

(Rev.) Takamasa Senge
The Izumo Great Shrine
195 Kitsukihigashi
Taisha-machi
Shiname-ken
699-0701 Japan

15 March 2016

The Administrative Building of the Great Izumo Shrine, Shimane Prefecture

Dear Rev. Senge,

DOCOMOMO Japan is the official Japanese chapter of the international non-governmental organization DOCOMOMO (Documentation and Conservation of buildings, sites and neighborhoods of Modern Movement) which aims to evaluate and work for the preservation of twentieth-century architecture and environmental heritage. We hear that the Administrative Building of the Izumo Great Shrine is under threat of demolition, and wish to appeal for the preservation of internationally renowned example of Japanese tradition expressed in a modern architectural form.

In 1998, the Architectural Institute of Japan (AIJ) established the DOCOMOMO Working Group under their Architectural History and Design Committee. In 2003, the Administrative Building of the Izumo Great Shrine was selected as one of '100 representative examples of modern architecture in Japan' and was included in the 2005 exhibition 'Modern Architecture as Cultural Heritages –the Docomomo 100 selection'. The exhibition, held in Shiodome, Tokyo, attracted a lot of visitors and was shown in Osaka and other cities. It was also promoted internationally through the exhibition catalogue as well as through *Japan Architect* (the English-language architectural journal published by the Japanese publisher, Shin Kenchiku Sha), *BRUTUS* and Internet homepages. Designed in 1963 by the late Japanese architect Kiyonori Kikutake, architect of the famous Sky House in Tokyo, the Administrative Building of the Izumo Great Shrine is one of his architectural masterpieces, expressing Japanese traditional design in a manner which draws great international and inter-disciplinary interest.

We understand that, in view of the constant rainwater penetration of the building's roof, you have decided, after much consideration of the building's reuse, to demolish it. We would request you to consider once more the conservation and rehabilitation of this building which can never be created again with the same architectural value. These we identify as follows:

1. A consideration for the irreplaceable sacred area of the Izumo Great Shrine.

The President of the supporting board of the Izumo Great Shrine, Mr. Choemon Tabe, then the governor of Shimane Prefecture, was an admirer of Kiyonori Kikutake's attitude towards architecture, and took him to visit the Izumo Great Shrine. The design of the Administrative Building began when Tabe asked Kikutake to design a new, fireproof administrative office, to replace the one which had burnt down some time before. Kikutake was shocked and lost for words. 'Looking at the wooden architecture which stood within the inner sacred area,' he later confessed, 'I couldn't gain any clues for the new design using our then current knowledge.'ⁱ

To try to achieve a transparent architecture, Kiyonori Kikutake first investigated types of glass used in Western countries, but the building technology of the 1960s could not support it. Then, rather than using *in-situ* concrete which he thought would make the sacred area dirty, he chose to use the pre-cast concrete architecture in imitation of traditional Japanese timber frame and joint construction.ⁱⁱ Furthermore, he inclined the outer walls to reduce the apparent volume of building so that it would appear subservient to the traditional wooden architecture of the Great Shrine.

2. An exceptional architectural design expressing the Japanese tradition.

With regard to the design of the Administrative Building of the Izumo Great Shrine, Kiyonori Kikutake said that the building is the 'light' illuminating the sacred area as well as providing other functions. When explaining the origin of architectural form, he said that, if the 'Honden' (the main house) of the Izumo Great Shrine was regarded as the warehouse of god, then the Administrative Building should be seen as the 'Inakake' (the temporary rectangular structure in rice fields on which cropped rice is hung to be dried).ⁱⁱⁱ Thus, the giant frame and inclined outer walls symbolize metaphorically the idea of cropped rice being dried, recalling the benign memory of a typical Japanese pastoral scene. The Administrative Building of the Izumo Great Shrine does not to express Japanese traditions as simile, but, intellectually, as a metaphor, and it is regarded, in architectural world, as an internationally outstanding work.

3. The latest architectural technologies of the time.

In the context of the sacred area of the Izumo Great Shrine, where the wooden architecture was built with the latest and highest technology available to each generation, the construction of the Administrative Building was also a challenge in terms of technological development. The structural frame of giant beams and columns, looking like a 'Torii', utilized a post-tension system, still effective today, to create an expansive 10m by 45m columns-free internal space. Although some parts, for technological reasons, required the use of *in-situ* concrete, other components were made of pre-cast concrete. The Administrative Building is an important example of the engineering revolution of 1960s, and the concrete, cast with the greatest care, is still, with appropriate maintenance, viable.

4. An excellent work highly valued in both domestic and international architectural circles.

The Administrative Building of the Izumo Great Shrine had received numerous architectural awards including the 15th AIJ Award of Architectural Institute of Japan (1963), the 6th BCS Award of Japan Federation of Construction Contractors (1965), the 14th Minister of Education Award for Fine Arts, the 7th Pan-Pacific Award of American Institute of Architects (1964), and is widely renowned as a superior work. It is still a building which any architect, builder, student or person interested in architecture, from any country, would wish to visit at least once in their life.

5. A masterpiece of Kiyonori Kikutake, indispensable to Japanese modern architectural history.

Kiyonori Kikutake, the architect of the Administrative Building of the Izumo Great Shrine, was born in Kurume, Kyushu, in 1928, and, in 1948, won equal third prize, with Kunio Maekawa (and behind Kenzo Tange who came second) in the architectural competition for the design of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Catholic Cathedral. After graduation from Waseda University, he worked in practice for the Takenaka Corporation and the Murano-Mori Architects office, before establishing his own architectural office in 1953. Until his death in 2011, Kikutake had designed almost 600 works, many now famous buildings. In addition, he published influential theories of architectural design including *Taisha Kenchiku Ron –Ka Kata Katachi (On the notion of replicability: Ka Kata Katachi)*, and was one of the proponents of the Metabolist movement. Numerous now well-known architects, including Shozo Uchii, Mitsuru

Senda, Toyo Ito, Itsuko Hasegawa, Yuzuru Tominaga, Hiroshi Naito and Tadasu Ohe, worked in his office.

Kiyonori Kikutake was one of the most influential Japanese architects, and his masterpiece, the Administrative Building of the Izumo Great Shrine is indispensable to the story of Japanese modern architecture. As for the Administrative Building's detailed design and construction, the architectural drawings were prepared by Atushi Ogawa, Katsusuke Endoh, Shozo Uchii, and Eiji Musha oversaw the construction site.

The Administrative Building of the Izumo Great Shrine is, above all, indispensable to the history of Japanese modern architecture, and is part of the world's precious cultural heritage. We respectfully ask that you understand the above explanations and consider once again the conservation and rehabilitation of the Administrative Building of the Izumo Great Shrine once again.

If there is any way that we could further assist with academic or technical advice in the preservation of this most significant building, Docomomo Japan would be pleased to do so.

Sincerely,

Hiroshi Matsukuma, Ph.D.
President, DOCOMOMO JAPAN
Professor, Kyoto Institute of Technology

ⁱ Kiyonori Kikutake, 'Sekei Kasetu Gendai Kenchiku heno Sekei no Riron (The Hypothesis of Design: The theory of design for contemporary architecture)', *Kenchiku*, September 1963.

ⁱⁱ According to the interview to Mr. Katsuke Endoh, on February 2016.

ⁱⁱⁱ Kikutake, op. cit.