

## Butsudan, Kamidana, and Ceremonial Space in Housing Improvement Discourse

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Since the end of the Meiji period, movements advocating “improving living standards” and “rationalization” have been repeatedly promoted in Japan. Previous studies have noted that while weddings and funerals were considered important areas for reform before and after World War II, these efforts generally met with limited success. By contrast, housing improvement is often cited as a domain that achieved more tangible results. These efforts prioritized the creation of hygienic living environments, rational and efficient floor plans, and living arrangements suited to culturally informed, family-centered lifestyles. This paper examines housing improvement efforts and investigates how domestic rituals involving the *butsudan* and *kamidana*, as well as ceremonies such as weddings and funerals conducted at home, were perceived and conceptualized. Drawing on improvement policies and reports produced by the housing movement’s promoters, it examines the evolving discourse concerning domestic ritual practices and ceremonial space from the Taisho period through the postwar era. While the treatment of *butsudan*, *kamidana*, and domestic ceremonies was not a central concern in housing improvement, available documents primarily address the recommended placement of *butsudan* and *kamidana* and improvements to guest rooms that correspond to changing approaches to ceremonial practices. The spatial arrangement of these religious and ritual objects changed over time, with particular attention paid to the significance of *kamidana* and *butsudan* during the wartime period. Although housing improvement efforts led to better living conditions, they also contributed to a degree of uniformity. Floor plans increasingly assumed that weddings and funerals would not take place at home, while *butsudan* and *kamidana* were more often positioned in a straight line with the tokonoma, closets, or cabinets in living and sleeping rooms. Furthermore, the rise of nuclear families, the downsizing of houses, and the Westernization of residential design led to an increase in homes planned without a *butsudan* or *kamidana* altogether. Future research should examine more closely the concrete impacts of housing improvement on domestic ritual space as well as the discourse on housing improvement shaped by key actors.

Key words: housing improvement, New Life Movement, *butsudan*, *kamidana*

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