

The History of Seibu in Photos (Part 1)

II Initial Period of Seibu Group Real Estate Development (1893–1969)

Part 3

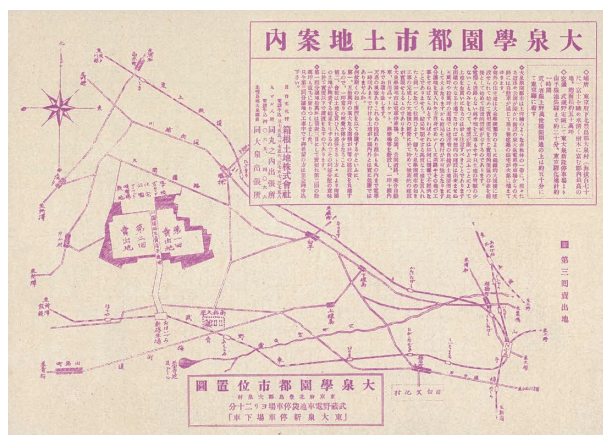
Remaining Steadfast in the Midst of Diversity, Tsutsumi Searched for Every Possible Strategy

One of the characteristics of Yasujiro Tsutsumi's management approach was to take advantage of lean times in business to aggressively seek an opening, missing no opportunity to expand related businesses. As sales of summer homes began showing weakness, he turned to constructing roads in Sengataki, and began operating summer bus service between Kutsukake Station and Sengataki. His approach of combining land development with road construction and bus service started here.

On a side note, Shinpei Goto was involved here as well. Tsutsumi had frequently sought his advice on land development, and during the Sengataki development had planned to build a road from Kutsukake Station about 22 meters wide. Goto advised him that 22 meters would be too narrow, and that roads from then on needed to be 36 meters wide. Subsequently, in his development in Karuizawa and in residential development, Tsutsumi built his roads 36 meters wide.

Sales of lots in Mejiro Bunkamura, mentioned earlier, were also an example of Tsutsumi's brash management approach as the summer home business lagged. A major turning point came with the Great Kanto Earthquake that hit in September of 1923. A delay in the recovery of transportation services to the Hakone area and the proliferation of residential land in Tokyo's suburbs both took place just as universities and other educational institutions were also relocating to the suburbs. Sensing this shift, Tsutsumi set forth a new concept—the academic town.

The academic town concept: A desire to do something for Japan's next generation of youth



Pamphlets introducing Oizumi-gakuen (top) and Kodaira-gakuen (right), the first projects based on Tsutsumi's academic town concept. Kodaira-gakuen managed to attract the Tokyo University of Commerce (currently Hitotsubashi University), but Oizumi-gakuen was unsuccessful in attracting a university.

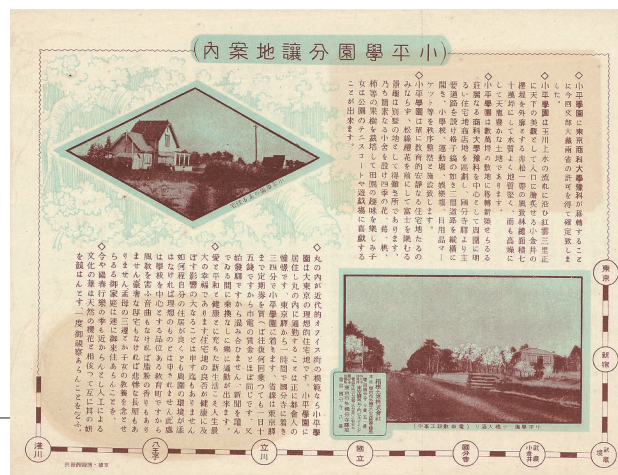
Tsutsumi gives a passionate account of his thoughts at the time in his book *"Hito o ikasu jigyou (Business improving the lives of people)."*

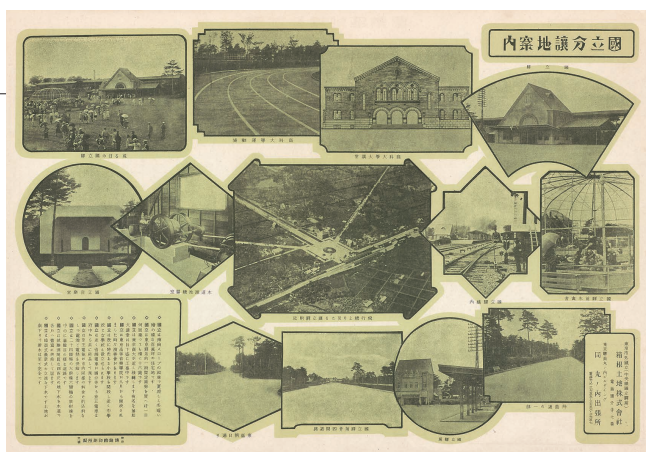
"Immediately after the Great Kanto Earthquake, I drafted a concept for the construction of a large-scale academic town in what was then Tokyo Prefecture. Central Tokyo had suffered an enormous toll as a result of the earthquake. I believed the reduction of much of the land to ashes should be taken as an opportunity to move schools away from the squalidness of the city, and that students should be allowed to study in a new place with cleaner air and good public morals. That would require developing an appropriate location outside of the city, relocating schools, and building a new town around them."

True to his word, in 1924 Tsutsumi purchased one million *tsubo* (about 3.3 million m²) of land in a tract stretching from today's Nerima Ward into Saitama Prefecture, and installed roads, water and sewerage and electric lights. He then began developing Oizumi-gakuen City. Since there were no stations nearby, he built one and donated it, marking the start of his involvement with Musashino Railway, Seibu Railway's predecessor. Development of a similar academic town in Kodaira began at about the same time. Based on information that Shinpei Goto, now the mayor of Tokyo, would be ordering the construction of the Murayama and Yamaguchi reservoirs to ensure an adequate supply of drinking water, Tsutsumi moved to complete the Tamako Railway with the goals of developing his academic towns, selling residential land, and developing tourism. The academic town concept moved forward with deep ties to the railways.

"A new Japan will rise here" The passion invested in the Kunitachi Academic City

In 1926, Tsutsumi began on work on his concept for the





Kunitachi Academic Town. The three academic towns Hakone Tochi worked on in Oizumi, Kodaira and Kunitachi had a distinct character different from that of the “garden cities” being developed at the time. Four of those features include:

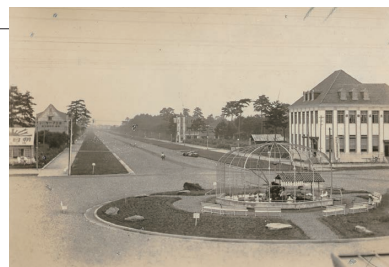
- (1) Towns laid out in a rectangle, with square lots laid out in orderly fashion;
- (2) Land for college campuses located in the middle or at one end of residential neighborhoods;
- (3) Broad roads leading from the center of those campuses;
- (4) Roundabouts provided here and there as accents.

Of the three academic cities, the one that most retains its townscape as originally planned is Kunitachi. While there are many stories about its design—including that it was modeled after German cities, and that it was influenced by Shinpei Goto’s urban planning in Manchuria, China—Kunitachi seems to have been a special place for Tsutsumi.

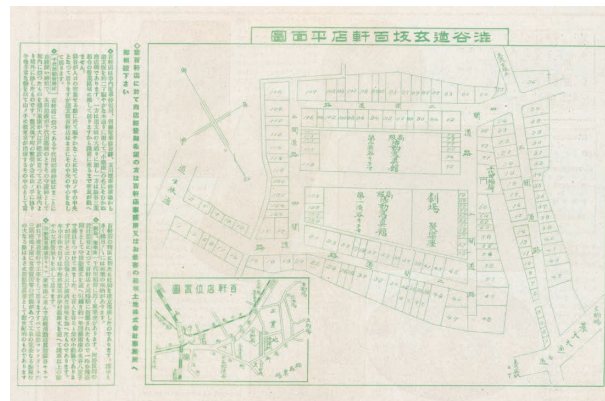
In the book mentioned earlier, Tsutsumi writes that, “We purchased one million *tsubo* of land overlapping three villages, cleared the wooded areas, built Kunitachi Station, added a 43 meter-wide road extending straight out from the station with 11 meter-wide radial roads, and built a beautiful town with clearly marked divisions. We named it Kunitachi (the Chinese characters for Kunitachi imply “to establish a country”) because we were convinced that here, a new Japan would be born.” Kunitachi exemplified all of the spirit Tsutsumi brought to developing land always in anticipation of a new age.

The sacred peak of Mt. Fuji can be seen from Fujimi Road, the radial road extending from the roundabout in front of Kunitachi Station. This is no coincidence, but was part of Tsutsumi’s plan from the beginning. Japan has an ancient tradition of “borrowed landscapes,” making use of the surrounding scenery in the design of a garden, but Tsutsumi’s plan was based on what might be called a “passing landscape,” an endless tree-lined street stretching to the horizon, with Mt. Fuji placed where the road meets the sky. This was intended to represent the future of the students who would gather in Kunitachi, and the hopes of its residents, and is part of what enhanced the value of Kunitachi as an academic town.

Shinjuku, Shibuya, Azabu. Tsutsumi begin work on creative development in some of central Tokyo’s prime locations



At left is another pamphlet, this one for residential lot sales in Kunitachi, another of the developments under the initial academic town concept. The photo at top shows Hitotsubashi Road Avenue (currently National Road 146, known as Daigaku Road), stretching south from Kunitachi Station. From initial construction, ample width was provided for the road.



Hakone Tochi also worked to develop commercial property in central Tokyo. *Hyakkendana*, developed along Dogenzaka in Shibuya, was one of these. It featured a movie theater and theater at its center, surrounded by many small shops.

As it was moving forward with its academic town development, around this time Hakone Tochi was also exploring a variety of potential projects in central Tokyo. In 1925, it opened a commercial facility known as Shinjukuken at what is today Shinjuku 5-chome, near the intersection of Yasukuni Road and Meiji Road avenues. It was another amusement park that featured a performing arts venue, movie theater, and even a small-scale zoo, but the concept may have been too progressive for the times, and it closed the following year. The land was offered as residential lots, which sold out immediately thanks to the good location.

In 1925, work also began on Hyakkendana, on the right about halfway up Dogenzaka in Shibuya. Tsutsumi had acquired the site of the former home of Baron Hisato Nakagawa, planning to sell it as residential lots, but with the Great Kanto Earthquake the following year, decided to change plans and build a shopping street. With shops divided among small lots in rows surrounding a theater, it presented a unique landscape and attracted lively crowds, among them the artist Yumeji Takehisa, who lived nearby and was said to be so enamored of the place that he made his way there almost daily.

It was around this time that Hakone Tochi began offering large residential lots in prime locations in central Tokyo. They started with the home of the Baron Yoshimitsu Yanagiwara, a 2,243 *tsubo* (approximately 7,400 m²) property in Azabu’s Sakuradacho, which they divided into 17 lots and sold for 168 yen per *tsubo*. The company’s aggressive buying and reselling of land in central Tokyo would serve as a strategic move in its post war acquisition of the former homes of imperial family members, and lead to the development of Shibuya’s Shoto and other exclusive residential districts.