



"My wish is for Yangon to become a city full of charm in the eyes of its residents and the world," says Osawa.

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# Urban Planner Passionate for Myanmar's Future

In Yangon, a city whose population is growing significantly, a Japanese female urban planner is helping create a comfortable and highly livable city rich in individuality

**"A**ll the Myanmar people I met in Japan were really down-to-earth and friendly. Then, when I first visited Myanmar in 2007, all the local people I encountered went out of their way to be kind," says Shiki Osawa of her first impressions upon arriving in Myanmar. She then started visiting Myanmar once a year, and her fondness for the country steadily grew. "I began to think how I could use my expertise for the people of Myanmar," she says.

After gaining experience in a large redevelopment project in the center of Tokyo as a Japanese real estate developer, Osawa joined Yoma Strategic Holdings Limited, one of Myanmar's leading real estate development companies. Three years have passed since she started working there as the only Japanese employee among a staff of about 9,000, and the only real estate development planner.

Myanmar is rapidly achieving urban development. "Yangon's

population is expected to double in a few decades," Osawa states.

Serious problems will arise if such rapid urbanization is left to take its own course. For example, slums may pop up from a lack of housing and employment, traffic may become congested or paralyzed, and air pollution may become increasingly problematic. To prevent such situations from happening, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has helped to formulate a strategic urban development



Unplanned development brings with it deep problems to the city. Osawa shares a long-term, holistic view of city planning with her Myanmar colleagues.



## Shiki Osawa

Arriving in Yangon in 2015, she has partaken in two urban development projects by the real estate development company Yoma Strategic Holdings Limited, a member of a large Myanmar conglomerate. She also has worked on a new city development project by New Yangon Development Co., Ltd., which was established by the Yangon Region government.

plan for 30 years of future growth in Yangon's metropolitan area. Through this initiative, Japanese know-how regarding grand-scale urban development, particularly environmental-friendly compact cities that utilize public transit networks, can be put to use in Myanmar.

At Yoma Strategic, Osawa is helping to develop a business and commercial district in central Yangon and a large-scale residential area neighboring the city center. Both projects began with an analysis based on the target area's JICA-formulated master plan. Osawa is also playing a leading role in a new city development plan by a public company established by the Yangon Region government. These plans, which constitute city planning from scratch, begin with the building of roads and bridges, and the provision of water and electricity supplies.

"My experience working in real estate development in Japan taught

me that city planning is not simply the work of constructing buildings but rather the work of refining plans while predicting the future shape of the city and thinking about the people living there," says Osawa.

Therefore, the most common point of debate between Osawa and her colleagues is not deciding how to resolve the tasks at hand, but rather thinking about "what we want Yangon to become." "When everyone talks about what is Yangon's special charm and what they want to remain for the future generations, the discussion always becomes so lively," Osawa states. "Everyone loves the city and is very proud of it."

The future Yangon that Osawa envisions is not simply a city that is safe and functional. "Yangon still has much religious architecture and many historical buildings as well as a rich culture such as wearing traditional garments in daily life. I hope that we can work with the people of Yangon to create a city that preserves its vibrant traditions unique to Yangon," she says.

Immensely fond of both Yangon and Myanmar, Osawa's eyes light up as she talks. The city planning of Yangon, which is experiencing the most rapid urbanization of any city in Myanmar, will surely be the first step in the unfolding of this country's future. ✨



Japanese developers are assisting in the huge mixed-use development project "Yoma Central," which is soon to be the new landmark of downtown Yangon. (3D rendering of Yoma Central)