Lessons from the One-Mat Room: Piety and Playfulness Among Nineteenth-Century Japanese Antiquarians

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The One-Mat Room of Matsuura Takeshirō (1818–1888) was constructed in late 1886 out of fragments of old wood donated by antiquarian acquaintances from all over Japan to commemorate his upcoming seventieth year. The room is a creation of originality and complexity that serves as a powerful lens through which to survey Japanese attitudes toward "things" in the nineteenth century and to draw back and trace some of the longer-term changes in those attitudes. The One-Mat Room reveals a mixture of religious belief and playful persuasion that had a long tradition in Japanese arts, above all in the way of tea, which in the nineteenth century was itself adapting modern modes of collecting.

I first encountered this tiny structure a century later as part of the Taizansō villa on the grounds of International Christian University in Mitaka, a western suburb of Tokyo (fig. 1).[1] The room settled there in the 1930s after three successive moves from its original construction as a lean-to addition to Matsuura's house in the Kanda district of downtown Tokyo. The One-Mat Room today enjoys a celebrity status never intended by its creator, who requested that it be used to cremate his remains.[2]

The first biography of Matsuura Takeshirō in any language appeared in English in 1916, by Frederick Starr, an anthropologist from the University of Chicago (fig. 2). Starr had first visited Japan in 1904 to collect a group of Ainu people and their artifacts for display at the Louisiana Purchase centennial exposition in Saint Louis later that year. It was then that he encountered maps and drawings of Hokkaido that Matsuura had made after his celebrated explorations of Japan's northern islands in the 1840s and 1850s. In his account of Matsuura's accomplishments, Starr wrote that although the Japanese are "to an extraordinary degree non-individual, impersonal, and given

< **Fig. 1.** The north end of the One-Mat Room today, in the Taizansō villa at International Christian University in Mitaka. Mo90ls: Okamoto Mayuko (left) and Wakabayashi Mariko. Photo: Saiki Osamu, courtesy of ICU Hachiro Yuasa Memorial Museum

Today, the north end, shown here, is oriented to the east.

Fig. 2. Frederick Starr and his Japanese assistants at work. 1920s. Photo: The Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago

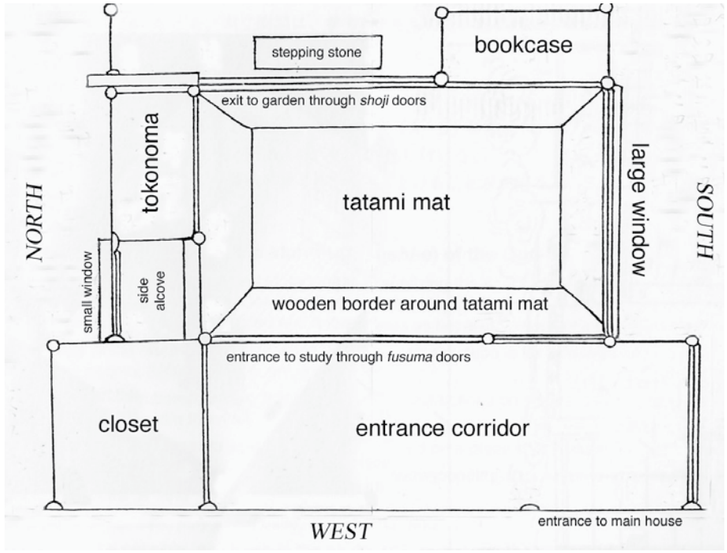

Fig. 3. Floor plan of the One-Mat Room. Based on a drawing in *A Solicitation of Wood Scraps* (*Mokuhen kanjin*), preface, 9r–10v

to acting as a group rather than individuals," they are at the same time "free and untrammeled in their tastes and independent in the indulgence of them." Starr declared Matsuura to be a striking example of an independence, that "in many individualistic communities would scarcely have been tolerated." The essay concluded with a description of the One-Mat Room and a detailed list of the materials used in its construction.[3] (Starr himself was a similar example of "untrammeled taste" who would make fourteen more extended trips to Japan before his death in Tokyo in 1933 at age seventy-four, pursuing manifold interests in Japanese popular religion and material culture; fig. 2 shows him at work with his Japanese assistants.)

The One-Mat Room was originally appended as a lean-to structure to Matsuura's home in the Kanda area of Tokyo, normally entered through a corridor from the west through paper-covered *fusuma*, or sliding doors (fig. 3). The north end of the room (see fig. 1) consisted of a tokonoma alcove to the right, and a side alcove to the left with a small window below a Shinto altar shelf (*kamidana*), while the east side of the room had on the left a pair of shoji screens opening to the garden, and on the right a built-in bookcase. The south end featured a single large window providing ample direct sunlight, before which was placed a writing desk and a brazier to heat tea water and provide

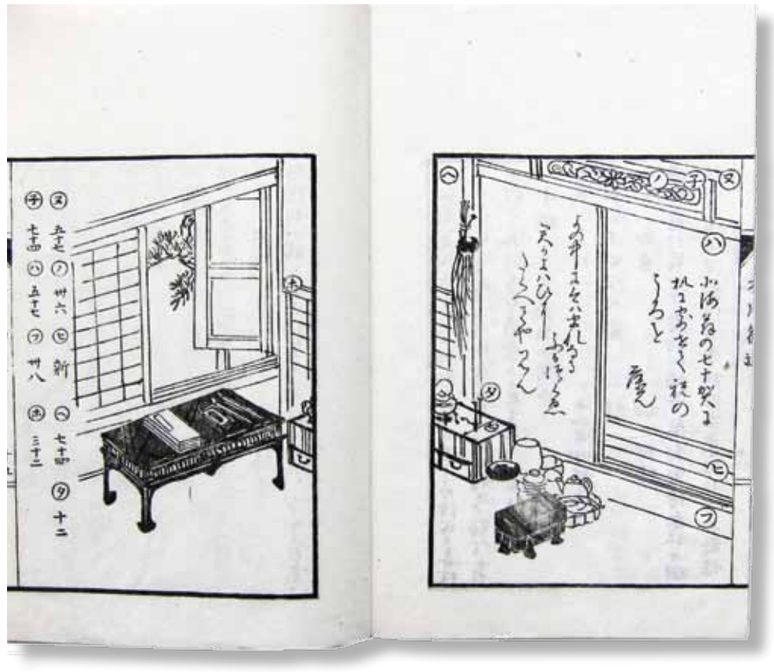

Fig. 4. Interior of the One-Mat Room with south window. *A Solicitation of Wood Scraps* (*Mokuhen kanjin*), 18v–19r. February 1887. 15.3 x 10.3 cm (cover). Collection of Matsuura Takeshiro Memorial Museum, Matsusaka. Photo by author

The inscriptions to the right refer to the antique desk to the lower left (donation no. 90 in *Mokuhen kanjin*), offering a poem for Matsuura's 70th-year celebration. Individual pieces of wood are identified with *katakana* and corresponding *Mokuhen kanjin* catalogue numbers.

Fig. 5. Decorative Beam End from dance stage at Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine, Kamakura. Donation no. 34 in *Mokuhen kanjin*. Photo: Katsuhito Nakazato © LIXIL Corporation, INAX Publishing. From *Bakumatsu no tankenka Matsuura Takeshirō to ichijōjiki / The One-mat Study of Matsuura Takeshirō, 19th-Century Explorer*, exh. cat. (Tokyo: INAX Publishing, 2010)

Fig. 6. Railing Post from Kunōji Temple (renamed Tesshūji in 1910), Shimizu, Shizuoka Prefecture, placed upside down to serve as pillar for the tokonoma alcove. Donation no. 42 in *Mokuhen kanjin*. Photo: Katsuhito Nakazato © LIXIL Corporation. From *Bakumatsu no tankenka Matsuura Takeshirō to ichijōjiki*

warmth in the winter (fig. 4). The overall floor area (including the alcoves) was about 3.33 square meters (54 square feet), and the ceiling 1.90 meters (six feet three inches) high. The One-Mat Room was a small but comfortable space for its declared function as the study of its owner, with ample room to greet a single guest (as in fig. 1). It is worth mentioning that Matsuura was a small man, about four feet ten inches in height (not unusual for his era).

The pieces of wood used to construct the One-Mat Room had been solicited by Matsuura from his wide network of friends. He sent out appeals from as early as 1879 (seven years before the completion of the study) for objects of historical significance. His printed catalogue of these objects, *A Solicitation of Wood Scraps* (*Mokuhen kanjin*, February 1887), lists eighty-nine items, of which all but six are pieces of wood, some designated for multiple uses.[4] Most came from Shinto shrines (36) or Buddhist temples (46), and the remainder from secular historical sites. About one-third of the religious sites are of national renown, including the shrines of Ise, Izumo, Kumano, Kasuga and Daizaifu Tenmangū, and such temples as Hōryūji, Shitennōji, Kōfukuji, Enryakuji, Ishiyamadera, Byōdōin and Daitokuji.

Many of the donated wood fragments are ordinary in appearance, but true to their frequent description in *A Solicitation of Wood Scraps* as "old wood" (*furuki*), most seem worn or weathered, some with traces of paint. About a dozen of the donations are visually distinctive. Item no. 34, for example, is an elaborate carving of peonies said to be a decoration at the end of a beam on the dance stage at Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine in Kamakura (fig. 5). In 1186, Lady Shizuka, the former mistress of Minamoto no Yoshitsune (1159–1189), performed a famous dance here before Yoshitsune's older brother Yoritomo. As she danced, Shizuka sang of her love for Yoshitsune, incurring the displeasure of Yoritomo, by then estranged from his brother. In the One-Mat Room, the wood was used as a bracket for a projecting

eave over the south window. Little is known of the donor, Fukuda Takanari, except that he worked for the Tokyo city government early in the Meiji period (1868–1912).

Even more distinctive is item no. 42, a post from a railing around a building at Kunōji Temple (renamed Tesshūji in 1910) in Shimizu, Shizuoka Prefecture (fig. 6, also visible in fig. 1). The post has here been placed upside down, its decorative lotus-shaped finial "hanging" downward to serve as an abbreviated alcove pillar (*tokobashira*), by convention a piece of wood on which great attention is lavished. This witty placement makes it the single most eye-catching ornament in the study. The finial is one of fully seven items donated by Mochizuki Jisaburō, an antiquarian from the Tōkaidō post-town of Ejiri with whom Matsuura inevitably stayed on his frequent journeys between Tokyo and west Japan.

Mapping the One-Mat Room

Matsuura Takeshirō achieved his greatest fame as an explorer, from 1845 to 1858, between the ages of twenty-eight and forty-one, when he made six expeditions to "Ezo," the northern lands of Japan beyond the main island of Honshu, first as an individual and then in the employ of the Tokugawa government. Driven by what Frederick Starr described as "a veritable *wanderlust*," Matsuura was a careful observer, taking voluminous field notes that he later compiled into a rich series of chronicles and gazettes.[5] Starr noted that "he observed everything—plants, animals, human beings, life, customs, products, soils, topography, altitudes, drainage, coastlines." Matsuura's descriptions of the customs and habitat of the Ainu people, for whom he had great sympathy, remain a unique and precious archive.

Matsuura was a skilled cartographer, producing beautifully detailed maps of Hokkaido and Karafuto that continue to astonish experts for their accuracy, in spite of his rudimentary instruments. In many ways, the One-Mat Room was a continuation in Matsuura's later years of his deep-rooted passion for mapping, as his interests turned away from the north frontiers, and back to his roots in western Japan, and to Japanese history. From the late 1870s, when he was in his sixties, he traveled at least once each year along the Tōkaidō highway between Tokyo and the Kansai area (Kyoto–Osaka), visiting antiquarian friends and exchanging old objects of interest.

Although collecting may have begun as a pastime for Matsuura, it soon became a profession as he was increasingly called upon to give his expert evaluation of old objects. Having little personal wealth, he also found himself drawn into the business of dealing. Indeed, his later travels were as much trading expeditions as pleasure junkets. He would acquire antiques as he went, send them ahead to Osaka where his son Kazuo then worked, and conclude his trip there with a sale of many of the new acquisitions. It is said that when he entered a town on his travels, people would be waiting for him with old objects to be evaluated—and that when they wished to sell, he would always buy the items at the specified price, without haggling.

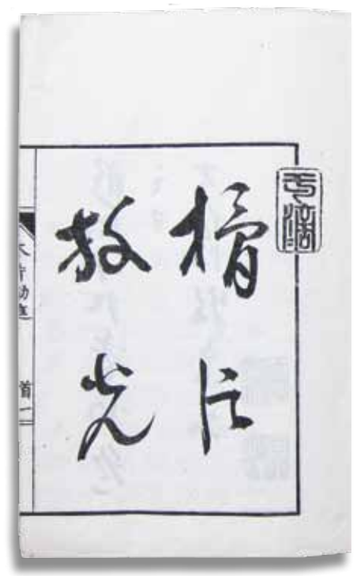

Fig. 7. Sōkei Bokujū. "Wood Scraps Send Out Light" (*Koppen hikari o hanatsu*). Dedicatory calligraphy of *Mokuhen kanjin*, 11. Collection of Matsuura Takeshiro Memorial Museum, Matsusaka. Photo by author

The One-Mat Room project that he designed to celebrate his seventieth year was essentially a joining of two types of mapping, first of the religious and historical sites from which the pieces of wood had come, and second of his network of friends who donated these "wood scraps." Each entry in the catalogue recorded the source of the piece of wood, and often something of its history; the name and province of residence of the donor; and the wood's use within in the One-Mat Room. In this way, each item was thus simultaneously mapped in geographical space, in historical time, in Matsuura's own social network, and finally within the architectural space of the tiny study. Here is an example:

> No. 82 Watanabe Makoto, Ichikawa, Kai Province [donor]
> Clay bells used for the festival ceremonies at Kanazakura Shrine, Mitakeyama, Koma District
> Hung in front of the Shinto altar shelf.
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | *kaigane no* | To receive these clay bells |
> | *Mitake no miya no* | from the Mitake shrine of |
> | *hanisuzu o* | the lofty peak of Kai, |
> | *tamau mo ware ni* | is for me like making contact |
> | *chiyo o fure toka* | with a thousand years. |

Almost none of the pieces of wood, however, bore any marks that might identify either its origin or donor. For this, it was necessary to turn to *A Solicitation of Wood Scraps*, the catalogue that served as the master codebook for the entire project, identifying in detail the source, history and donor of each of the 89 items. Can we be sure that any given piece of wood came from the site described, or that it had the history that was alleged? Not really. Matsuura himself was sometimes critical, noting for example that number 84 was "popularly said to be from the tree from which Benkei [the semi-legendary warrior-priest companion of Minamoto no Yoshitsune, hero of the Genpei War of the late twelfth century] was born," to which he added: "This is not true, of course, but I simply record what has been said." Matsuura clearly understood that his project was rhetorical, not literal, and that the confirmation of each piece as authentic was beside the point.

"Wood Scraps Send Out Light"

The catalogue begins with a prefatory section that opens with a four-character Chinese phrase written by Sōkei Bokujū, the chief priest of Daitokuji in Kyoto: "Wood scraps send out light" (*Koppen hikari o hanatsu*) (fig. 7). This nicely captures the aura of the One-Mat Room, and evokes the special Japanese feeling for wood as a medium of religious power. Trees themselves, of course, are the home of *kami* spirits, but the gods can also "reside" (*yadoru*, *komoru*) in inanimate objects, investing them with a spiritual power that can either threaten or protect. Japanese amulets (*o-mamori*), in particular, are for the most part made of wood or paper (itself a wood product). This enables us to conceive of the One-Mat Room as a comprehensive collection of talismans that gather in the protective powers of the greatest shrines and temples in Japan.

Fig. 8. Lintel of Chinese juniper above north window, visible in fig 1. Donation no. 54 in *Mokuhen kanjin*, given by Akiyama Terue, chief priest of Mishima Shrine. Photo by author

The four dedicatory Chinese poems following the title calligraphy in the introductory section of *A Solicitation of Wood Scraps* all celebrate the wonder of a room just one tatami mat in size, suggesting that its very smallness is a source of strength, as though vast reaches had been compressed into a dense space of special resilience. One of the poets writes, "With scarcely space for the knees, it must be solid / with a heart like steel, never tilting or bending," while another suggests that "Its greatness can only be compared to the hills, its durability to that of steel."

The prefatory texts also establish "One-Mat Room" (Ichijōjiki) as the proper name by which Matsuura styled his project from the start. He did provide an alternate name of "Kusanoya" (Grass Abode) in his signature at the end of *A Solicitation of Wood Scraps*, suggesting the lineage of hermit's huts—above all, that of the famed poet Saigyō in Yoshino, of which a painting on wood was donated as number 52, which Matsuura calls "the main image of my little room." Although "Kusanoya" was used by the Kii branch of the Tokugawa family, who maintained the room for a number of years, "Ichijōjiki" seems more appropriate.[6]

Ancient Weathered Wood from Ōsezaki Shrine

The power of sacred wood in the One-Mat Room is strongest with those pieces, eight in all, that are said to have come not from the lumber used in buildings, but from particular trees of note. Some are said to have been planted by famous priests or historical figures, and as we have heard, one allegedly gave birth to Benkei. Each has an irregular surface that preserves the form of the original tree. Japanese have long prized ancient wood of odd shapes, and it is no surprise that some should have been sent along to Matsuura, each with its own story.

One such piece of wood provides a useful way to illustrate the One-Mat Room in practice, the "old piece of Chinese juniper from Ōsezaki Shrine"

Fig. 9. The "Sacred Tree" (Go-Shinboku) of Chinese juniper at Ōsezaki Shrine on the Izu Peninsula. Photo by author

donated by Akiyama Terue of Izu province and used as the "lintel above the small north window" (fig. 8, also visible in fig. 1). Number 54 in *A Solicitation of Wood Scraps*, this 41-cm piece of wood immediately draws the visitor's attention with its golden brown color and wonderful sculptural quality, having been eroded into deep, undulating channels that resemble waves of the sea.[7]

The wavy pattern of the wood accords perfectly with Ōsezaki Shrine—its age certified by appearance in *Regulations of the Engi Era* (*Engi shiki*) of 905—that sits on a tiny peninsula jutting northward from the northwest corner of the Izu Peninsula. Over the centuries, it came to be revered especially by sailors in Suruga Bay, who would stop by the shrine in passing and make small offerings of stones. Today, Ōsezaki is visited mostly by divers lured by the clear deep waters around the promontory, but it is also famous for an ancient grove of Chinese junipers, declared a national "natural monument" in 1932 as the only large concentration of ancient trees of this species in Japan. Most striking is the "Sacred Tree" (Go-Shinboku) of Ōsezaki Shrine, over seven meters in circumference and estimated at more than fifteen hundred years old (fig. 9). It may well have been from this very tree, from which protrude many twisted dead branches, that the wood was taken. The function of the wood within the shrine itself is unknown, but in some way, the donor Akiyama was able to secure a piece of it for Matsuura.

Akiyama Terue (1843–1902) was a generation younger than Matsuura, and had a distinguished career as a priest at leading Shinto shrines during the Meiji period, serving as chief priest at Mishima Shrine from 1881 until 1895, when he became chief priest at Yasaka Shrine in Kyoto. Matsuura would have often stopped at Mishima Shrine, one of the great sanctuaries of eastern Japan, during his travels along the Tōkaidō in the 1880s, and doubtless met Akiyama in those years. In a letter that Akiyama wrote to Matsuura in July 1886, we learn that Matsuura had specifically requested the wood, although we have no idea how he learned of it.[8] Akiyama's letter

singles out the sweeping panorama of Suruga Bay available from the cape of Ōsezaki, extending over four provinces from Numazu to the northeast, with Mount Fuji rising to the north, and down southwest to Mount Kunō (site of Tokugawa Ieyasu's first mausoleum, before the construction of the much grander one at Nikkō). He remarks of the wood that its outer "skin" (the bark and sapwood) had been worn down by wind and rain, exposing the dark red-brown heartwood. Placed over the tiny north window, it seems to offer a buffer from the chill of the north, much as Ōsezaki Shrine protects sailors from rough seas.

Before leaving the "old piece of juniper" from Ōsezaki Shrine, it is appropriate to mention that the donor, Akiyama Terue, was the grandfather of the distinguished art historian Akiyama Terukazu, who passed away in March 2010 at the age of ninety. I cannot help feeling that Akiyama-sensei's deep interest in the oldest surviving Yamato-e paintings, those in the Phoenix Hall of the Byōdōin in Uji, and his eagerness to apply the most advanced modern scientific technology to study them, represented the simultaneous immersion in both the past and the present that one can see both in his grandfather and in Matsuura Takeshirō.

"Just One Tatami Mat in Size"

Wholly separate from the complicated work of cataloguing the sites and donors in *A Solicitation of Wood Scraps* was the architectural challenge of assembling the many fragments into a study with a floor space of one tatami mat, about one by two meters, or three by six feet. We have no evidence as to how Matsuura actually approached this task, working with his carpenter Fujita Seikichi, whose name appears on the floor plan in *A Solicitation of Wood Scraps*. But we may assume two priorities: to afford a prominent location to the ten-odd pieces that were of striking visual quality; and to create a comfortable living space for a study. The final result was a room of a sort never before seen in Japan.

What exactly was the logic of a "one-mat room"? Matsuura provided his own answer in the opening of the "Manifesto" (*Kabegaki*, literally, "writings on a wall") that served as a postscript to his catalogue. It begins as a treatise on dwelling space, similar to the latter half of the celebrated *Record of a Ten-foot-square Hut* (*Hōjōki*) by Kamo no Chōmei (1155?–1216). Whereas Chōmei proceeds architecturally in stages toward an ever smaller home, Matsuura's journey is more geographical, starting as a traveler with only "a single pack on my back" who has "walked the length of the sixty-odd provinces of Japan and on as far as Ezo and Karafuto." Only after his explorations are finished does he settle down, into an ordinary house befitting an Edo commoner. But he is unhappy in such a fixed place, which he likens to "a gravesite."

Matsuura decides upon the idea of a room just one mat in size. He first denies that it is a matter of *monozuki*, or a taste for eccentric and unusual things. He offers the curious explanation that he is simply adding one extra mat to the existing eighteen-and-one-half mats of the house, to keep the total under twenty. I interpret this as a play on the date on which he was writing the "Manifesto," the last day of Meiji 19 (1886)—just short of Meiji 20. In the end, this specific explanation of the concept does reflect a clear taste for the eccentric, despite Matsuura's denials.

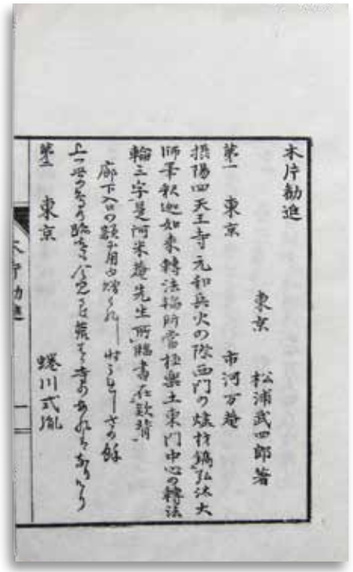

Fig. 10. First page of the catalogue of "wood scraps" in *Mokuhen kanjin*, describing donation no. 1, a piece of burnt wood from a plaque above a gate at Shitennōji Temple, Osaka, said to predate a fire in 1615, and carved with the characters "Tenbōrin" (Turning the wheel of the [Buddhist] Law) as written by the late Edo-period calligrapher Ichikawa Beian and donated to Matsuura by his son, Man'an. Collection of Matsuura Takeshiro Memorial Museum, Matsusaka. Photo by author

Looking at the plan of the One-Mat Room (see fig. 3), we see that Matsuura's claim of "one mat" is actually an exaggeration, another bit of "*monozuki*" wit, as the single mat is surrounded with a wooden "border" (*gakubuchi*) about 15 cm in width that expanded the actual floor space of the room to one-and-a-half mats. This is just under the size of an "*ichijō daime*" (one mat plus a *daime* of three-quarters of a mat), the smallest tearoom in the tradition of Sen no Rikyū's (1522–1591) *wabi*-style tea, a standard that Matsuura evidently wished to surpass.

The small size of the One-Mat Room has misled some commentators to describe it as a tearoom. Matsuura was certainly aware of the assiduous search by Sen no Rikyū for a minimal tea space, an effort that had a lasting impact on Japanese architecture and aesthetics. But he was not in competition with tea, a pastime that he seems to have considered rather frivolous. The stated purpose of the One-Mat Room was that of a study, revealing his priority of literary and scholarly pursuits.

In this sense, the One-Mat Room was what the architectural critic Taki Kōji has called a "lived house" (*ikirareta ie*), in this case a functional study with space to entertain a single guest.[9] It was not a performance stage like a tearoom, as made clear by Matsuura's own drawings of the room in *A Solicitation of Wood Scraps* (see fig. 4), showing it filled with a clutter of objects, various of which were themselves donations. Of the 89 donations listed in the catalogue, 13 were movable furnishings—books, paintings, trays, a hibachi with implements, a desk and some decorative objects. Unfortunately, all of these have disappeared, probably lost when the One-Mat Room was moved in about 1908 from the Matsuura family residence in Kanda to the Nanki Bunko library in the Azabu district of Tokyo.

Mapping a Life: The "Manifesto" of the One-Mat Room

The intimate nature of Matsuura's project was reflected in the physical features of *A Solicitation of Wood Scraps* itself, a book of small proportions (15.5 cm high by 10.5 cm wide) that is a wood-carved facsimile replica of his own hand-written text and hand-drawn images (fig. 10 and see also fig. 4). The book was legally published by Matsuura himself, and distributed privately to his friends—although one surviving copy lists a price of "eight sen" (about forty cents in American money at the time), suggesting that a demand had developed for a commercial edition.

The most compelling testimony of the personal meaning of the One-Mat Room is to be found in the "Manifesto" that appears as the final four pages of *A Solicitation of Wood Scraps*. It is in effect a final mapping, that of his own life. Critical to this reading of the "Manifesto" is Matsuura's underlying Buddhist belief in the ultimate insignificance of the phenomenal world. He had aspired to the Buddhist priesthood from an early age, and became

a practicing Zen monk following a serious illness while traveling in Kyushu at the age of twenty, taking the priestly name of Bunkei. He never seems to have settled down for long to temple life, but this experience determined his entire view of life and the material world.

After explaining the small size of the room, as described above, he turns to the nature of its materials:

> I have made this room by piecing together old scraps of wood that were sent to me from friends in the various provinces. Thus it serves as a way for remembering my friends day and night, reminiscing on who gave this piece, who gave that. In this way, I do not forget the generous spirits of my friends, and have managed a way to tell others about their fine words and deeds.

Having provided this tribute to his network of friends, Matsuura then turns finally to the matter of evanescence, insisting that "I did not presume to build the room with the thought that it might survive for later generations." Citing the parable from the *Lotus Sutra* in which the phenomenal world of suffering is compared to a burning house, he requests a fiery end: "When I die, I would ask that this place be torn down, the wood used to burn my remains, and the ashes then removed to Mount Ōdai."[10]

The very idea of removing his ashes to Mount Ōdai (or Ōdaigahara, as it is known today) was as eccentric as that of building a one-mat room, but for Matsuura it seems uncannily appropriate. Located deep in the mountains behind Takeshirō's own birthplace near Matsusaka on the Kii Peninsula, at the point of intersection of the three provinces of Ise, Kii and Yamato, Mount Ōdai is the wettest spot in all Japan, with annual rainfall of over 4500 mm. Less a peak than a "great high plain" (the literal meaning of Ōdaigahara), it serves as the watershed for much of the Kii Peninsula, in particular for those rivers that nourish the most sacred areas of ancient Japan: Ise, Kumano and Yoshino.

Mount Ōdai was feared in Takeshirō's day as the home of a great serpent, and rarely ever climbed. As a final expression of his own spirit of exploration, however, Takeshirō set out in his last years to conquer Ōdai and to break down the superstitions surrounding it, climbing the mountain twice while he was gathering the materials for the One-Mat Room. He apparently hoped to open the mountain for colonization (a goal achieved today by its status as a popular tourist site). So Mount Ōdai only made sense as the place where Matsuura should himself come at last to rest, transformed to ash by the flames of the One-Mat Room and the deep personal and historical memories it contained, and transported to the source of the water that gave life to some of the most sacred areas in all Japan. In this way, he himself would continue to circulate among the gods that he worshipped.

The Absorption with Things

Despite Matsuura's protest that his conceit of a One-Mat Room had nothing to do with *monozuki*, the project reflects the ideal of *suki*, which is critical to how the Japanese think about and deal with things. The word emerged early in the Heian period (794–1185), derived from the verb *suku*, meaning "to become single-mindedly attracted to things to which one has taken a liking; to become wholly absorbed."[11] The noun was used first to connote love (particularly erotic love), but was also applied to the arts, especially to the art of *waka* poetry.

Edward Kamens has proposed in his provocative book about *utamakura* (poetic place names) in *waka* verse that a preoccupation with collecting "fetishes and curios" is related to the "famous places" (*meisho*) of poetry that functioned as *utamakura*.[12] Poets yearned to connect *directly* with the places of which they sang in verse, many of which they had never visited. Indeed, many were places that no longer existed, requiring special effort to acquire any physical traces. Kamens uses the term "*waka* fetishism" to describe this obsessive longing for physical objects connected with poetic words. The most revealing anecdote about such desires, and about the refined style with which it was consummated, concerns two tenth-century poets known for their *suki*, Nōin (988–1050?, author of *Utamakura*) and Fujiwara Tokinobu (dates unknown). The story is recorded around a hundred and fifty years later as a parody of the extremes of *suki*:

> Tokinobu, an expert archer, was a man of taste (*sukimono*). When he first met Nōin, the two men were impressed with one another. Nōin said, "I have something to show you in commemoration of your visit today," and drew from within his robe a small brocade bag. In it was a single shaving of wood. Showing it, Nōin said, "This is my treasure. It is a shaving from the time of the construction of Nagara Bridge."
>
> Tokinobu was overjoyed, and pulled from within his own robe an object wrapped in paper. He opened it and revealed that it contained a dried frog. "I have here a frog from Ide." They were both struck with wonder, and each returned his treasure to his robe, then parted company. People today can only sigh at such behavior.[13]

Much like the wooden fragments in the One-Mat Room, Nōin's wood shaving and Tokinobu's dried frog are physical fragments from famous sites internalized by *waka* poets: the Nagara Bridge over the Yodo River, and Ide, celebrated as early as the tenth century in the *Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems* (*Kokinshū*) for the cry of its frogs.[14] Of course, this legendary meeting of the Heian poets revealed a fundamentally different approach to things from that of Matsuura. The poets' world remained largely in the imagination, while Matsuura had visited nearly all the places represented in the One-Mat Room, although he insisted that the wood fragments were far more important as signs of the friends who gave the wood than of the actual places.

In the Muromachi period (1392–1573), *suki* passed from the art of poetry to the art of tea, for which the word became in time a virtual synonym, creating in turn the word "*sukiya*" to refer to buildings constructed in tea taste. Today, by far the most common use of *suki* refers to tea practice itself or to *sukiya* architecture. More than any of the other Japanese arts, the way of tea negotiates a delicate balance between spirituality

and sensuosity through the display, handling and exchange of physical things, the "implements" (*dōgu*) that are so central to the history and practice of tea.

Although Matsuura's concept of the One-Mat Room was in part a direct challenge to the tearoom, he was independent of any connection with the formal practice of tea, or indeed with any organized aesthetic. And yet, the entire project of the One-Mat Room would not have been possible without the broader impact of tea in Japan, a thoroughly object-based art that encouraged sensitive appreciation of things. Just as tea masters have always insisted on tea as a form of sociality, so Matsuura insisted that his ultimate concern was with the network of friends brought together by the One-Mat Room.

The Playful Handling of Things

A final important twist on the concept of *suki* is revealed by the word *monozuki* that we have already encountered in the "Manifesto," which specifically joins *suki* with things (*mono*), to suggest a strong element of playful individuality in the handling of objects. In successive dictionary citations of the word, we can sense its evolution: 1) "to strive for witty effect" (*Bunmei-bon setsuyōshū*, 1468–87); 2) "to have a taste for odd things, things that are different from the ordinary" (*Shiga nikkai*, 1534); and 3) "to have a strong sense of curiosity" (*Nippo jisho*, 1603–4).[15] These qualities of *monozuki* as curiosity and a taste for the unusual continued to be cultivated throughout the Edo period (1615–1868), both in the formal arts, notably in *haikai* poetry networks (Bashō's verse "A butterfly attracted to flowers without fragrance: a true *monozuki*!"), and in the world of Edo popular literature (*gesaku*).[16] In some cases, *monozuki* parodied itself, as in the so-called "treasure competition" (*takara-awase*) parties staged by Ōta Nanpo (1749–1823) in the Tenmei era (1781–89), flamboyant events where worthless fake objects were presented as true treasures with great fanfare.[17]

Matsuura did not engage in tea or popular literature, but his father, a samurai in the domain of Tsu (the home of Motoori Norinaga, the great eighteenth-century scholar of "national learning"), was a practitioner of both *haikai* poetry and tea gatherings, so we may presume that Takeshirō developed a well-honed sense of the complex and affectionate attitudes toward things that were nurtured by those arts.

Antiquity and Love of the Past

In the world of Edo *monozuki*, both things and the way in which they were presented were prized for wit and originality. But, in the late Edo period, a far more sober attitude to things was evolving. In part, this was the product of the Qing Chinese model of "evidentiary studies" (*kōshōgaku*), which encouraged a spirit of close observation and careful attention to both textual and physical evidence. More fundamentally, it reflected the increasing exposure of more and more Japanese to the vast diversity of the physical world by way of travel and exploration—key sources of Matsuura's own scholarship.

And, of course, the spreading "national learning" (*kokugaku*) movement provided a different kind of stimulus, seeking to transform the very shape of the past that Japanese intellectuals created in their minds. All of this began to change in the nineteenth century with the discovery of literally buried history, revealed by things dug up from the ground, which was effectively the birth of modern archaeology in Japan. This connection is the focus of a provocative book by Suzuki Hiroyuki, in which he seizes upon the notion of "lovers of the old" (*kōkoka*) as a distinctive class of men in the transition from Edo to Meiji.[18] Matsuura Takeshirō is mentioned as a founding member of this class. Suzuki stresses that the illustrations of the old objects of these collectors, using the most advanced printing techniques, was a crucial way for them to promote their interests, and he includes Matsuura's woodblock-printed *The Pleasures of Scattering Clouds* (*Hatsuun yokyō*, 2 vols., 1877 and 1882) as an example.[19]

Suzuki uses the word "*kōkoka*" for the group he analyzes, but this is not a word that they would have recognized, although it accurately describes their taste for the past. It is basically a Meiji translation of the English "antiquarian," an inclination that operated in a completely different context in Japan. In Europe, those interested in the more distant past turned to the stone monuments of classical antiquity. In Japan, monuments were built mostly of wood, frequently destroyed by fire and regularly rebuilt, so that physical remains of the ancient past were rare and fragile. Reading through *A Solicitation of Wood Scraps*, one notes how many pieces were salvaged from fire or recycled through rebuilding or repair. The conception of the One-Mat Room was peculiar to such a perishable culture of wood—Matsuura asked that it be burned, not preserved. It was in a sense the ultimate anti-monument.

A "liking for the past" (*kōko*) was nothing new in Japan, nor in the many Chinese sources to which Japanese of the Edo period often turned, and it had grown vastly in the final years of the Edo period. For people like Matsuura, "old" and "things" could not easily be considered separate from each other. Unlike the more literary-minded scholars of national learning, who were led from words to the past, these *monozuki* types were led to the past through material things.

Suzuki describes an important difference between the approach of the "*kōkoka*" and that of the new generation of Japanese trained in the discipline of archaeology as introduced from Europe and America. The former were attached to the particularity of each object, preferring the use of actual-size rubbings as the basis for their woodblock-printed illustrations. The new university-based practitioners of "*kōkogaku*" (written with the characters meaning to "think about" rather then "love" the past) looked at the objects they collected as "specimens," valued not individually, but as the basis for comparison with other objects in order to develop systems of classification. For the *kōkoka* antiquarian, the aesthetics of the object were primary, while for the archaeologists, visual appeal was secondary.

As Suzuki demonstrates, the new academic "professionals" in the university departments of archaeology quickly displaced the old curiosity-driven *monozuki*–type collector, such as Matsuura and Ninagawa Noritane (1835–1882), who donated a scrap of wood to the One-Mat Room. These two camps ended up in two separate modern disciplines that were just then in their formative stages: "art history" and "anthropology." The tensions between the two approaches still provoke angry debate and new ideas. In his day, Matsuura Takeshirō was "object-oriented," as were so many of his generation of amateur collectors and observers, but if he had been born a generation or two later, we can imagine him equally intrigued with the great debates over classification that emerged only in the last decades of his life.

Epilogue

Vast changes occurred in the later Meiji period about the ways things of personal and historical meaning were handled. The commercial market in old things grew phenomenally and was quickly globalized, with striking results. Western preferences came to influence Japanese art markets, and vice versa. An entirely new body of "collectors" emerged in Japan from the new capitalist class, imitating Western models, pushing aside with their wealth the older haphazard style of *monozuki* collectors, who were largely indifferent to market value and did not even have a word for "collection." (Matsuura himself, as we have seen, did buy and sell objects to finance his antiquarian travels, but his refusal to haggle suggests a casual attitude to profit and a primary interest in sharing.) They only understood the pleasure of showing selected items that they owned to special friends who might appreciate them for their beauty—and oddity. The notion of a personal collection that would be available to a broad public, possibly paying admission, was unknown until the turn of the twentieth century. Private museums remained a rarity in Japan until after World War II.

So the world of the old collectors, known only as "*monozuki*" or "*kōzuka*," now becomes that of proper "collectors" in the modern style. And this turned out to be the fate of the One-Mat Room itself, which in spite of Takeshirō's instructions that it be burned, was preserved in the private home of his son and grandson. I can only sympathize with their own sentiments, and be thankful to them that the One-Mat Room was not destroyed. In 1908, it was moved to the Nanki Bunko, a magnificent Western-style library built by Tokugawa Yorimichi, the head of the Kii branch of the Tokugawa family.[20] With this, the One-Mat Room itself became a "thing" worth collecting, a transformation that has preserved it until today.[21]

For all its expansive mapping of history and geography, reflecting the career of its creator as an explorer, the One-Mat Room is an intensely inward-looking project. Perhaps the best image is that provided by Sugiura Baitan in his dedicatory poem, in which he sees Matsuura as "at times reaching out like a dragon, at others bunching up like an inchworm." In other words, after a life of expansive activity, he was shrinking into a tiny physical space that has remained symbolically vast.

Notes

1. Since 1924, the One-Mat Room has been attached to a structure that includes the Kōfūkyo tearoom. For historical details, see Henry Smith, *Taizansō and the One-Mat Room / Taizansō: Matsuura Takeshirō no ichijōjiki no sekai* (Tokyo: Hachiro Yuasa Memorial Museum, International Christian University, 1993).

2. See, for example, *Bakumatsu no tankenka Matsuura Takeshirō to ichijōjiki / The One-mat Study of Takeshiro Matsuura, 19th-Century Explorer*, exh. cat. (Tokyo: INAX Publishing, 2010). Matsuura's instructions to cremate his remains with the wood from the One-Mat Room were made in the "Manifesto" of *Mokuhen kanjin*, 22.

3. Frederick Starr, "The Old Geographer: Matsuura Takeshiro," *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* 44, pt. 1 (Feb. 1916): 1–19.

4. The other materials were paper (two books and two paintings), iron (a pair of long nails used to handle charcoal in a hibachi), clay (for a set of bells) and stone (as a step at the east entrance).

5. Starr, "The Old Geographer: Matsuura Takeshiro": 3.

6. For the use of "Kusanoya," see Kitsui Seigorō, "Kusanoya ni tsuite" (About the Kusanoya), *Shosai* (The study) 3 (1926): 8–12, and Takagi Bun, "Chaseki yurai" (The history of the tearoom), in *Taizansō no ki* (Tokyo: Privately published, 1936), quoted in Smith, *Taizansō and the One-Mat Room*, 80.

7. *Byakushin* is also known in Japanese as *ibuki* (scientific name, *Juniperus chinensis*), and is found in China and along the coasts of Japan. Ōsezaki represents the northern limits of its range in Japan.

8. This is from a collection of letters written to Takeshirō by donors to the One-Mat Room. It was mounted as a scroll, and is in the Matsuura Family Papers of the Historical Documents Division of the National Institute of Japanese Literature in Tokyo. For a photograph and transcription of the letter, see Smith, *Taizansō and the One-Mat Room*, 242–43.

9. Taki Kōji, *Ikirareta ie* (The lived house) (Tokyo: Tabata Shoten, 1976).

10. "Mount Ōdai" is today called Ōdaigahara, elevation 1695 meters, located on the border of Nara and Mie Prefectures. For more on Matsuura Takeshirō's relationship with Mount Ōdai, see Smith, *Taizansō and the One-Mat Room*, 26–30.

11. Ōno Susumu et al., eds., *Iwanami kogo jiten* (Iwanami dictionary of classical Japanese) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974).

12. Edward Kamens, *Utamakura, Allusion, and Intertextuality in Traditional Japanese Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), ch. 3.

13. English translation from Kamens, *Utamakura*, 160.

14. For details on the complexities of each of these *utamakura*, see Katagiri Yōichi, *Utamakura utakotoba jiten* (Dictionary of *utamakura* and *utakotoba*) (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1983), 113–14, 295–98.

15. *Nihon kokugo daijiten* (Dictionary of the Japanese language), second ed. (Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 2000–2002).

16. *Monozuki ya niowanu kusa ni tomaru chō*.

17. For details of the 1774 *takara-awase*, see Haruko Iwasaki, "The World of *Gesaku*: Playful Writers of Late Eighteenth Century Japan" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1984), 64–73. It is revealing that the introduction to *Takara-awase no ki*, the printed "Record of the treasure competition," cites as precedent for such competitions the story of Nōin and Tokinobu, as related above—a tale about things that seem to have been perfect for the *gesaku* sensibility.

18. Suzuki Hiroyuki, *Kōkoka-tachi no jūkyū-seiki: Bakumatsu–Meiji ni okeru "mono" no arukeorojii* (Japanese antiquarians of the nineteenth century: The archaeology of "things" in the Bakumatsu–Meiji eras) (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2003).

19. Suzuki, *Kōkoka-tachi no jūkyū-seiki*, 176–78, and Smith, *Taizansō and the One-Mat Room*, 16.

20. Smith, *Taizansō and the One-Mat Room*, 30–35.

21. For the details of this history, see Smith, *Taizansō and the One-Mat Room*, 30–68.