

Alleys as a Part of Living Space

A Case Study of Zoshigaya

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1. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

This paper shows residents' use of outside space at a densely built-up area in Japan. Zoshigaya is the study site of this research. It is located in Toshima, Tokyo. Densely built-up areas are regarded as weak in disaster, because of narrow alleys and densely-built wooden houses. An emergency vehicle cannot access to each house through narrow alleys. In case of fire, it may quickly spread out and whole town may be burnt down. Tokyo metropolitan government and Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport, and Tourism are designating Zoshigaya as a densely built-up area that needs special measurement for disaster prevention. That needs improvement as soon as possible.

On the other hand, many residents want to keep historic atmosphere and quiet alleys. Residents can stand talking in narrow alleys and spend their daily life very comfortably, because cars cannot go through narrow alleys. There is a strong neighborhood relationship that is very effective in case of disaster. Zoshigaya is dangerous in built environment, but safe in sense of community.

Photo1 and 2 show typical types of alleys before/after improvement. A typical scheme of densely built-up areas has improved with disaster prevention, but views of residents' lives have seen off and on were disappeared.

In this paper, we consider improvement of alleys as a part of living space in densely built-up areas. This paper based on a questionnaire survey asking detached house residents in Zoshigaya. We send out 1296 questionnaires in November, 2012. And we had 559 significant answers.



Figure1: Location of Zoshigaya



Photo1: A typical alley BEFORE improvement



Photo2: A typical alley AFTER improvement

2. ABOUT ZOSHIGAYA

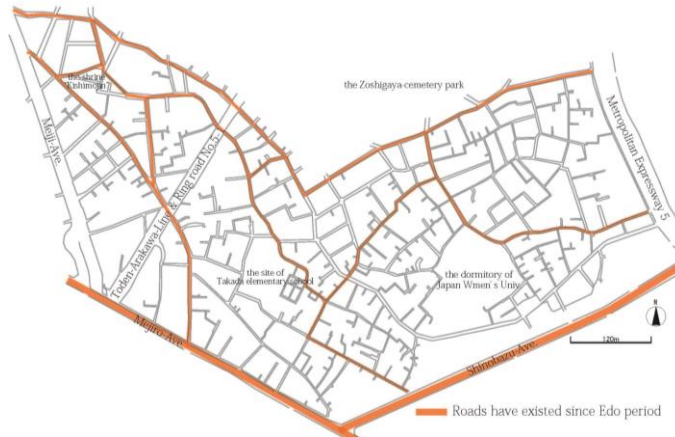
Zoshigaya is located in the inner city of Tokyo. Since Edo period, it has been famous sightseeing spot for visitors to the shrine "Kishimojin". Major access streets toward Kishimojin are developed as shopping and eating areas, and other parts of Zoshigaya were used as rice fields or temples' properties. After Great Kanto Earthquake (1923), many people have lived in

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downtown came in to neighboring areas, Zoshigaya was one of them, and they built up their houses along narrow paths between rice fields. In addition, Land Readjustment for reconstruction of war damage area after World War II was not implemented in Zoshigaya. As a result, Zoshigaya has continuously been a densely built-up area.

Now Zoshigaya is convenient area for commuting. Many residents have lived since their childhood. At the same time, there are new residents coming in to newly built flats and small houses redeveloped after an old house.



Referred to "Kaei new Zoshigaya Otowa Picture map (1853)"⁽¹⁾

Figure2: Roads have existed since 1853

And Figure2 shows roads that have existed since 1853(Edo period). Mejiro and Shinobazu Avenues and the approach to "Kishimojin" have existed since Edo period. These old roads allow people to walk long distance along each road, so that people can go through. On the other hand, other new alleys are dead end or do not allow to go through long distance. In other words, alleys that have become living spaces do not allow people to go through and are narrow.

3. USE OF ALLEYS

We investigated use conditions of alleys with questionnaire surveys asking detached house residents. The results are as follows.

3-1 SWEEPING

Sweeping an alley in the front of a house is a custom in Japan, however, this custom is disappearing in urban areas. But in Zoshigaya, 68.7% of detached house residents usually sweep alleys like photo3.

This behavior shows residents consider alleys as semi-private spaces and alleys and houses are close to each other.



Photo3:
A resident sweeping an alley

3-2 POTTING UP PLANTS

Although Zoshigaya is located in the inner city, there is much greenery. It seems many of residents in Zoshigaya love greenery. 60.5% of detached house residents are potting up plants at porches and 21.1% of detached house residents are potting up plants at alleys in the front of their houses. Some of them do not have a garden, so alleys may be parts of gardening spaces.



Photo4:
Flower pots on an alley

3-3 COMMUNICATION

Photo5 shows residents stand talking on an alley. 60.1% of detached house residents are often communicating with

neighbors on alleys. And 26.0% of residents that can see an alley from living rooms greet neighbors walking an alley daily.

A resident answered the questionnaire says “When I was a child, adults had greeted me. Now my children are greeted from neighbors, and I also greet neighbor children.” in her questionnaire sheet.

Alleys have a function of communication space. If traffic is heavy, these sights will disappear from alleys.



Photo5: Residents communicating on an alley

3-4 PUTTING BENCHES

Some detached house residents put a bench outside of their houses or alleys, and use it for many purposes in their life. Table1 shows the result of the questionnaire, what kind of purpose they put benches outside for. They put a bench for Meal, Party, Gardening, Reading, Star observation and so on. They use outside space as a part of living space. And some of them do not just put it for themselves, but also put it for old neighbors or guests. This is a result of a strong relation between inside and outside of a house and consideration for neighbors.

Houses putting a bench their porches are located on figure3. We found many of them, and most of them are facing to narrow alleys or locating on dead end alley. Narrow alleys are more comfortable for using as a part of living space and communicating with neighbors.



Photo6: A bench putted outside of a house

Table1: Major purposes of putting benches outside

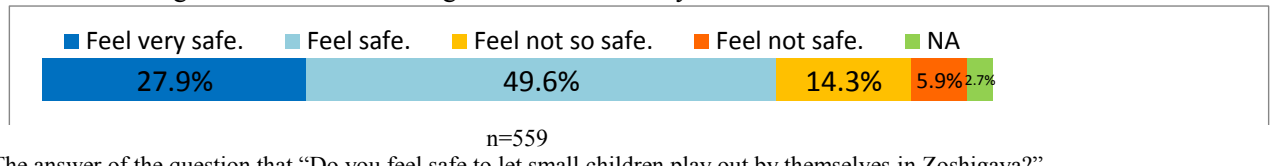
Expecting User	Purpose
family, him/herself	Gardening, Looking outside, Meal, Tea party, BBQ, Basking in the sun, Relax, Reading, Exercise, Seeing a festival, Star observation, Changing a light bulb, Work ...etc.
neighbors	for a walker, for a neighbor, for an old person, a guest relaxes, for a gardener...etc.



Figure3: Houses putting a bench their porches

4. IMPRESSION OF ZOSHIGAYA

Figure4 shows the answer of the question that “Do you feel safe to let small children play out by themselves in Zoshigaya?” in the questionnaire. 77.5% of detached house residents feel safe. There are many reasons of these answers, and 18.4% of residents say “I can see outside from inside of my house”. Small houses and narrow alleys make residents feel that “I know what is happening on the alley that I live along” and this creates strong sense of community.



The answer of the question that “Do you feel safe to let small children play out by themselves in Zoshigaya?”

Figure4: Impression of Zoshigaya

5. CONCLUSION

Through this survey, we found that alleys are used variously in residents’ daily life. For improvement of densely built-up areas, it is necessary to consider alleys as a living space. And it is also important that residents can see outside from inside of their houses.

We need to create a planning scheme including design codes for narrow alleys used as a living space of residents. For example, “A bench for communication”, “A window faced to an alley in the front of a house” like figure5. These design codes will make whole town comfortable to live and safe for disaster.

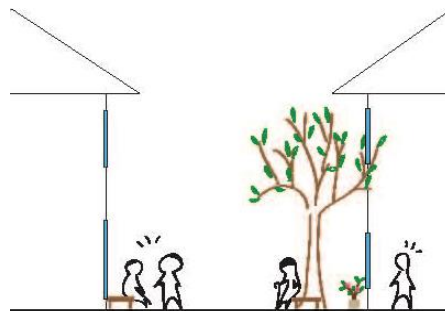


Figure5: An example of design code

Keywords: densely built-up area, alley, living space, outside space, bench

Note

(1) Figure2 shows some roads that have existed since 1853 in all roads existing at Zoshigaya in 2013.

It referred to “Kaei new Zoshigaya Otowa Picture map”.

References:

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