

# Japanese Spatial Culture from a Cross-Disciplinary Approach

## JAPARCHI: From a Network to a Collaborative Tool for Innovative Research

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Thank you for the invitation. As I got engaged in the discussion, the topic of the symposium became more and more stimulating for me, because in the beginning I was troubled with the idea of what should I do with this topic. Finally this theme could be related to a project we have, within the Japarchi network which I have co-directed for the last two years with my colleague Sylvie Brosseau, a professor of Waseda University. So, as a director of this French-Japanese research network I am trying to think about the future of this network by using IT. I brought the book published by the network in 2014 that is circulating in the room.

First I will briefly introduce what is the Japarchi Research Network, why it exists and how it works. The first part will be a presentation of this collective publication (book) done in 2014. The second part will be a very short presentation of a new project under discussion because we have to present a new project every three years. And in the third part I will show one existing example of a French online tool which could be a model for what we would like to do. As conclusion I will present a short summary of the project and its potential.

### **What is the Japarchi Research Network?**

Considering space as a cultural tool to understand a society and its environment—past, present and future—, we consider that identifying and sharing fundamental knowledge is becoming more and more crucial in the context of a rapidly changing world. Research has indeed an important role to play in this context, such as revealing the some-

times hidden, lost or forgotten spatial structures of a specific culture, clarifying its meaning and complexity, looking at its formation or regeneration through various influences, borrowings, adaptations, etc. In other words, it helps to better understand changes in progress and cultural differences, by bringing closer different cultures in order to temper the conventional on-going discourse on cultural homogenization due to our globalized world. Spatial notions and their built-up devices constitute a visible and material expression of such dynamics. The dispersed range of knowledge it requires formed the first motivation to establish the Japarchi research network.

Japarchi is a French-Japanese network that has been founded in 2006 by a group of French architects and scholars who are teaching and researching at French National Graduate Schools of Architecture.

This research network is one of the 10 research networks that are funded by the French Ministry of Culture. It is worth to emphasize that architecture schools belong to the Ministry of Culture and not to the Ministry of Education in France. This project has been developed as part of the Ministry policies to promote research in the field of architecture, urban landscape and territory, history and design, with a quite large scope. It also aims to encourage cross disciplinary and international research.

The network contract at the Ministry is renewed every three years. It is mandatory to submit a project proposal and have it approved by a committee of evaluation, composed of peer-professors.

Today this network has nearly 100 French and Japanese speaking members, this is the first particularity of this network: the Japanese colleagues are all speaking French, and are mostly doing research about French topics in architecture or urban and landscape theory, history and design. Moreover, French speaking members are teaching or doing research and have engaged in studies of Japan's spatial culture or comparative studies between France and Japan's spatial culture. About 2/3 of the members are French and 1/3 are Japanese.

All the members have a background from varied disciplines which is challenging for when we need to work together. At the same time this has a very high potential to develop new research fronts through the exchange of the research viewpoints and topics from different fields.

The original task of the network was not only to do the research, but also to link the research production to the educational and professional activities in the field between France and Japan. Another task is to capitalize the French-Japanese research in these fields and disseminate it among a larger research community. Another task is also to make the produced knowledge and information available for students engaged at the Master level and then orient them towards the Doctoral course level in this field. Of course the network has the objective to foster scientific and academic activities like organizing seminars, symposiums, publishing books and articles as usual.

In a way this symposium gives us an opportunity to think what is this network and finally rethink the role of Japarchi as something more than a network. It is perhaps possible to define this group as a knowledge and information platform which goal is to facilitate and promote cross-cultural studies between France and Japan in our fields. It is not a research laboratory specialized in one specific discipline but a platform where the specialists on the study of Japan's Spatial Culture coming from different institutions and disciplines can meet, exchange and collaborate.

It is organized towards the aim of guaranteeing a high level of academic quality, with a double head direction, one in France and one in Japan. There is a scientific committee composed of French and Japanese members of the network and this committee gives orientations and evaluates members proposals according to ongoing collective research projects. When publishing collective books there is a reading committee which composition is adapted according to the research project.

The tools used by this platform are very simple. As main tool, there is a website, a communication tool that is open to the public, at the same time it is a showcase to display members' activities and production. It serves also as an information database where the general public and students can find information about French-Japanese exchange programs, French-Japanese research centers, activities and so on. We have also a steering group which role is to link the network members and the public be-

cause as the website is open to the public there are often questions from the public about the activities of the network or about other general information. The steering group feeds the website with information and support in the organization of events such as seminars or symposiums for instance.

The most important feature of this organization is its shared framework. This format allows us to develop a collective research about the question of space, particularly, in dealing with notions of the Japanese space as a material or conceptual device. This was a way we found to bring together the diversity of knowledge, the diversity of disciplines, and the diversity of written and visual materials that are manipulated. A very simple website built upon a low budget, and in the directory it is possible to click the names of the network members to access the list of the publications of one specific researcher and their respective biographies. There is a “news” page where are published the individual production of the members of the network. Another page where is possible to get information about French-Japanese institutions or research programs, etc..

### Japarchi Editorial Production in 2014

The book that is circulating in the room during the presentation is the first collective production that the network has produced (Fig.1).

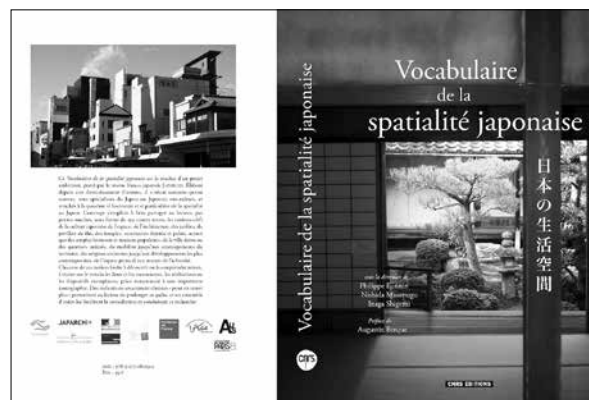


Fig.1 Japarchi collective publication in 2014 (back and front cover): Philippe Bonnin, Nishida Masatsugu, Inaga Shigemi, (eds), *Vocabulaire de la spatialité japonaise*, CNRS, Paris, 605p.

This is what we call the “frame” that explains the methodology used in the network. It focuses on the definition of some spatial concepts present in the Japanese Culture through explanations given with words or vocabulary particular to the Japanese context, and the translation of it into spatial devices. This frame has been implemented regarding four specific dimensions of space as research

objects and our purpose is to use them in a dynamic research process rather than within compartments or partitions, separated by categories. The four specific dimensions that we share take into consideration the varied disciplines of members' speciality. A first dimension is that of "scale": researchers could think about one notion under very different scales (micro to very large), and think about the links between varied scales. The second specific dimension is "time", whether historical or at the present time. So in the process of defining the notion of the Japanese spatial culture we tried to identify a dynamic relationship between different periods. This would allow to understand the evolution of the notion and the spatial devices in order to clarify if there is some permanence through the centuries or whether there are changes, evolutions or mutations in the notions and spatial materialization of notions through different periods. The third specific dimension is "fields and disciplines": through the analysis of one notion there was an interest in clarifying the interaction rather than the partitions of knowledge into different disciplines. And the fourth specific dimension, which is still a challenging one, is the "duality of knowledge sources", between practice and theory. This is because in the network some members are teaching theory and some are teaching design more connected to the professional world.

The format used in this collective research project is typically based on the conventional dictionary's entry. It is based on the specifications or guidelines given in the process of writing an article, which try to reflect the complementary specific dimensions explained before.

The main principle is that each entry is a word that could be a notion, a toponym, an architectural typology, a pattern or a spatial phenomenon, among others. What is important is that each word was chosen with consideration to its relevance to the Japanese spatial culture whether in the past or today. The advantage of using terms/words rather than themes, for instance, is that all categories offer a possibility to build upon real interdisciplinary approaches. Each entry in this book starts with a focus on the genealogy of the term/word and its various meanings from origin to the present day usage. Then the entry develops a definition based on the explanation of the spatial device in terms of its form when there is knowledge available about it. Next, the entries try to bring light to the transformation process as well as permanence of the device. So each entry's contents make reference to existing

dictionary entries when appropriate. Visual materials such as drawings and photographs are also used to illustrate historical stages or specific representations of each device or notion during its process of existence within the Japanese culture.

For you to have an idea about the format of the book:

- The book contains 190 entries;
- It has been written by 64 members of the network;
- It has been reprinted several times (the success of the book is explained by the fact that students have been using it as a guide inside French architecture schools. Moreover, in many cases their teachers use it to prepare their courses);
- It received a prize from the French Academy of Architecture

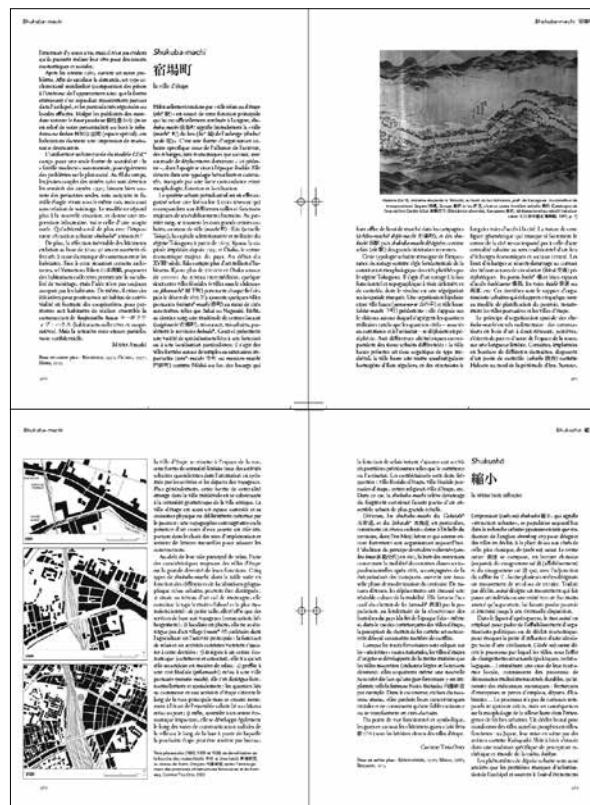


Fig.2a, Fig.2b  
Example of one entry using an urban type to describe a large scale spatial organisation, from its original meaning to its current definition ("shukuba-machi/宿場町/la ville d'étape", op. cit., p.460-463).

The book had three editors, with a special mention to Philippe Bonnin who was the former director of Japarchi network and its founder.

As an example of one entry, an urban type, the post-station *Shukubamachi*. As you can see, it appears in Japanese, in French and in the romanized form of the Japanese term. This is to show the di-



iversity of visual materials used, beginning from the typical historical representations. This kind of material allows researchers to make their own drawings, and understand the evolution or the destruction / disappearance of this urban type nowadays. (Fig.2a, Fig.2b)

In the book there are conventional navigation tools. In the index all the terms are listed in the alphabetical order of their romanized form from the original Japanese terms. There is also an index of family names of authors, and a thematic index such as housing, housing regulation, or other fundamental categories, such as, spaces or palace's architecture, among others. There is one index missing in the book, that is the list of terms in French language organized in the alphabetic order. Thus, some readers complained that they couldn't find words because they did not know the original Japanese term, so we are thinking that one solution to that would be to create an online list of the terms translated in French in the website (Fig.3).

Term	Japanese	Page
secteurs de la construction	Zenon / sentai jiyuho	942
alignement	Madinani	939
aménagement du territoire	Kotudo koku	926
équipement	Jichesi	932
équipement type	LDK (Living dining kitchen)	933
architecture	Kenchiku	947
barne	Humi	935
barrière	Kitag	936
barraques	Barakku	946
béton	Konkretu	929
bien culturel	Bunko zai	913

Fig.3 One intermediate tool: the book's online index according to the French alphabetical order (<http://japarchi.fr/outils/index-alphabetique-francais-du-vocabulaire-de-la-spatialite-japonaise/>).

### Japarchi new project for 2018-2020

For the next stage of the project, we thought it would be interesting to develop the network as a collaborative tool in order to create a dynamic online database similar to the book. The idea is to create a simple and classical database, because the traditional printed system of publication is very limited regarding the need to update, to add new entries, to translate the contents in English, to add more visual materials, etc. Thus, we would like to keep the same principle of organization and use the advantages of IT tools to develop this dictionary into a larger project. As one example of its limitations, when the project of the book started a

list of 300 entries was envisaged. However, it was not possible to add all of the terms that had been selected by that time by the scientific committee. It would be possible in an online form to expand the contents of the publication.

We have also been discussing what benefits would bring this kind of online tool for the network. In terms of knowledge production, it has undeniably been increasing the dynamic between various fields, disciplines, types and scales. A collaborative tool online would probably be the best way to allow a collaborative work that would offer a new perspective for the research, and would allow an upgrade in the quality of the knowledge produced. Moreover, it would allow the production of innovative approaches to the understanding of the spatial notions. It would also stimulate the reactivity of the research community which would be able to make comments on the online contents, make reviews, or support in improving and updating the contents, or making it available in different languages. Another advantage of working online is that it would allow us to geo-localize the examples that the authors mention in different entries. It would also be an opportunity to interconnect the written and the visual materials in one entry; to link them with the contents of different entries, by creating a kind of superposition of multiple layers of information; to add visual materials of varied types; and to make hyperlinks with others Japanese studies centers or institutions or to create other open editions in collaboration with scientific magazines, for instance.

As an example of an existing database, there is a project which is still being developed offline, called "Archipédie" created by the French National Center for Architecture and Preservation (*Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine*) in Paris. It is a collaborative digital encyclopedia on Modern and Contemporary architecture and the focus is the history of men and women who make architecture. It is an editorial project with educational and experimental dimensions and it creates a place for sharing and diffusing knowledge on this topic. It is conceived in collaboration with teachers and students from the French Architecture Schools and the aim is to incorporate researchers' productions in the near future. The main target now is the general public (Fig.4).

The main purpose of "Archipédie" as an online collaborative tool is also to take part on the critical thinking or debate about the Modern and Contemporary Architecture through the use of innovative

editorial information tools. “Archipédie” is organized in four categories: people, groups, institutions and publications (other categories, such as events, themes and architectural pieces are planned to be incorporated online from the next year). Each entry of this online encyclopedia and collaborative tool is the name of an architect. So it is quite conventional because finally the content of each entry is a monograph. The contents uploaded online are checked by a committee who is also in charge of deciding if the submitted contribution can be uploaded or not.

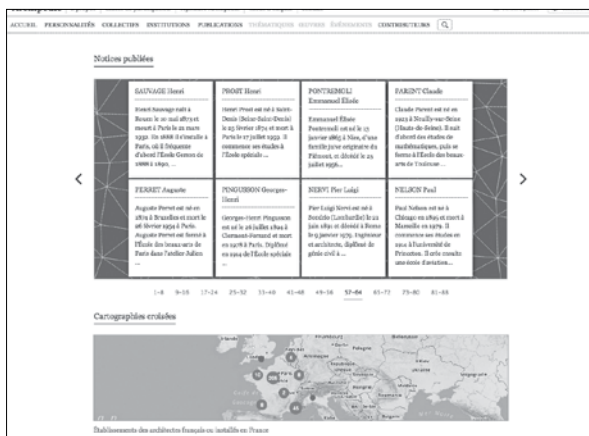


Fig.4. Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine (CAPA, Paris), (ed.), 2017: “Archipédie”, <http://archipédie.citedelarchitecture.fr>

I show you some images of “Archipédie”. This is the homepage where different entries are listed. It is possible to look for the name of an architect we’re interested in but we can also search in this encyclopedia for the location/geo-location of the architect’s offices — if the architect has many offices around the world — or the main regions where the office has built. In the dashboard of the encyclopedia the upper left part has the information about which one is the latest entry, or which one has been recently modified, and in the upper right corner, we can know who are the new contributing authors and on which entry they are working on. At the bottom left we can know the proposals that are under examination of the scientific committee and the column in the middle is the latest contributors to this encyclopedia. More statistically, we have how many entries are published or how many are waiting in the process of being checked. We can understand how many teachers, researchers, or students collaborated in this encyclopedia and how many people had made comments on different entries.

Some interesting tools that they are now developing will deliver broader views of the whole data of this encyclopedia. For example, a worldwide

view of the implementation or localization of the architects’ offices or their online published entries. This is a typical example of one entry: the architect’s monograph shows his lifetime production, and in the end of the monograph there is a quite detailed chronology. If we click on the year where the architect was born we have an overview of other architects who were born in the same year, so we can understand the generation to which that architect belongs. After the detailed chronology there is also a list of the buildings the architect made and, in the same way, if we click on the “building” we can have an overview of who were the main builders or important buildings created in the same year. At the end of the entry there is a list of the publications of the architect, a bibliography and the location of architect’s archives and other related links.

## Conclusion

So, we have been discussing about the adoption of a temporary name for the project that could be: “Japarchipédie”. In summary we have demonstrated the potential of this digital platform project under discussion. As an attempt to answer to the questions posed by the organizers of this symposium, we have tried to define the project of a digital collaborative tool for research about the Japanese culture of space and its components (architecture, city and landscape). We have two purposes with this proposition: first, reinforce a cross-disciplinary approach, in order to enrich the knowledge production process; and second, to give access of the results to specialists and also to a general public.

The type of data likely to be included in this project is similar to that used for the publication but this new digital project would allow us to review, update, translate, interconnect and geo-localize the materials. We envisage that most of the contributors would be researchers and doctoral course students. And we would be glad to hear your comments on this project, thank you!

## Questions and Comments

**(Hugo SEGAWA)** We have in our network on Latin American architecture, several undergraduate and graduate students that could collaborate in updating or feeding the information of the database. One problem that we have is that many of the senior researchers have difficulties in dealing with the technical aspects of the database (the IT knowledge), and the young generation has of course less problems with that. If you consider all the variations in

generations of people involved in the project, from seniors to young students, do you think we can open this database to all the people, sometimes just transitory people who are part of the research program or research group for a period but they leave after a while? Because we can think about the Wikipedia system that is absolutely open, but sometimes it is so open that questionable articles might come out. What do you think about open systems? Do you think there should exist managers that permanently control the “feeding” of the entries on the system?

**(Corinne TIRY-ONO)** Absolutely, in the organization of the network, which is an academic group, there is a scientific committee that will control the quality of the contributions and if the online project develops further, we would need to organize a special group that is comfortable with IT tools and have the capacity to control the quality of the contents, and of the materials that would be proposed by the contributors. This already exists for the “Archipédie” online collaborative tool. There is a coordinating group that is really controlling strictly what is proposed and that can forbid or give authorization to what can be published or not. It is just like when an article is proposed to publication in an academic journal: there is a reading committee that reads the paper and makes comments then refuses, accepts or asks to review, update or develop some points. It would have exactly the same way of functioning. I am confident that if we organize people in charge of filtering the information, the contributions will match a level of academic content.

**(Adriana PICCININI)** Coming back to the Wikipedia discussion, one good feature of Wikipedia is that the process between submission and review is quite fast. If we think about academic publications this process can take quite a long time. If we think about using efficiently digital tools, would the “academic” format of publication take too much time?

**(Corinne TIRY-ONO)** Different than a book where the results are published and once printed cannot be changed, the purpose of this collaborative tool is to create a dynamic research process where contents are always developing and being updated. So whether the uploading process is fast or not, this is less important. I think the most important is to have the possibility to update the contents and allow people to bring their knowledge to always improve the quality of the content.

**(Gaia CARAMELLINO)** I wonder if in the process of shifting from the book to the digital platform and include a new research, are you also planning to deal with the usage of the terms by different specialists’ fields? Or if the usage of the terms from specialists to other people? I am thinking about the example of Christian Topalov, “L’Aventure des Mots de la Ville”, do you plan also to include the variety of uses of terms when you plan this platform? Is there a plan to present the different kinds of use of words, terms and notions in varied fields?

**(Corinne TIRY-ONO)** Basically in the book we have already tried to do so. We have explanations of the change of the use and usage of notions until today.