

Site visit to Hizen-hamashuku

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On Monday, the 3rd July 2017 we visited the historic complex of buildings of Hizen-hamashuku in the city of Kashima (Saga Prefecture). A bus was organized by the Saga University, to reach there from the city of Saga. The day started with the visit of a nearby lagoon, where the sea had withdrawn a lot during the day, so that Japanese children could play in the mud. After that we visited a local farmers' market, which impressed us with a lot of different kinds of dried fish and living seafood.



Fig. 1: The Lagoon at the edge of the Ariake Sea

After another short bus trip we reached Hizen-Hamashuku, which is situated at the confluence of the river Hamagawa into the Ariake Sea, which is a big bay in the south east of the Saga Prefecture. Due to Hizen-Hamashuku's location at the bay, it was traditionally a fishing village. It had more importance on a regional scale though, as it was also a post station in the Edo period. The name of Hizen-Hamashuku can be explained as following: "Hizen" was a prefix introduced after the Meiji-restoration in the second half of the 19th century, to differentiate villages or cities which had had the same name before the restoration. The last part of the name, "shuku" refers to cities which were located on the ancient national road of the Japanese empire and which offered accommodation and food for travellers on this road. Moreover, the city was also known for the numerous Sake breweries. Some of them are still functioning today and attracting a great number of tourists.



Fig. 2: Preservation-District in Hizen-Hamashuku

Hizen-Hamashuku actually consists of two Preservation-Districts for groups of historical buildings, as marked in red and blue on figure 2.

About the conservation work in Hizen-Hamashuku

As Japan is struggling with severe population losses in rural areas, the Japanese government has started to lance different measurements in those regions. One of the measurements is the determination of Preservation areas. For now there are 111 of such Preservation Areas to be found all over

Japan. In the prefecture of Saga there are four of these areas, with two of them being the already mentioned preservation areas of Hizen-Hamashuku. The Japanese government gives financial subsidies for repairing and landscaping houses and also for disaster prevention.

In the case of Hizen-Hamashuku between 80 and 90% of the reconstruction costs were covered by the Japanese government. Also for the preserved area, there is a very strict regulation for any building activity. Every construction work needs permission from the local government. Also, if a new house is built next to the preservation area, it has to be checked if it disturbs the historical complex of buildings.

In addition to the physical restoration work, there is a revitalization of the area happening, fostered by mainly soft measures. One of them is organizing a yearly festival in the area since some years. While the first festival didn't attract a lot of tourists of outside the city, the event has been very successful lately, with the tourist numbers going up.

Other actions taken were the organization of a concert in an ancient Sake brewery, the design of a community park for the local population and the establishment of a touristic guidance system within the city of Kashima, designed by Prof. Mishima and his team. Also the Sake tourism in the area was enhanced and as March is the month where the new Sake is ready, this is the one where Hizen-Hamashuku is full of visitants from all over Japan. It was also mentioned that due to this success, the atmosphere amongst the residents of the Hizen-Hamashuku and surrounding area became better. The current discussion is about the question how the city of Kashima and especially such preservation areas could gain in population and also in number of tourists and visitants.

About the architecture of the Samurai house we visited.

Lunch took place at a big house within the complex – a former Samurai house dating back to the Edo period. This house was in a very deteriorated condition, when the renovation – supervised by Prof. Mishima and his team started. Because of the size of the building, the costs for renovation were exceptionally high.

It is a precious example of traditional Japanese architecture. The great majority of the walls, not only at the inside, are made of paper and are moveable, so that the air can circulate on the one hand and rooms could be separated from each other or joined into a big room on the other hand. The basic measurement unit was the traditional Tatami mat, made out of rice straw. One Tatami



Fig.3: Entrance area of the building, with Tatami mats on the floor.

mat always had exactly the same size as on *jō* which was the smallest surface measure in former times. It's size is 1,64 m² (Wikipedia, 2017). The length of the mat was 1,8 m and this unit was used to measure the rooms height, which also depended on if there was a second floor or not. As typical for the whole Saga prefecture, the traditional house from the Edo period has a very sharp roof, held by a wooden main column in the centre of it.

The big room, where we had lunch was the former guest house of the building. It is decorated with ornaments dating back to the medieval ages on the shelf in one corner of the room, which except from that is very simple and has little decoration. Actually, this room could be divided into three by inserting the paper walls, but as we were a rather big group space was really needed. The guest house used to be the most luxurious room of the house.

Other than in regular town houses, samurai houses didn't have one main entrance. But in the case of the building we visited in detail in Hizen-Hamashuku, it is known that the owner was a farmer before getting the title of Samurai, which was a very unusual thing to happen. It is believed that he got the title as reward for a great achievement. That is why the entrance was attached later. It also has a porch roof.



Fig. 4: main entrance with porch roof.

Before the second world war silkworms were held in the second floor of the building. That may also be the reason, why the entrance area of the building, which other than the rest of the rooms is on the ground floor and not elevated, is bigger than in regular town houses. It is believed that silk working took place in this area. Right next to that entrance room on the ground floor, there was a small room to keep the animals. On the other side a kitchen, also on the ground floor, could be found. The fire stove in the kitchen was also used to smoke the woodworms out, as most of the building was made out of wood.

As usual in the buildings of the Edo Area the restrooms as well as the trash were placed outside the building, with a fair distance to avoid hygienic problems.

Disaster prevention in Hizen-Hamashuku

Also in this area being prepared for certain disasters plays a major role, as the old wooden buildings have a high risk to burn in case there is any open flame during the earthquake. Also, as the buildings stand very close to each other, it may be difficult for the fire brigade to extinct it. What has been done for this reason was the installation of several hydrants and water tanks in the area, so that the residents themselves would have the means to extinct a fire in case of emergency.

Online-Sources:

Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2017: Meiji-Restoration. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Meiji-Restoration> (21.08.2017)

Wikipedia, 2017: Tatami. <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tatami> (24.08.2017)