

Review

Rephotography of the Photo Album “The Duke Mohri Principal Residence”

Yukihide SHIRAISHI ^{a*}, Koki SHIRAISHI ^b, Hideki SHIRAISHI ^b, Takayuki SHIRAISHI ^b, and
Gonshiro SHIRAISHI ^c

Abstract: The preservation of photographs functions both to document historical moments and to safeguard their condition over time. Rephotography, on the other hand, focuses on reinterpreting those preserved photographs, tracking their changes, and expressing them anew from a creative perspective. Both play important roles in preserving history and memories through photography and in providing new value for the future. Gonshiro Shiraishi photographed the Former Mohri Family Principal Residence in Hofu, Yamaguchi Prefecture, and published two photographic albums: “*Yamaguchi-ken Hofu-chō Anzaishō*” in 1911 and “*Kōshaku Mohri-ke Hofu-tei Shashinchō*” in 1916. In this review, we present rephotographs of the Former Mohri Family Principal Residence (now the Mohri Museum) and the Mohri Family Garden, as depicted in the two photo albums, comparing the changes from 1911, 1916, and the present.

Key words: Rephotography, Old Photographs, Photo Album, Mohri Family Garden, the Former Mohri Family Principal Residence

1. Introduction

In recent years, interest in the preservation and restoration of photographs has grown. One reason is the increase in museums and other institutions that collect and preserve photographs as works of art. Old photographs are also valued as academic resources and research materials in various fields, including history, and are increasingly regarded as significant cultural assets.^{1,2)} The revision of Japan’s Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties in 1996 provided for the protection of cultural properties dating from the arrival of Perry in 1853 to the end of World War II in 1945. In addition, science and technology were added to the criteria for designating historical materials. As a result, photographs became subject to cultural heritage protection in Japan as historical materials, and their reputation increased. The designation of photographs as Important Cultural Properties began with the famous photograph of Shimazu Nariakira in 1999, and there are currently 14 such designations. Photographs account for about 20% of the Important Cultural Properties of the modern era in the field of historical materials. This is due to the fact that, thanks to the efforts of those involved, significant progress has been made and practical measures for use have been implemented, including advances in photographic research and the digitization of old photographs.

Rephotography, on the other hand, is a photographic technique in which a location photographed in the past is photographed again in the present.³⁾ This is often done as part of artistic expression, reinterpreting the meaning of the original photograph to convey the passage of time and change. For example, the same location may be

photographed at different times to illustrate social change by comparing historical photographs with contemporary images. Through rephotography, the re-evaluation of preserved photographs may take place. Reinterpreting the historical context of past photographs from a contemporary perspective provides a new perspective on photography as an art form, while at the same time allowing it to serve as a record. Thus, a mere photograph becomes meaningful again.

Gonshiro Shiraishi was born in Yamaguchi Town, Yamaguchi Prefecture, in 1876. He opened the Shiraishi Photo Studio in Miyaichi, Hofu Town, in 1896.⁴⁾ In addition to “*Yamaguchi-ken Hofu-chō Anzaishō*”,⁵⁾ he published photo albums, including “*Kaho Shōkyō*”,⁶⁾ “*Kōshaku Mohri-ke Hofu-tei Shashinchō*”,⁷⁾ “*Sabagawa Kōzui Shashinchō*”,⁸⁾ and “*Gyōkei Kinen Shashinchō*”,⁹⁾ to document Hofu, Yamaguchi Prefecture. These photo albums include several rephotographic images, which continue to be cited in many publications.^{10–13)} In this review, we present rephotographs of the Former Mohri Family Principal Residence (now the Mohri Museum) and the Mohri Family Garden, as depicted in two photo albums, comparing the changes from 1911 with “*Yamaguchi-ken Hofu-chō Anzaishō* (accommodations for Emperor Meiji’s visits)” (Figure 1 and Figure 2), from 1916 with “*Kōshaku Mohri-ke Hofu-tei Shashinchō*” (Figure 3 and Figure 4), and from the present with our rephotographs.

2. History of the Mohri Family

The ancestor of the Mohri family was Ōe no Hiromoto, a close

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^a Department of Applied Chemistry, Sanyo-Onoda City University, Daigakudori, Sanyo-Onoda, Yamaguchi 756-0884, Japan.

^b The Society of Photography and Imaging of Japan.

^c Photographer.

Corresponding author. Tel: +81 836 88 4580 E-mail: shiraishi@rs.socu.ac.jp (Y. Shiraishi)

the newly created “*Kazoku*” peerage system. The Former Mohri Family Principal Residence, the setting for this paper, was the residence of Motonori’s eldest son, Duke Mohri Motoakira.

3. Rephotography of the Former Mohri Family Principal Residence

In 1892, Inoue Kaoru, an elder statesman in the days of the Meiji Restoration, decided to build the Former Mohri Family Principal Residence (Mohri Residence) here. Inoue Kaoru was a politician born in Suō Province in 1836. He was sent to Europe by Chōshū Domain and was known as one of the “*Chōshū Five*”. The Mohri Residence was prepared for construction after the road was relocated in 1893, and the government-owned land was transferred after 1894. However, the construction project of the Mohri Residence was delayed by the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), the death of the family head, Mohri Motonori in 1896, and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). Construction of the Mohri Residence began in earnest in 1911, when Emperor Meiji stayed at the residence during his review of Kyushu. The “*Yamaguchi-ken Hofu-chō Anzaisho*”, as shown in Figure 1, is a photo album produced in 1911. The construction of the Mohri Residence resumed in September 1912 and was completed in 1916. The “*Kōshaku Mohri-ke Hofu-tei Shashinchō*”, as shown in Figure 3, is a photo album from 1916, created shortly after the completion of the residence.

The Mohri Residence occupies the southern foot of Mt. Tatara, and the Hofu Plain opens up to the south. If you look out into the distance, you can see Mitajiri Bay and the Seto Inland Sea, and Oita Prefecture is visible on clear days. The mild climate and clean air

make the Mohri Residence a perfect location. The Mohri Residence is on a grand scale, as the garden is 83,957.13 square meters in size and the main residence is 4,000.55 square meters. Figure 5 depicts a panoramic view of the Mohri Residence taken in 1916. It was highly regarded as a pinnacle of Japanese garden design and architectural design, incorporating the best of Meiji and Taishō era technology.¹⁵⁾

Figure 6 shows the front gate of the Mohri Residence. The gate, as seen in the center and right photographs of Figure 6, is made entirely of zelkova wood, a magnificent structure reminiscent of a castle gate. The large central door was only opened when the master or a special guest passed through. Stone walls are built on both sides of the gate. The center photograph in Figure 6 was taken in 1916, and the right photograph was taken in 2024. The two photographs appear to be almost identical except for slight differences in the tree planting. In contrast, the left photograph, taken in 1911 before construction resumed, significantly differs from the other two photographs. Figure 7 shows the carriage porch of the Mohri Residence. The carriage porch, which originated from the mansions of noblemen, was considered a symbol of authority. The large overhanging “*Karahafu*” roof of the Mohri Residence symbolized the dignity of the duke’s main residence. In the center and right photographs of Figure 7, as in Figure 6, it is evident that the shape has remained almost unchanged over the past 100 years.

Figure 8 shows the main building of the Mohri Residence. The “*Nagi Residence*”, as shown in the left photograph of Figure 8, was built in 1908 and its thatched roof was completely renovated to welcome Emperor Meiji in 1911. In November 1911, it was used as a lodging place for Emperor Meiji when he traveled westward to Kyushu. Before World War II, it was designated by the national government as a National Historic Site called “*Yamaguchi-ken Hofu-chō Anzaisho*”. It is now closed to the public. Meanwhile, the center and right photographs in Figure 8 show the main residence after its completion in 1916. The main residence is a modern building in the style of “*Goten-zukuri*”, constructed using high-quality timber such as Japanese cypress from Kiso, Japanese cedar from Yakushima, and zelkova from Taiwan. It is a grand and beautiful building of great renown. The main residence has 60 rooms and 780 tatami mats in total. The main residence served as the residence of Emperor Taishō in 1916, Empress Teimei in 1922, Emperor Shōwa in 1947, and both Emperor Shōwa and Empress Kōjun in 1956. The right photograph in Figure 8 still conveys the strong impression of 1916, even after more than 100 years. Previously, the authors reported a review



Figure 5. The panoramic view of the Former Mohri Family Principal Residence taken in 1916.



Figure 6. The front gate of the Former Mohri Family Principal Residence (left, center and right photographs were taken in 1911, 1916, and 2024, respectively).



Figure 7. The carriage porch of the Former Mohri Family Principal Residence (left, center and right photographs were taken in 1911, 1916, and 2025, respectively).



Figure 8. The main building of the Former Mohri Family Principal Residence (left, center and right photographs were taken in 1911, 1916, and 2024, respectively).

written at the time of Empress Teimei's visit in 1922.¹⁶⁾ For a comparison with the events of 1922, the reader is referred to our previous review.

If you enter the main residence and turn right, you will find two reception rooms, as shown in Figure 9. These are the only Western-style rooms in the main residence. The reception rooms have carpeted floors, chairs and tables. The floorboards in the corridors and rooms are made of zelkova, and the partition doors are made of cedar. The next room is the hall, which serves as a guest room, as shown in Figure 10. It is the largest room in the mansion, spanning the first, second, and third rooms, and measuring 42 tatami mats. The hall follows the style of the great "*Shoin-zukuri*" drawing room of the Edo period, with a coffered ceiling. The number of bulbs in the chandeliers decreases from the first to the third room. The fact that the number of light bulbs reflected the status of the invited guests is characteristic of this period. Electricity was generated on-site. The main residence was wired throughout for electricity, which

was still in the early stages of adoption, and represented an early example of an electrified house. The cypress square timbers used for the staircase (Figure 11) connecting the first and second floors were cut from the imperial forest. At the top of the staircase, there is a "*Katōmado*" window with a large sliding glass inset to provide light. Figure 12 depicts the bathroom of the Mohri family. Granite was used for the hip walls and baseboards, and marble was used for the bathtub and floor. The bathtub was made of stone from Akiyoshidai in Yamaguchi Prefecture. The building was fully equipped with a hot water supply system even at that time, and although it was built in the Taishō era, hot water was available directly from the faucet. This convenience can be said to be unique to the main residence of Duke Mohri. As can be seen in Figure 9 through Figure 12, the building still retains almost all of its original appearance more than 100 years later. This is largely due to the establishment of the Mohri Hokokai Society, a public-service foundation, as explained below.

In 1955, the Mohri Family Garden was designated as a Place of



Figure 9. The reception room of the Former Mohri Family Principal Residence (left and right photographs were taken in 1916 and 2024, respectively).

Scenic Beauty (*meishō*) in Yamaguchi Prefecture. Since then, the Mohri family has been considering how to maintain this magnificent garden and building as a cultural asset for many years to come. As a result, the Mohri Hokokai Society, a public-service foundation, was established in 1966 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Meiji Restoration. The Mohri family donated the entire property to the foundation in order to maintain the main residence, garden, and heirlooms passed down through successive generations. The foundation decided to open these to the public for a fee and to permanently preserve them as cultural assets belonging to the people. Furthermore, in 1967, the children’s room of the main residence was remodeled to create an exhibition room, and part of the hallway was also equipped with display cases to establish the Mohri Museum.

All of the 20,000 items in the museum’s collection came from the Mohri family. Over 10,000 documents, including the Mohri family

archives, which are designated as Important Cultural Properties, are indispensable for the elucidation of Japanese history. Of these, four collections (eight items) are National Treasures, and ten collections (8,597 items) are Important Cultural Properties, including a portrait of Mohri Motonari. National Treasures are a designation given to particularly important items among the Tangible Cultural Properties (Important Cultural Properties) designated by the national government. Yamaguchi Prefecture has ten National Treasures, four of which are preserved at the Mohri Museum. The four National Treasures include the “*Four Seasons Landscape*,” “*Kiku-zukuri Koshi-gatana*,” “*Kokin Wakashū, Vol. 8*,” and “*Shiki Lu Hou*.”¹⁷⁾ The “*Four Seasons Landscape*” is a work by Sesshū, a famous ink wash painter. The changing landscapes of the four seasons, starting from spring and ending with winter, are dramatically depicted in a majestic composition on a 16-meter-long scroll. The “*Kiku-zukuri Koshi-gatana*” is a

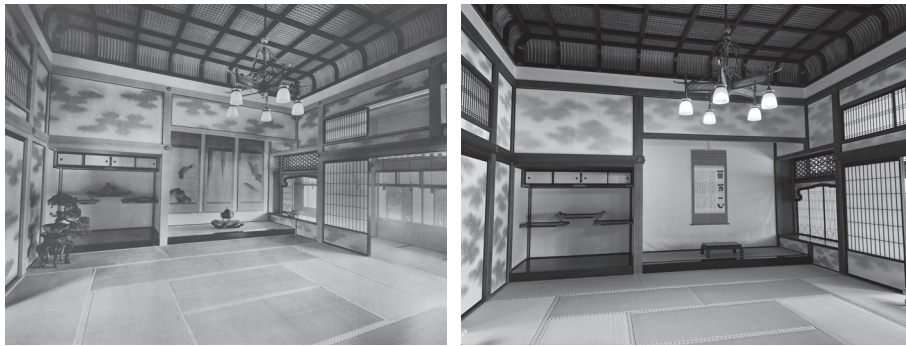


Figure 10. The guest room of the Former Mohri Family Principal Residence (left and right photographs were taken in 1916 and 2024, respectively).



Figure 11. The main staircase of the Former Mohri Family Principal Residence (left and right photographs were taken in 1916 and 2024, respectively).



Figure 12. The bathroom of the Former Mohri Family Principal Residence (left and right photographs were taken in 1916 and 2024, respectively).

26.5-centimeter-long short sword made in the latter half of the Kamakura period. Although it bears no inscription, it is a typical Yamato-style piece from the late Kamakura period and is in good condition. The “*Kokin Wakashū*” is Japan’s first imperially commissioned anthology of waka poems, compiled in 905 by four people, including Ki no Tsurayuki. Of the 20 volumes, only volume 8, which we have, volume 5, and volume 20 of this anthology are complete, with six volumes remaining as fragments—that is, volumes 1, 2, 3, 9, 18, and 19. It is widely accepted that this manuscript is a copy transcribed by Minamoto no Kaneyuki. The paper was made by sprinkling mica sand on white hemp paper, giving it a sparkling effect depending on the viewing angle. Combined with the elegant yet restrained calligraphy, it evokes the refined world of Heian-period aristocracy. The ninth volume of “*Shiki Lu Hou’s*” is a history of China. According to records, the Mohri family manuscript was copied by Ōe no Iekuni, who was an ancestor of the Mohri family, in 1073, collated by Ieyuki in 1101, and read by the chamberlain Tokimichi in 1196. The Mohri Museum exhibits these materials, rotating the display every two months. We hope you will have the opportunity to view these National Treasures in person at the Mohri Museum.

4. Rephotography of the Mohri Family Garden

The Mohri Family Garden was designated as a Place of Scenic Beauty by Yamaguchi Prefecture in 1966 and as a National Place of Scenic Beauty in 1996. A large strolling pond garden extends to the south of the main residence. The garden covers an area of about 55,000 square meters, of which the inner pond occupies about 5,500

square meters. “In addition to the excellent site selection, this garden’s primary purpose is to convey the character of the traditional garden of the main residence of a feudal lord that dates back to the Edo period, it is highly acclaimed as having the greatest value for being introduced throughout and beautifully expressed. (Agency for Cultural Affairs)”.¹⁸⁾ In front of the main residence, pine trees and large garden stones are carefully arranged. One step below, water guided from the ravine cascades down a 3.5-meter-high waterfall constructed from megalithic masonry and flows into a pond, as shown in Figure 13. The view of Mitajiri Harbor and the islands of the Seto Inland Sea beyond the Gourd Pond is spectacular, as shown in Figure 14. Around the Gourd Pond, stone structures, lanterns, plants, lawns, and other elements are thoughtfully arranged, embodying the characteristics of a typical strolling pond garden, as shown in Figure 15. The garden includes more than 250 species of plants, primarily pine trees. The garden stones are mainly mountain and river stones made of granite, sourced from the local area. Figures 13–15 show contrasting views of the landscapes in 1911, 1916, and 2024, respectively. Apart from differences in tree growth, the landscapes appear nearly identical in the rephotographs. This indicates that the garden has been excellently maintained and preserved.

On the other hand, some aspects of the Mohri Residence have changed compared to 100 years ago. Figure 16 shows the *Soreisha*, a building honoring the spirits of the Mohri family’s ancestors. Because it was dedicated to the ancestral deity of the Mohri family, it was relocated along with the head of the family—from Hagi Castle to the Takanawa Residence in Tokyo, and then to Hofu in 1916.¹⁹⁾ However, after the death of Duke Mohri Motoakira in 1938, his

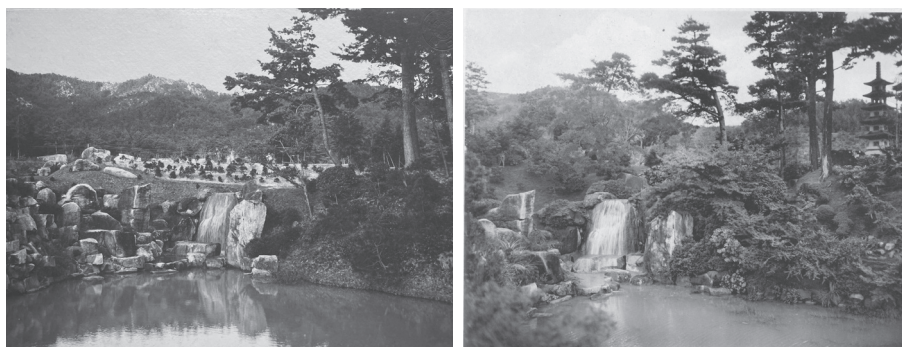


Figure 13. The waterfall in the Mohri Family Garden (left and right photographs were taken in 1911 and 1916, respectively).

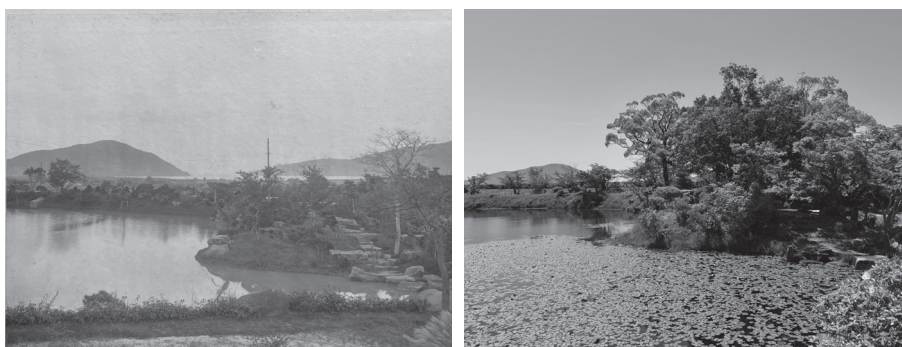


Figure 14. The Gourd Pond in the Mohri Family Garden (left and right photographs were taken in 1911 and 2024, respectively).

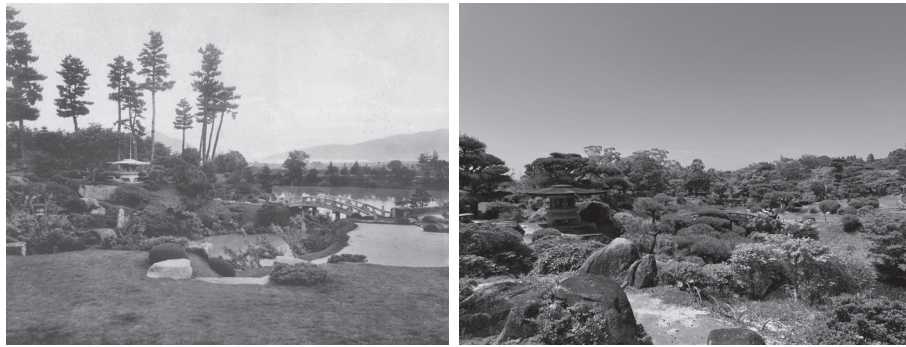


Figure 15. The stone structures in the Mohri Family Garden (left and right photographs were taken in 1916 and 2024, respectively).

son, Duke Mohri Motomichi, who inherited the title, moved to the Takanawa Residence in Tokyo. As a result, although the *Heiden* (offering hall) and *Haiden* (worship hall) remained, the *Shinden* (main hall) was dismantled in 1939. Figure 17 shows a photograph of the three shrines at the Mohri Residence in 1916. These shrines, along with the main hall of *Soreisha*, were removed in 1939. These shrines were located in the southwest part of the Mohri Residence, and today only the site remains. Figures 16 and 17 help connect the memories of the past at the Mohri Residence to the future.

5. Conclusions

In this paper, we introduced and contrasted the changes observed through rephotographs of the Former Mohri Family Principal Residence and the Mohri Family Garden, as captured in two photograph albums, i.e., “*Yamaguchi-ken Hofu-chō Anzaishō*” and “*Kōshaku Mohri-ke Hofu-tei Shashinchō*”. One of the highlights of the Mohri Residence is the “*Sanshi Kyōkunjō*” (Three Sons’ Instruction Letter) handwritten by Mohri Motonari, which is designated as an Important Cultural Property.²⁰⁾ This letter was written by Mohri Motonari on November 25, 1557, while stationed at Tonda in Suō Province (now Shūnan City, Yamaguchi Prefecture), and was addressed to his three sons: his eldest son, Mohri Takamoto; his second son, Kikkawa Motoharu; and his third son, Kobayakawa Takakage. It was a lengthy, 14-article letter of instruction, in which Motonari’s political vision was conveyed to his sons. This letter expressed a father’s desire for his sons to unite and preserve the Mohri family. It is believed that this teaching was undoubtedly a key factor in the continued prosperity of the Mohri family. Thanks in large part to the teachings of Mohri Motonari, we are able to appreciate these valuable cultural properties today.

Like these historical documents and cultural assets, photographs are also an important part of documentary heritage. However, a quarter of a century after the first designation of photographs as Important Cultural Properties, only a small number of photographs continue to receive this designation. In addition, photographs related to cultural properties from the Meiji era onward have been heavily weighted toward buildings and art and craft objects. Photographs are often less well-preserved than documents and records and are subject to progressive deterioration and damage. Therefore, it is important that research and protection efforts continue into the future.



Figure 16. The Soreisha honoring the spirits of ancestors taken in 1916.



Figure 17. The three shrines taken in 1916.

We strongly hope that the value of old photographs will be widely recognized, and that Japan’s photographic culture will spread further throughout the world.

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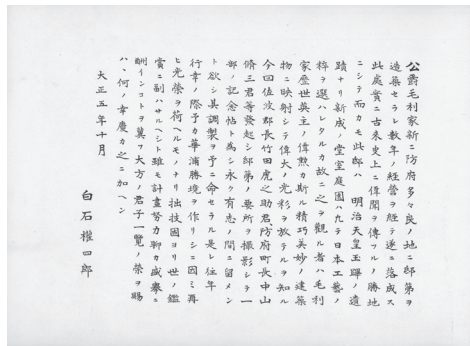


Figure 18. The acknowledgements by Gonshiro Shiraishi from the photo album "*Kōshaku Mohri-ke Hofu-tei Shashinchō*".

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