

A Study on the Dimensions of Stairs in Pre-World War II Japanese Houses

— With Emphasis on Important Cultural Properties —

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Japanese houses traditionally featured one floor, but multi-storied houses started to be built in the Meiji period. With the spread of taller houses, stairs between the first and second floors took on increasing importance and underwent various changes. A review of past discussions and an analysis of house plans revealed that stairs in pre-World War II Japanese houses changed from straight to winder, and that the typical stair location changed from hallway to entrance hall. Based on these findings, the author asserted that stairs in Western homes were considered ideal at that time. This argument, however, was based only on the reference materials available and proposed the ideal stairs of the time without referring to their dimensions, such as risers and tread width. Thus, in this current study, sixteen two-storied houses designated as important cultural properties were closely examined, with the stairs in each house measured to identify differences in their dimensions based on shape, location and house style.

It was found that such differences can be attributed to house styles. Moreover, in Western-style houses the angles of the front and back stairs are same, whereas in traditional Japanese houses the back stairs are steeper and narrower than those in the front. In traditional Japanese houses, winder stairs are not as steep as straight ones; yet straight stairs located at the entrance hall are less steep and wider than those in other locations. To summarize, as winder stairs at the entrance hall became common in pre-World War II Japan, stairs became less steep and wider like those in Western-style houses.