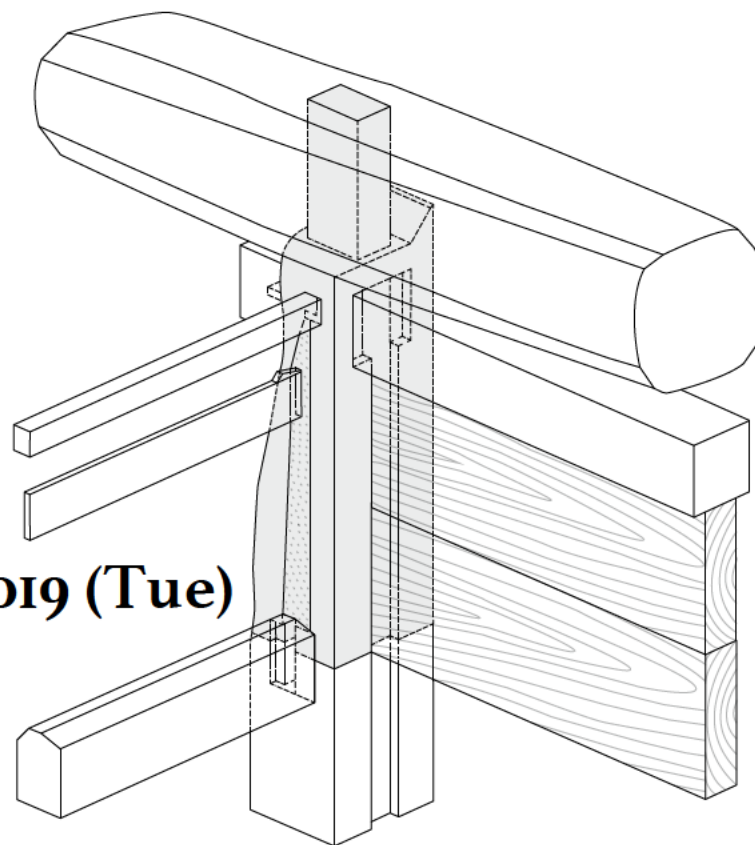


JOINERY

Time Capsule of Traditional Carpentry

*Parts of Japanese Folk Houses
Collected near Mt. Haku*

September 6, 2019 (Fri) - November 19, 2019 (Tue)



Foreword

The Kuzuryu River region below Mt. Haku is famed for its heavy snows. Here, numerous folk houses (minka) 200 to 300 years old once stood. The houses were distinguished by strong, sturdy pillars able to withstand heavy snows and enormous curved beams cut from trees bent by the weight of snow. To connect these pillars and beams, the shiguchi method of traditional wood joinery was employed. Shiguchi is a method of connecting pillar and beam using a right-angle (or oblique-angle) joint formed of a hoza (tenon tongue) and hoza-ana (mortise hole). It also refers to the joint itself.

Architect Yoshihiro Takishita (1945~) began to encounter and collect shiguchi joinery in the 1960s while working to relocate and restore the old folk houses standing at the foot of Mt. Haku. When the joints, normally hidden, were exposed during the dismantling, Takishita was struck by their beauty and craftsmanship. Finding it difficult to discard the damaged or worn joints, he began collecting them. Today, the shiguchi stand quietly on display. While no longer a functioning part of a building, the carved joints speak eloquently to us of the character of the old folk houses.

This exhibition displays examples of shiguchi joints that supported folk houses in the Edo-period (1603-1868). Please look well at the simple, powerful formative beauty of each work of joinery from Yoshihiro Takishita's collection. For this exhibition, members of the Traditional Technology Institute (Dento giho kenkyu-kai) have reconstructed their original appearance in diagrams, which are also displayed.

Listening closely to the aged joints, we will hear the voices of their carpenters, who carved them in dedication to their craft. Through the exhibition, visitors will have opportunity to know the structure of Japan's folk houses and depth of its carpentry traditions. Both are aspects made clear by the shiguchi.

We wish to extend our warmest appreciation to Yoshihiro Takishita and the Traditional Technology Institute, and everyone whose efforts have made this exhibition possible.

LIXIL GALLERY

What Shiguchi Joints Tell Us

Yoshihiro Takishita (Architect, Chief Director, Association for the Preservation of Old Japanese Farmhouses)

Shiguchi joinery has a long history. Tracing it would be like traveling through the history of the Japanese since Jomon times (14,000—300BC).

Observing the great pillars and beams dismantled from farmhouses two or three-hundred years old, lying on the ground, I have felt awed by the strong appearance of their tenons and mortises. In my youth, the powerful looking joints struck me deeply. The traces of the hatchet and broad-ax and those of the saw, adze, and chisel gave me a sense of connection with the woodcutters, carpenters, and villagers of the past. The shiguchi joints nevertheless disappeared from view after the pillars and beams were reassembled in the completed, newly relocated house.

The start of my collection was a wood “piece” I picked up at the reconstruction site of a steep-roofed gassho zukuri farmhouse, relocated from Fukui prefecture, in my student days. I immediately felt captivated by its shapely, long tenon tongue. That shiguchi joint—which I later named “Samurai”—and other joints I picked up at work sites thereafter eventually received new lives standing in my “Shiguchi-do” Joinery Hall, where I keep and display my collection.

These shiguchi joints, imbued with the spirits of villagers and skills of carpenters, are a time capsule of the wisdom and memory of premodern society. With their diverse, striking shapes, moreover, they fascinate people of today.

What can we actually see in these “pieces of pillars and beams” ?

Shiguchi joints speak eloquently of the lives of the common people of Japan, even more so than the spaces of the folk houses. Their wood—long believed to be the abode of a sacred spirit—reveals the wonder of nature. Wood expresses nature’ s mystery, tenderness and ferocity; its beauty and coarseness; its rationality and irrationality; and the passing time.

The primal landscape in my mind’ s eye is the spiritually rich way of life of farm villagers who brought their minka architecture to final form, strengthened by centuries of hard struggle and guided by a deep reverence for trees learned from Shinto, the ancient worship of mountains. With these thoughts in mind, I place myself before the shiguchi joints and talk with them, my thoughts running to when, in the Kamakura period (1185-1333), farming people first left their pit dwellings and came to possess their own land; and to when, in the Edo period (1603-1868), faced with limited resources in a sakoku (“closed country”), they achieved a completely self-sufficient way of living—what was truly a sustainable circulatory society. Living under the regulations and protection of the Tokugawa shoguns, the farming people administered their own villages by continuously helping one another, and regional society shone in Japan. Shiguchi joints have witnessed the history of a people who lived in awe of nature and their ancestors. These architectural and culture relics tell us more truth than any history book.

As you stand before the shiguchi joints, I hope you will enjoy a free and intuitive dialogue with them and sense the warm hearts of carpenters and villagers of the old days.

The Homeland of Shiguchi Joinery—Folk Houses of Fukui

Uyo Fukui (Director, Echizen Japanese Old Farmhouse Research Center)

Around when the Olympic Games were held in Tokyo (1965), twenty years after the war, Japan’ s mountain villages began hollowing out in parallel with the stabilization and rapid urbanization of Japanese society. Under the banner of disaster prevention, large-scale dams were numerous constructed in the depopulated villages to meet a growing demand for electricity. As a result of the dams, areas upstream along large rivers and areas of heavy snowfall deep in the mountains were submerged—regions where large, sturdy minka (folk houses), constructed using the abundant forest resources, had steadily grown in number since the early modern age. At this time, research into the folk houses began to be actively conducted in the field of architectural history, along with that into temples and shrines. In response, the Agency for Cultural Affairs also conducted a series of “urgent minka surveys” in each prefecture. The purpose was to locate, among folk houses unknown and buried in history, houses having historical and regional value, and the especially important ones were immediately designated as Important Cultural Properties.

In the tug of war between development and preservation, some folk houses were designated cultural properties but others were destroyed without anyone noticing. In some cases, timbers from the dismantled folk houses were recycled and received new lives. Those of one folk house became a soba noodle shop in the suburbs; those of another became a souvenir shop in a tourist area, and those of yet another became the villa of an investor.

Kuzuryu Dam in Fukui is a rockfill dam built from 1962 to ’ 68. Yoshihiro Takishita created his own residence using the pillars and beams of an old folk house located here that was destined for destruction. On this footing, I hear, he has since given new life—in residences and vacation homes—to many old pillars and beams from unused folk houses in Katsuyama City and Ikeda-cho, Fukui.

Displayed here are sections of pillars and beams that were judged as unfit for reuse in a structural reassembly. Their striking forms, cut with shiguchi (right angle joints) and tsugite (end joints), nevertheless allowed them to escape the scrap yard. In terms of their shiguchi and tsugite methods, they do not exhibit unusual features unique to this region, but there are some surprisingly wonderful applications, such as extending the thick tenon tongue through the joint assembly

to serve the additional function of a connecting beam or a tie beam. The group of carpenters formerly established by the gate of the nearby Soto Sect Daihonzan Eihei-ji Temple undertook not only temple and shrine work but also constructed important farmhouses in the vicinity, so it is believed that they deepened and polished their skills through such work.

To protect the residents in the daily lives, the folk houses in the deep snow mountain areas used thick, precisely fabricated timbers. Time’ s passage has further heightened the beauty of their appearance. Resembling abstract artworks, they perhaps offer a different viewing experience from sculptures evoking gods and Buddhas. That experience is likely purer for people who are unaware of the actual functions and meaning of the shiguchi joints.