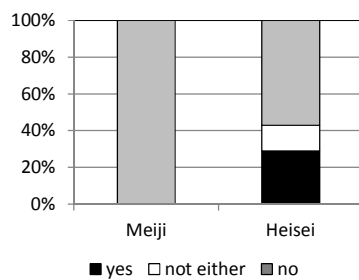


Fig. 16 Communication with family

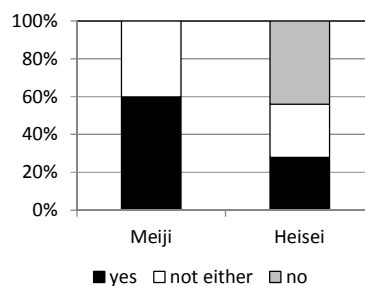


Fig. 17 Communication with neighbors

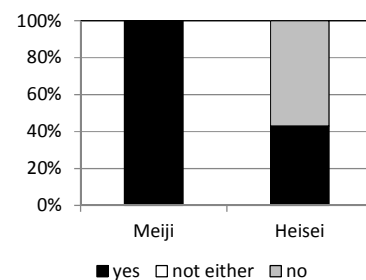


Fig. 18 Communication with tourists

5. Discussion

5.1 Changing meaning of kote-e (Fig. 19)

Most of the patterns of Meiji kote-e relate to the happiness, health, and prosperity of the family and the house such as talismans, perpetual youth, longevity, multiple births, prosperity in business, etc. Ninety percent of Meiji kote-e are in houses and most of them are in the main house. In contrast, most patterns of Heisei kote-e indicate special and famous products of Ajimu. Heisei kote-e are more often found in stores, hotels, the town hall, post offices, etc. on the first

floor. Kote-e itself is becoming an advertisement and a signboard for commercial purposes. The purpose of kote-e is now to be shown to many people. The original meaning of kote-e of wishing a family and house happiness is gradually beginning to fade. However, kote-e may be able to be developed to have various uses.

If kote-e develops in the original meaning, new kote-e is required to carry out guidance and instruction for installation in buildings which people live in, such as a house or a house with a store. Furthermore, it is good to simultaneously explain not only the technology of kote-e but also its meaning, purpose, and history, such as “Why kote-e is given to a house,” “What kind of wish can be made,” “How it has been developed,” etc. This education could take place through lessons at school or on-site training to the next generation.



Fig. 19 Change of kote-e

5.2 Harmony between kote-e and its building/the town (Fig. 20)

Most Meiji kote-e are plaster type and are directly installed in the window casings and gable ends of main houses and warehouses. Therefore, the sizes, materials, colors, and location of Meiji kote-e are decided according to the building system and design. In contrast, most Heisei kote-e are of the wall tapestry type and are installed on main house walls and the vacant space of outer walls. Therefore, Heisei kote-e may not be decided according to the building system and design. The size, materials, colors, and location of kote-e may not suit its building. There are also kote-e that have a strange appearance. The townscape may be seen to have a sense of incongruity as a result of these mismatches.

When a new kote-e of the wall tapestry type is installed, its size and location should be decided according to its building size system, such as the span, window size, window location, etc. Moreover, the relationship between kote-e and its background should be taken into account in terms of materials and colors. It is necessary and important to improve not only kote-e but also its building, to set up a design guideline, and to create a beautiful townscape that is unique to Ajimu.



Fig. 20 Incongruity in appearance

5.3 Bad condition of kote-e (Fig. 21)

Many kote-e that are in bad condition exist. Usually, the condition of both the kote-e and its building is bad. The owners are aged in many cases, and it may be difficult to easily restore or renovate the building. Immediate action is required and an organization needs to be formed that can subsidize and organize engineers and artists to preserve and restore kote-e.



Fig. 21 Bad condition of kote-e

5.4 Taking over to the next generation

Most Meiji kote-e owners seldom discuss kote-e with their family since they take it for granted or are disinterested in it. Heisei kote-e owners have also gradually decreased the amount of time they spend discussing kote-e with their family as time goes by, despite the fact that they talked about it often just after they were made.

If there are no opportunities to discuss kote-e constantly, the young generation's concern for it will fade. Kote-e have to be updated continuously so that both the owners and Ajimu residents and the next generation can enjoy the art form. Kote-e owners, old and new, need to periodically hold meetings where they can discuss kote-e with each other and exchange information about the creation, preservation, and maintenance of kote-e.

5.5 Re-evaluation of kote-e

There is a possibility that kote-e owners give a low evaluation to their kote-e because it is of minimal concern to them, they are disinterested, and they take it for granted. As a result, the condition of the art becomes bad, kote-e that does not harmonize with the townscape appears, and the consciousness of creating a beautiful town also become low.

Owners should re-evaluate and re-recognize the true worth of their kote-e. Owners should be given information to disseminate and a study organization should be created so they understand that kote-e is a worthy and important thing that is unique to Ajimu. It is hoped that this, in turn, will raise their consciousness of creating a beautiful town.

6. Conclusions

(1) The patterns of Meiji kote-e usually indicate the wishes for safety and prosperity of the family and the house. Meiji kote-e are usually installed in houses; however, they are not necessarily installed where they are visible from the front road. In contrast, Heisei kote-e are usually the wall tapestry type that is installed not only in houses with shops but also in shops and hotels; they are installed on the first floor and are parallel to the front road. Their patterns usually depict commercial and individual relationships. The main purpose of Heisei kote-e is to be seen by many people.

Heisei kote-e influence the townscape greatly because they can be seen well from the front road.

However, the original meaning of kote-e, such as wishes for the prosperity and safety of a family and house is fading gradually.

(2) Since Meiji kote-e are usually the plaster type and are directly installed in the window casings and gables of the building according to their building system and design, kote-e and its building are harmonized in terms of size, materials, colors, and location. In contrast, since Heisei kote-e are usually the wall tapestry type and are installed regardless of the building system and design, kote-e and its building may not be harmonized. It is thought that such incongruity has had a bad influence on the townscape.

(3) Heisei kote-e owners are proud of their kote-e because they are attached to them. As a result, they are proud of their town. However, they do not think that the town is beautiful. Some of them are dissatisfied with the townscape. Meiji kote-e owners are proud of their town, but they are not so proud of their kote-e and they do not think that the town is beautiful. This is why Meiji kote-e owners have a mindset of being unconcerned with and disinterested in kote-e, which they take for granted.

(4) Meiji kote-e owners seldom discuss kote-e with their family, and the time they spend discussing it with their neighbors has also decreased. However, they talk with tourists well. Heisei kote-e owners also talk less about kote-e with their family or neighbors as time goes by. Less than half of Heisei kote-e owners talk with tourists despite the fact that they want tourists to come and view them.

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