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To cite this article: Yorifusa Ishida (1990) Japanese industrial villages and a reformist factory owner, Planning Perspectives, 5:3, 295-305, DOI: 10.1080/02665439008725711

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02665439008725711

Published online: 08 May 2007.
Japanese industrial villages and a reformist factory owner

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Magosaburo Ohara (1880–1943), owner of the Kurashiki Boseki Co. Ltd. was the only reformist among Japanese factory owners in pre-war days and planned to construct ‘Shokko Mura’ (industrial village) in Kurashiki City. He could not, however, complete this ‘Shokko Mura’ plan in the face of severe competition from other Japanese spinning companies. The achievement of his ‘industrial village’ idea thus fell far short of that of his foreign counterparts. However, three ‘socialistic’ institutes which he founded for basic research on his social reform activities have made an important contribution to the improvement of labour problems in Japan.

Preface

Ebenzer Howard’s Garden City idea was largely based on previous efforts by utopian socialists and reformist factory owners to realize ‘industrial villages’. Sir Titus Salt’s Saltaire, George and Richard Cadbury’s Bourneville, William Lever’s Port Sunlight and the Krupp Colonies are the most typical examples. Instances of ‘industrial villages’ and reformist factory owners in Japan constitute the main theme of this paper. Taking a Japanese reformist by the name of Magosaburo Ohara and his Kurashiki Boseki (spinning) Co. Ltd. as an example, the author considers the immature ‘industrial village’ idea in Japan.

Information about industrial villages

Information about European industrial villages was brought to Japan early in the 1870s. For example, the Iwakura Mission had visited Saltaire on 25 October 1872, the record of the mission’s round trip explaining Saltaire as follows:

In the village they established a school. The children of workers, boys and girls alike, spend half a day in learning at the school and another half a day in working at the mill. This might be a good system for

advancing their abilities both theoretically and practically. It might be beneficial not only for the children but also for enterprises for they work in the mill and earn money. It is regarded as an honour for English gentlemen to take care of the working class and to do so much for aid to the poor. The considerations that this factory owner took also bring him honour. The subjects taught at this school are not those of high grades but the basic subjects of primary school which are essential arts for men and women. In front of the school, there are alms houses, where aged and retired workers are given accommodation and support. There is also a hospital to treat patients from the village. Village people come to a newly built temple and are given sermons to build up good character. In many other factories that we visited before and after, we could hardly find any examples similar to this well-arranged factory. Five thousand village people all look up to Mr Salt's family. This system is called the 'Shokko Shigai' (industrial village) and it is very important for the development of industry[1].

The Mission also visited Krupp Colonies in Essen, Germany on 7 March, 1873, and judged that the Colonies, despite housing more than 3000 workers, were not flourishing and not as praiseworthy as Saltaire[2]. Utopian socialist Robert Owen's idea and achievements were introduced to Japan in the 1890s[3] and his name and philosophy became popular by 1920[4]. Nevertheless this early information was scarcely referred to by Japanese factory owners in the 19th century.

In 1909, a voluntary group of officers belonging to the Local Division of the Ministry of Home Affairs published a book entitled Den-en Toshi (Garden City)[5]. Dr Shun-ichi Watanabe's view is that this book, despite its title, is mainly concerned not with the garden city idea, but with many items regarding social welfare, improvement of living conditions, and dissemination of good morals and manners[6]. However, it is noteworthy that in relation to the Japanese industrial village idea, this book also refers to Western industrial villages such as Port Sunlight, Bournville and the Krupp Colonies. For example, the book cites Bournville as one of the good examples of the garden city idea, explaining Cadbury's planning approach and the design of Bournville over seven pages:

The new village at Bournville together with Port Sunlight have been praised as the two most important examples of the garden city. Every one who visited there admired the picturesque scene of the village where all houses are colourfully made of red bricks and green slates.... In the beginning, Mr Cadbury himself engaged the management of the village, but now the entire charge and management are entrusted to an association. The whole system works very well and no part of the initial plan remains unrealized. As they attached utmost importance to a cooperative management system, they decided that all revenues be accumulated and put into a fund. Using this fund, they got more land nearby suitable for an 'industrial village' and made arrangements for future development[7].

Moreover in the explanation, the fact that Bournville was designed not only for workers at the Cadburys' chocolate factory but for many other workers living and working in Birmingham, and the fact that all estates of the Bournville village were the responsibility of the Bournville Trust and managed through residents' cooperation, were not overlooked. We cannot delineate exactly the relation between the Japanese reformist's idea of the industrial village (mentioned later) and the information on foreign examples introduced by the Home Ministry's Den-en Toshi. But as this book was said to be popular and went through several editions, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Magosaburo Ohara, a Japanese reformist factory owner, had read it.
Housing conditions of the Japanese working class in the 19th century

Housing conditions of the Japanese working class were very poor in the 19th century. In the early years, many workers in modern developing industries were former craftsmen or day-labourers who lived in back-to-back tenement houses or in slums in the towns. Later on, as Japanese industrialization progressed very rapidly, factory owners, especially owners of spinning factories who employed many young women workers, had to recruit their workers from rural regions and provide them with dormitories or company houses to live in. But the conditions of accommodation they provided were no better and were sometimes even worse than those of the tenement houses in the towns.

Tomioka Seishi (a silk-spinning factory at Tomioka, Gunma Prefecture) was established in 1872 and operated by Kobu-sho (Ministry of Industry) as a model factory to promote the modern silk-spinning industry in Japan and to train women workers who were called together from all over the nation, being expected to become the leaders among silk-spinning workers.

We cannot determine precisely the actual condition of women workers' dormitories at this model factory. But in 1872, at the opening of the factory, women workers were housed in a building originally designed for engineers and workers invited from France. In 1873, a new women workers' dormitory was constructed. The dormitory consisted of two buildings each of which was a two-storeyed wooden building of around 1000 m\(^2\) floor space. It had about 60 tatami-matted rooms of around 20 m\(^2\) each, in rows along the middle corridor. In 1873, the dormitory, with a total floor space of around 2000 m\(^2\) housed about 400 women workers (three or four workers per room), so the accommodation density was not excessively high[8].

Tomioka Seishi was a government-managed model factory, so the women workers' dormitory there was a rather good one. But even up to the 1940s, ordinary women workers' dormitories of Japanese factories were no more than barrack camps to tie the workers to their factories.

In 1899, Gen-nosuke Yokoyama, a famous socialist newspaper reporter, described [9] the low wages, long working hours, unbelievable labour conditions and miserable living environment of the working class. He also referred to women workers' dormitories in spinning factories; the rooms of the dormitories were generally 12-15 jo (20-25 m\(^2\)) in size, but in some cases there were very large rooms of 30-40 jo (50-65 m\(^2\)) with 40 or 50 girls crowded in each room.

In 1925, Wakizou Hosoi, another reporter who had worked in spinning factories for 15 years, mentioned that the dormitories of spinning factories were either enclosed by high fences of brick or other durable material with spikes on top or surrounded by moats and canals, and looked like forts[10]. These forts were built not to thwart invaders but to prevent the escape of women workers. According to his report, the prototype of women workers' dormitories was a big wooden building with dozens of tatami-matted rooms rowed along a dark middle corridor and referred to as a 'butagoya-shiki (pigsty-type)' because of the floor plan and the insanitary conditions. Accommodation density was said to be one woman worker per one ‘tatami’ (0.9 x 1.8 m in size). Moreover, the room and ‘man-nen-doko’ (bedding never put away) was used twice by day workers and night workers, so the actual density was doubled[11].

In 1927, the Home Ministry promulgated Regulations for Factory Workers' Dormitories, but the standard provided by them remained very low. For example, accommodation density was to
be not less than 2.5 m² per person (Article 10) and housing more than 16 persons per room (Article 9) was prohibited[12].

Magosaburo Ohara; a reformist factory owner

In Japan we find few cases by reformist factory owners which deserve to be called 'industrial villages'. Magosaburo Ohara (1880–1943), owner of Kurashiki Boseki (spinning) Co. Ltd. (hereafter called ‘Kura-Bo’ for short) was perhaps the only reformist among Japanese factory owners in pre-war days, and he determined to construct a Japanese-style* Industrial Village.

Professor Oh-e[13] considers why Magosaburo Ohara became a reformist. He theorized that Ohara became a reformist under the influence of three persons: Hitoshi Yamakawa, a famous socialist, co-founder of the Japanese communist movement and Ohara's intimate friend from childhood, Genjuro Hayashi, Yamakawa's brother-in-law and a Christian belonging to the Congregational Church in Kurashiki; and Juji Ishii, a Christian social worker who had managed an orphanage and other welfare facilities in Okayama Prefecture.

In 1899 Ohara met Juji Ishii through an introduction from Genjuro Hayashi; he was deeply influenced by Ishii's Christian humanism and became an enthusiastic supporter, donating large sums of money to Ishii's social work. Moreover, he founded the Kurashiki Kyoiku Konwakai (Kurashiki Education Conversazione) and launched himself into social reform through social education. In 1905, Ohara was baptized and became a Christian after a year's recuperation from pleurisy[14][15].

Receiving Ohara's generous support, Juji Ishii extended his activities and established the new social welfare facilities called 'Aisen-en', which included a nursery school and a night school at Aisenbashi, one of the slum quarters in Osaka. The Ohara Social Problem Institute for studying labour problems and social welfare (mentioned later) was first established in 1919 in the Aisen-en[16]. Even if Ohara did not give lectures to the poor as George Cadbury did at the Adult School, it is very interesting that he also started his works as a reformist managing the night school for the poor and the association for social education.

Ohara was said to have been interested in the ideas of Robert Owen and his New Lanark experiment, which was one of the prototypes of the industrial village idea, and also in the achievement of the Krupp Colonies[17]. Ohara read pamphlets, which K. Harada, one of his friends working in Germany, had sent him, on workers' welfare systems and welfare facilities in Krupp's factory, and he became aware of the differences (which he considered excessive) in working conditions between Krupp's workers and the workers of Kura-Bo. It was said that he had a trusted young staff member to translate a pamphlet 'Krankenkasse' from the Krupp Co. and form a workers' mutual aid system for his company[18].

In 1906, Magosaburo Ohara succeeded his father Koshiro Ohara, and became the president of Kura-Bo. The miserable conditions of workers in his factory, which had been reported by some journals of the time as the worst example in the nation[19], became an urgent problem for him. The women workers’ dormitories of Kura-Bo were just as or even more squalid than those of other Japanese spinning factories. In the early years of the 1900s, the total floor space of the dormitories in the Kurashiki Factory for over 1100 women workers, was only around 2000 m², or
less than one tatami-mat per worker. It was not surprising then that in 1906 an epidemic of typhoid fever broke out in which many workers suffered and seven died[20].

‘Japanese type’ industrial village

In the light of these conditions, in 1907 Ohara launched the dormitory improvement project. Cancelling the ‘in-progress’ construction of dormitories which showed slight improvements, he planned a new type of dormitory called ‘bunsan-shiki (clustered type)’. The ‘bunsan-shiki’ dormitory consisted of a couple of single-storey row-houses with a fairly broad space between rows planned for a flower bed. Each row-house contained several house units, which in floor plan resembled the common tenement houses in town. At the opening of the new dormitories, Ohara explained to the boarders his idea of ‘bunsan-shiki’, considering that the new dormitories would make the women workers feel at ease because the rooms were designed like their parents’ homes in town[21]. However, it is very doubtful that girls, almost all of whom came not from towns but from rural regions, felt at ease in the new dormitories.

Completed in 1914 after 6 years’ construction, the dormitory area and factory was Ohara’s first step towards the Japanese type industrial village (Figure 1).

In 1912, Kura-Bo planned to construct another new factory, the Masu Factory, north of Kurashiki station. In planning the Masu Factory, Ohara took a new step forward based on his ‘Shokko Mura’ ideas. He intended to avoid single-worker dormitories entirely, and adopted a plan to construct ‘working family’ housing[22]. The term ‘working family’, in this case, meant a family consisting of a woman worker, her spouse worker and their women worker relatives.

Figure 1. Kurashiki factory with improved workers’ dormitories.
Before launching the new factory project, an internal report submitted to Ohara by the personnel management project team stated that employing workers who were family members was better than employing single workers for prolonging workers' service and for reducing the labour costs. The report proposed that the company change the labour management policy from constructing costly idealistic dormitories for single women workers to providing company houses for the ‘working family’. According to statistical data from the Kurashiki Factory and the Tamashima Factory, 0.98 male workers and 1.78 female workers from each ‘working family’ were expected[23–24].

In those days, the most important concerns of the owners of spinning factories were how to reduce labour costs and how to make their workers work harder. These often contradicted each other, because in forcing workers to work harder, they retired or even escaped from the factories, and owners had to recruit new workers, thus paying high recruiting costs[25]. Adopting a policy of paternalism was a manoeuvre by Japanese factory owners to tie workers to their company. In Kura-Bo, newly employed workers numbered 1276 persons per year (average from 1906 to 1909), which was 276 persons more than the number of workers remaining at the end of the period. Why should so many workers be recruited? The following data gives a clear answer: in an average year of the same period, 18.4% of workers were discharged because of illness and 20.8% because of other reasons. Moreover 39.1% ‘escaped’ and 1.7% died[26]. It was obvious that the greatest opportunity for reducing labour costs was to reduce recruiting costs by prolonging the length of service. The policy of employing ‘working families’ had such a background.

Ohara’s idea in planning the Masu Factory was that the workers themselves, upon settling into the company houses, would not migrate any more, and would become members of ‘Shokko Mura (industrial village)’. Moreover, he said that the employee’s houses should be ‘Den-en toshi-fu (garden city style)’ allowing the factory workers to engage in gardening in their homes, and that in the future, the factory itself should be a ‘cooperative workshop’ run by the residents of the ‘Shokko Mura (industrial village)’[27].

The actual designs of those ‘garden city style’ company houses of the Masu Factory were as one-storey wooden row-houses with an average floor space of around 33 m² per household. Total acreage of the site for 600 houses was 7.35 ha; in other words, 123 m² per household, so the space remaining for gardening was very small. Moreover, the workers, working long hours in two shifts, had little spare time to engage in gardening. Figure 2 shows the site plan of the Masu 1st Factory and estate of company houses called ‘Shokko Mura (workers’ village or industrial village)’.

According to the ‘Shokko-Mura’ plan, the percentage of male workers at the Masu 1st Factory was to be 37% of all the workers, which was considerably higher than the 18% figure in ordinary spinning factories[28]. With economic prosperity following the end of the First World War, the imbalance between male and female workers gradually became an obstacle for the company, whose priority was to increase production substantially at the Masu Factory. The company abandoned the personnel management policy of getting workers from families housed in the company houses, and in 1918 again began to provide women workers’ dormitories by changing the company houses for working families in the Masu 1st Factory to single workers’ dormitories. Begun in 1918, the Masu 2nd and 3rd Factories, which were adjacent to the Masu 1st Factory, were to have 66 buildings in the new ‘bunsan-shiki (clustered type)’ dormitory style. Ohara had said that he believed it was irrational to employ workers from remote places and force them to
Figure 2. Mr. Ohara’s 'Shokko-Mura (industrial village)': Masu Factory with Company Housing Estate.
live collectively in mass dormitories, and that it would be best to construct the factory with a ‘Rodo-mura (workers’ village)’. But in changing the personnel management policy, he said circumstances forced him to construct the same dormitories again in the Masu 2nd and 3rd Factories, even though he believed this change of policy was more than an act of temporary retrogression[29].

The Hayashima Factory in Okayama prefecture, which was rather small scale among the factories of Kura-Bo, was regarded as an experimental plant in a new system. In 1912, in the renovation project of Hayashima Factory, Ohara hoped to add an orchard to the new company housing estate on the south slope of the factory site. It was said that in transplanting saplings of fruit trees cultivated in the Ohara Farm, he intended to combine his agricultural promotion activities with realization of the Industrial Village idea[30]. This proposal, however, was never realized.

Ohara’s ‘socialistic’ institutes

Ohara, however, proceeded to found three institutes for basic research on the development of his social reform activities, namely the Ohara Agricultural Institute, the Ohara Social Problem Institute and the Kurashiki Institute for Labour Science.

The Ohara family had been powerful rice dealers and money-lenders since Magosaburo Ohara’s grandfather’s time, and had acquired arable land greedily by purchasing or foreclosing. In Magosaburo’s time they had become one of the largest landlords in Okayama prefecture, owning more than 500 ha[31]. Ohara, besides having the spinning factories as the president of Kura-Bo, leased a lot of tenant farms, and so was interested in the improvement of the agricultural industry. In 1914, he established a foundation named the Ohara Sho-no Kai (association for encouraging agriculture). Among the activities of the foundation, basic study of agricultural science had great importance. In 1929, the foundation changed its name to the Ohara Agricultural Institute. The institute was said to have greatly contributed to the agricultural industry in Okayama prefecture, especially to fruit cultivation, before the institute was placed under Okayama University in 1953[32]. It could be said that success in fruit breeding and the model orchard of the Ohara Agricultural Institute stimulated Ohara’s plan to attach flower gardens and orchards to the ‘Shokko-mura (industrial village).’

In 1920 Ohara established the Ohara Social Problem Institute in Osaka, inviting many noted socialist scholars to study social welfare and labour problems. For fear of being accused of supporting socialistic movements, he strictly prohibited the Institute from participating in any actual movements. In March 1928, Japanese communist and socialist movements were suppressed severely, and the Institute was also investigated by police authorities. At that time, Ohara proposed to withdraw his financial support; the problem of dissolution was disputed among staff and supporters until the Institute finally became independent of Ohara’s support and moved to Tokyo in 1938. In 1949, the Ohara Social Problem Institute, after many turns of event became attached to Hosei University[33].

In 1921, following the establishment of the Ohara Social Problem Institute, Ohara established another important institute for the Japanese working class: the Kurashiki Institute for Labour Science, to research mainly into, and improve the health conditions of women workers engaged
in ‘midnight’ labour and to find solutions[34]. The institute had many scientific achievements, but ‘midnight’ labour at the mills of Kura-Bo itself was not abolished until 1929, because it was so profitable. In 1936, the assets of the Institute were donated to Japan Society for the Promotion of Science which became the Japan Institute for Science of Labour, making great contributions to the improvement of working conditions in Japan.

Except for the Ohara Agricultural Institute, by the end of the 1930s Ohara had washed his hands of the two ‘socialistic’ institutions and of the social welfare works which he took over from J. Ishii; the Japanese ruling clique had become overwhelmingly powerful and he himself could not ignore them.

Conclusion

Although Ohara was deeply concerned with social reform and intended to manage his factories based on these ideas, his achievements fell far short of his foreign counterparts. Why had Magosaburo Ohara’s social reform remained immature? It may be because a combination of the less developed capitalism and the intensified fascism in Japan placed many hurdles in his way.

One of the founders of Japan’s spinning industry once said ‘It would be impossible to catch up with the English spinning industry by using the same measures that they used. The only possible way is to work harder, to work twice or even three times as hard as the English do’[35]. He actually said ‘to work harder’, but he might have said ‘to make or force workers to work harder’. The Japanese spinning industry could not compete against the English by forcing its women workers into miserable working conditions. As Kura-Bo was not a leader among Japanese spinning companies, nor a government supported enterprise, but a local enterprise and rather late in coming, the company had to compete with fellow Japanese companies before it could catch up with the English. Even if Magosaburo Ohara acknowledged himself as a reformist, he was no more than a capitalist and could not ignore his situation. Moreover, Kura-Bo could not bear the high labour costs incurred by adopting Ohara’s ideas.

There is another opinion: that Ohara was not a reformist of true sincerity, but only an apparent reformist always calculating his profit[36]. Based on this viewpoint, his retrogression from the ‘Shokko Mura’ idea was not against his wish, but was according to his mercenary management policy. To a certain extent I agree with this conclusion, although after taking this into consideration, I believe Ohara’s ideas and achievements are worth keeping on the record of Japanese planning history.

In concluding this paper, I think I must refer to the present conditions of Ohara’s Industrial Village in Kurashiki City. It is in striking contrast to the English counterparts, Saltaire, Port Sunlight and Bournville, which are still keeping their good living environments. The Kurashiki Mill of Kura-Bo was changed to a munitions factory in the last phase of the Second World War and stopped its production activities in 1945. In 1969, the remaining buildings of the mill were changed for other uses: including a hotel, restaurants, shops, two art museums and the Memorial Museum of the company. Dormitories which had been in the neighbouring site were completely demolished and the site is now used for the Citizen’s Hall of Kurashiki City, car parking, hothouses for orchids and a restaurant.

The Masu Mill of the company is still in operation. The company houses in Ohara’s Industrial Village near the Masu Mill still remain in part. Originally, there were 600 houses in this village.
Now, however, only about one third of them, including many vacant houses remain. They are still owned by the company and rented to workers. The company intends to demolish them one by one when they become vacant.

References

2. *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 293.
22. ibid., pp. 147–8.
28. ibid., p. 159.
30. ibid., p. 318.