

THE JAPANESE CONCEPT OF PRESERVATION OF HISTORICAL AREAS AND THE EUROPEAN ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE YEAR 1975

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ABSTRACT In this paper, the author wishes to explore the history and characteristics of the Japanese concept from the point of view of the effect that the European movement including the European Architectural Heritage Campaign might have had. The period of the 1970s was a crucial time in relation to the preservation of historical areas as well as to the World Heritage Convention and Japan also welcomed such a dramatic and innovative time. The Central Government of Japan gained an impact from European countries to open the door for the preservation of historical areas in 1970, and finally decided to revise *The Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties*. The group of traditional buildings was defined as a new category in 1975, the year the Council of Europe launched the *European Architectural Heritage Year* (EAHY 1975); from then onwards two movements influenced the preservation of historical areas in Japan: one was the *Machizukuri*, which appeared in the 1980s as a community-based town planning movement, while the other was an academic movement which established a new holistic perspective for the Urban History of Japan in the 1990s. These influenced the management for the Preserved District and were instrumental in improving the Guidelines for the construction of new buildings since the 2000s.

1. THE IMPACT FROM EUROPEAN COUNTRIES FOR PRESERVATION OF HISTORICAL AREA IN JAPAN

It was difficult to preserve the traditional wooden houses inhabited by the middle class, as these are the most important characteristic of the historical areas, especially found in large city centers in Japan. Bombs destroyed many of the buildings during World War II and the only exceptions were some large historic cities such as Kyoto and Nara. The houses that survived were extremely altered or demolished due to the pressure of population increase caused by the rapid economic growth in the 1960s. And then the *Law of the Ancient Capital Preservation*¹ was enacted in 1967. However the law was applied to a limited area in ancient cities such as Kyoto, Nara and Kamakura, which were ancient capital cities. Furthermore the law ended up freezing up any activities in the areas.

Dr. Masaru Sekino first submitted the report entitled “Dangers which threaten historic centers in Japan” at *The ICOMOS First Conference on the Conservation, Restoration and Revival of Areas and Groups of Buildings of Historical Interest* in 1967 when the *Law of the Ancient Capital Preservation* was enacted. In the report, he pointed out that there was insufficient conservation even for individual outstanding houses; at the same time, the latest trends of how the other countries including Eastern Europe and the Americas had been dealing with preservation of historical area was introduced into Japan (Sekino 1967). However, there was huge difference between stone buildings and timber buildings and between Japan and other European Countries.

The Central Government of Japan was aware of the rapid changes and started to open the door for the preservation of historical areas in Japan through the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO who jointly organized, with the co-operation of UNESCO, *the Symposium Regarding The Preservation and*

Development of Historic Quarters in Urban Programmes-Kyoto and Nara in 1970. The symposium was attended by architects, historians and city planners like Dr. Piero Gazzola, Mr. Jean-Bernard Perrin, Dr. Masaru Sekino, Dr. Kenzo Tange and so on (Summarized Record of Discussions 1971). According to the record on the discussions during the symposium, Dr. Kenzo Tange, a Japanese architect, referred to the difficulty of carrying out the conservation of urban areas in Japan where inhabitants enjoyed modern lifestyle even more than European countries. Actually at that time, he was planning a development of a Fiera district in Bologna and he insisted on development of new city so that the historical center could coexist with modern life. However he recognized the potential of preservation of historical urban areas in Japan and later suggested the extension of the application of the *Law of preservation of Ancient Capital Cities*; additionally he also installed a new framework for the preservation of historical areas in Japan. The symposium gave the central government one of the reasons to prepare the new legislation by setting aside the financial means and to begin making a list of historical areas in 1974, which then resulted in selecting approximately 400 historical areas.

Meanwhile, the movement of residents and citizens who acknowledged losing their historical environment had started parallel and was rapidly spreading out around Japan; this gave birth to the *Japanese Association for Machinami Conservation and Regeneration*² which was founded in 1974 as a liaison and co-operation organization for the local residents' movements. Subsequently, the idea of the conservation of historical areas was introduced with the official term of *Preserved Districts for Groups of Traditional Buildings*³, and was adapted as a new category of cultural property by the state in 1975.

The ICOMOS symposium, *The Conservation on Smaller Historic Towns*, was held in Rothenburg ob der Tauber, May 29-430, 1975.⁴ Dr. Masaru Sekino introduced a new development that the central government of Japan had been initiating with the preservation of wooden historical areas from Far East (Sekino 1975). Furthermore the Symposium title, *The Conservation on Smaller Historic Towns* was exactly in relation to the EAHY 1975, launched by the Council of Europe. The Japanese concept of the preservation of buildings showed a substantial difference from European Countries that had been influenced by many European concepts since 1967 and finally made it in time for EAHY 1975; at the same time UNESCO established new recommendations for historical areas (UNESCO 1976). Finally, following the meeting, the Japanese concept started to develop in its own way.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF JAPANESE CONCEPT OF PRESERVATION OF HISTORICAL AREA

The first development was *Machizukuri* (まちづくり), as the Japanese version of 'Community Development'.⁵ The important economic growth in the 1980s and the 1990s resulted in the establishment of the notion of *Machizukuri*. The reasons expressed by the residents who wished to counteract the reduced quality of life caused by the rapid development had led the movement of community based town planning. It was emphasized that the local community should have played a major role in the process of town planning so that they could implement actions related to community revitalization, neighborhood preservation and planning. One of the driving forces that made people interested in the *Machizukuri* was that it could include the economic provisions for the local community who were struggling with depopulation caused by the outflow to large cities.

The concept of *Machizukuri* overlapped and interacted with that of the 'Preserved District'; consequently, it made for the Preserved District to shift from 'Living evidence of days gone by' to 'Survival tools in the present days' in local towns or villages. This occurred because a number of local authorities, who had tried to develop impoverished areas, finally recognized that there was no way to provide the economic prosperity without using the historical area as a factor for development.⁶ The approach to the historical elements that the residents had once neglected and demolished was dramatically changed through the process that residents pressed and encouraged local authority to take action. In many cases where the

Machizukuri was connected with the Preserved District, the local authorities now considered the Persevered District as a key asset in their policy.

The second development was the establishment of a new holistic perspective for Japanese urban history in the 1990s, which caused renewal of the evaluation criteria of the historical fabric. Starting in 1975, the system of the Preserved District seems to have been a success. Meanwhile, the rapidly developing economic growth also resulted in new urban development projects in different parts of the country; ironically, this also contributed to better understanding the Japanese urban history. Instead of a large number of development projects, which destroyed the natural and cultural environment, this trend encouraged projects for the study and excavation in urban areas unveiling the past and understanding such urban areas and settlements as archaeological resources. In particular, it led to the discovery of mediaeval sites thus improving and clarifying the understanding of urban history.

In the 1970s, Dr. Hidenobu Jinnai introduced the morphological and typological analysis for urban fabrics, originally developed in Italy under the stewardship of Dr. Saverio Muratoni, in Japan. Before, the investigation to evaluate the historical area had been borrowed by the conservation and restoration for historical architecture whereas now the morphological and typological analysis could be applied for surveying the town of Takehara in 1978 to evaluate spatial evolutions (Fig. 1) (Tokyo University 1978).



Fig. 1: The town of Takehara (Photo: Kiyonaga)

Initially, the analysis of historical areas lacked evidence of the medieval period. However, an academic movement encouraged collaboration between archaeologists, historians, urban planners, and architectural and urban historians from the late 1980s. Those who had tried to renew the disciplines of urban evolution developed a new perspective. As a result, this perspective could first stand in the 1990s on the

straightforward process of spatial evolution until the mid-20th century. It was however understood that the urban fabric that had resulted from the major transformations at the end of 16th century, involving the society, the economy and the urban space. Consequently, it was pointed out that such Japanese urban heritage had survived, and could now be considered as the resource reflecting the past urban developments (Takahashi 1993).

This resource is likely to indicate crucial elements that make up the framework and layout of cities or towns. Such survived elements can even be found in Tokyo where historical layers were thought to have completely disappeared (Jinnai 1985). The discovered elements could indicate that the transformation of the 16th century was even larger than that of modern times and that it continues to be the sustainable living space under the changes caused by the forces of market economy. Even though the buildings were replaced several times, the urban fabric could still indicate the ideal living space based on the morphological context over 400 years. Hence, the sustainability of the human environment could appreciate the invisible regulations, mechanism as an intention embedded in their topographically.

3. THE SYSTEM OF PRESERVATION OF HISTORICAL AREA

According to *The Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties*,⁷ the definition of “group of traditional buildings [is] groups of traditional building of a high value, which form a certain historic configuration with their environments” (Article 2, Clause 6). “Preserved districts for a group of traditional buildings” is a district determined by a municipality, i. e. a city, a town or a village, in order to preserve a group of traditional buildings and its environment that create value in combination with such buildings (Article 142). The first 7 districts, Kakunodate (Akita), Shirakawa (Gifu), Tsumago (Nagano), Sanneizaka (Kyoto), Gion-Shinbashi (Kyoto), Horiuchi (Yamaguchi), Hiyako (Yamaguchi) were selected in 1976 (Figs. 2,3). By September 2014, 107 areas had been designated as “important preserved districts for groups of traditional buildings.”⁸ The repair, maintenance and visual restoration works have been carried out over 1.500 buildings by using subsidies from the central government.



Fig. 2: District of Kakunodate, (Photo: Kiyonaga)



Fig. 3: District of Shirakawa (Photo: Kiyonaga)

Unlike the central government usually designated a single historical architecture as an important cultural property while taking into account the owner's consensus, the municipality determined the district for the preservation of traditional buildings in accordance with city planning or regulations (Article 143, Clause 1), without considering the size of the district and the number of traditional buildings. The central government may, according to an application filed by a municipality, select all or parts of "preserved districts for a groups of traditional buildings" that possess an especially high value to Japan as an "important preserved districts for a group of traditional buildings" (Article 144, Clause 1). After the council for the central government (an advisory body to the *Agency for Cultural Affairs*) approves, the central government shall put a notice in the *Official Gazette* (Article 144, Clause 2). An area designated as "important preserved district for a group of traditional buildings" must meet at least one of the following classifications (Government of Japan 1975).

1. Preserved district for a group of traditional buildings with an especially high value in its design;
2. Preserved district for a group of traditional buildings and subdivision with a well-preserved original state;
3. Preserved district for a group of traditional buildings and the environments that noticeably show its local characteristics.

After identifying the district, the central government can grant financial and technical assistance to the projects of the municipality for the conservation and restoration of traditional and non-traditional buildings, disaster prevention planning and equipment, purchase of land and building. In addition, in order to preserve the specific visual aspects of the preserved district, those buildings can be accepted to ease

restricting *The Building Standard Law*⁹ requirements that include issues such as the use of incompatible new materials for roofs or walls, and preventing the eaves from perturbing on the street.

A resident who requires developments, i.e. new buildings, extensions, reconstructions, moving, removing, alterations of the surface of the building by repair, improvements or painting, alterations of the land, cutting of trees and quarrying, must seek permission from the local authority or the mayor, in accordance with the *The Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties*¹⁰ and municipality's by-law.¹¹ The preservation master plan made by a municipality encompasses the details of the restrictions and the guidelines based on the morphological and typological analysis. The preservation master plan must consider the following issues:

1. The general evaluation and future vision of the preserved district.
2. The criteria of traditional buildings, as well as the list of traditional buildings and constructions and natural elements.
3. The guideline of repair and maintenance (*Shu-Ri*, 修理) for traditional buildings, the guideline of visual restoration as a first step (*Kyo-ka*, 許可) and the guideline of visual restoration in a second step (*Shu-Kei*, 修景) for non-traditional and new buildings.
4. The strategy for financial assistance by local government.
5. The strategy for setting up public facilities and risk management.

Repair and maintenance (*Shu-Ri*) means consolidating or recovering only the damaged part and otherwise leaving the structure and the material intact. *Shu-Ri* is used normally as the technical term in conservation and restoration works in Japan. Meanwhile, the concept of visual restoration (*Shu-Kei*) borrowed a technical term from the Japanese gardening and landscaping techniques. In particular, in a preserved district, *Shu-Kei* is used in relation to reconstructing building parts or focusing on formation, positioning, scale, facade design, and colors to allow it to live in harmony with its surrounding townscape. The difference between the first step and the second step for visual restoration is the amount of restriction to changes or treatments for non-traditional and new buildings. In all three cases, the guidelines refer to the facade and a part of building that could be seen from streets or public open spaces. In the first step, the owner of the building can receive financial assistance from the government when the conservation and restoration works are carried out in accordance with the guideline of repair and maintenance or visual restoration.

4. THE GUIDELINE OF APPROVAL (*KYO-KA*) AS A TOOL FOR CREATIVITY AND DIVERSITY FOR HISTORICAL URBAN LANDSCAPE

In the first decade after 1975, in a preserved district, the tendency was to only limit attention to small areas rich in traditional buildings, where the owners of such buildings were the great majority. After *Machizukuri* was adopted in the 1980s, the range of preserved districts became more widely implemented allowing to fully appreciate even more the potential of the preserved districts. This was because increasingly the non-traditional buildings were dominant in the preserved district. The preserved districts were likely to have a vast area, unclear borders and involvement of many stakeholders including the owners of the non-traditional buildings. As a result, the preservation master plan had to cope with various challenges that required new measures to evaluate and manage the preserved districts.

For the preservation master plan, the major issue is the identification of the boundary based on the historical and morphological context, which must also secure consensus by the majority of the stakeholders. The perspective of the urban history can provide the way to identify the boundary adequately, as long as one of its parts resulted from historical spatial evolution. Furthermore, it became necessary for the preservation master plan to deal with various challenges caused by many stakeholders. Especially, the guideline to manage the non-traditional and the new buildings were needed because non-traditional buildings

dominated the preserved district. The new perspective of the urban history could also contribute to the development of the methodology. The preservation master plan contains, as mentioned above, the guideline of repair and maintenance (*Shu-Ri*), visual restoration (*Shu-Kei*) and approval (*Kyo-ka*) for alteration of buildings. The repair and maintenance of traditional buildings is thought to be a positive contribution in order to guarantee the authenticity and integrity of the preserved district. On the other hand visual restoration for non-traditional and new buildings has been considered a great contribution to the visual aspects of the townscape. However, visual restoration might reduce the authenticity and integrity of the townscape in case the building appearance is mismatched with its surrounding. Therefore, the key concept of visual restoration was preferred to give more importance to the older buildings and making the new buildings less remarkable.

In 1994, Dr. Yukio Nishimura pointed out that authenticity in preserved district in Japan relies considerably upon non-traditional buildings, which are modified (by using *Shu-Kei*) in traditional design, using new materials in the context of the district (Nishimura 1994). At that time, the number of non-traditional buildings was more dominant than the traditional buildings in the preserved district. Besides, the districts that were likely to have a vast area and many stakeholders who owned non-traditional buildings were increasing. However, the guideline for visual restoration still had strict limitations in order to cope with the design of the appearance. Hence it became difficult for such a single guideline to be applied for all construction activities in the preservation district. The typological and morphological analyses could provide the new methodology for the guideline of visual restoration to solve the difficulties through an academic approach, and also to make improvements. The historic town retained the important elements that formed the frame of the town. The analysis could indicate that such elements can make a traditional layout as transmitting the layout of the town. Because of this, in order to manage the townscape's continuity, the new buildings could be acceptable provided they did not disturb the traditional layout such as the hierarchical relationship between buildings and streets, as well as the distribution of large or small spaces and buildings.

As a result since the 1990s, the guidelines of visual restoration developed by each districts began including the guideline of approval; both guidelines define basic traditional building settings, i.e. setting, scale, facade components, roof style and total painting. However the guideline of approval places more importance in traditional settings and roof style, and the other parts are only enforced to emphasize harmonization in their historical landscape, because the setting and roof style of the buildings can occupy most parts of the continuation on the orders for the townscape. Thus the guideline of approval defines what the townscape fundamentally needs, and it requests that the owners must respect the harmonization of the historical landscape with their own funds. On the other hand, the guideline of visual restoration is still as strict as before and requests that the owners must contribute to recovering the significance of the landscape with funds from the government. The combination of these could be in accordance with the concept of the *Machizukuri* movement that insisted on recovering the inherent image of the city damaged by disordered development. In particular, the key concept of guideline of approval is that the new buildings do not disturb but harmonize with their surrounding historical buildings by taking into account traditional materials, thus making a positive effect on the continuity of the society and economy. Some experts maintain that the guideline of approval has a great possibility not only to guarantee the basic tone of the townscape as the minimum standard but also to introduce acceptable diversity in the townscape context because of its ample tolerance (Kariya 2000).

Indeed, there was once an un-stipulated standard reflected in the pre-market economy period when the economy was embedded in the society before the first half of the 19th century, which could manage creativity and diversity under certain limitations. The capacity of the embedded economy determined by the society should decide the capacity of the urban settlement, the layout of city or town, provided people are careful not to bulge the local economy out more than the society could handle. Paradoxically, the capacity of urban settlements could only determine the level of economy the society would be able to realize, while working within un-stipulated standards. That is why the guideline of approval that transmits

the capacity of urban settlements was considered as a contemporary counterpart as well as un-stipulated standard that once had worked.

Until recently, little has been discussed about the boundary of the 'guideline of approval' given that it is a rare case for the owner to build a new building without funds from the government; therefore people are likely to be under the guideline of visual restoration. Nowadays it is necessary to improve the discussion on the boundary of the 'guideline of approval' so that those who could find disciplines that would be able to make diversity and creativity in the preservation districts, as well as the areas that remain historical buildings and are not designated as the preservation district. At the same time, as increasing difficulties to handle the historical urban landscape due to the dis-embedded economy occur, the local communities are also expected to let un-stipulated standards work in the contemporary environment (Miyamoto 2013).

By tracing the transition of the conservation master plan and surrounding discussion, we can confirm that the Japanese conservation of historical areas i.e., preserved district, has been adapting a new methodology since the second half of the 1990s without any alteration in the legislation. Besides, the methodology of visual restoration including the guideline of approval has been adapted into the city planning as the *Landscape Act* of 2004,¹² which widely expanded the concepts and emphasized a better understanding of what the continuity of a urban or rural area is, because it is applicable wherever, even in recently developed settlements, to the needs of the local community. However, there is a big difference because the guideline of approval by the *Landscape Act* puts more importance on facade components and designs rather than setting or roof style.

CONCLUSIONS

The conservation of historical areas as cultural property in Japan officially started in 1975. The concept of preserved district had been influenced by European concepts used as a tool for the enhancement of recovering for rural areas where the local communities were faced with declining in the local economy. Therefore, the local community has played a great role both in conservation of historical areas and in economic development, being the ideal model for decentralization involving the local community. Ironically large demolition and destruction of natural and historical environments that have taken place since the 1990s could enforce the study of urban history and find principle orders in traditional settings in urban and rural areas. Furthermore, the study of urban history could support the strategy for the guideline of approval appearance that could be expected when managing non-traditional and new buildings in the historical areas.

Over the last forty years interestingly the concept of preserved district has been advanced with no change in legislation, in spite of having increasingly to face various socio-cultural problems. The legislation for preserved district had already shifted from being centralized to decentralize. The key element of the decision in the process is gaining the consensus of the local community. It is necessary for the local community and the authorities not only to respect their historical environments but also to play a main role in sustainable daily conservation; otherwise residents cannot keep the environments in a good condition. Today, it could be considered as an ideal decentralized town planning. Besides, there have been two impacts that allowed the concept of preserved district to advance that did not require changing the legislation as long as the legislation could accept them.

The guideline of approval seems to be in accordance with contemporary standards, as well with the once un-stipulated standard embedded in the society. Therefore, the guideline of approval can have a positive effect on continuity, creativity, and diversity of the urban context, as long as people are careful not to bulge the local economy out more than the society could handle. However, until recently, little has been discussed about how to apply the guideline of approval more. We should recognize that it has a great potential on the creativity and diversity, as the intergenerational ethics based on morphological and typological analysis. Therefore, one can say that it is necessary to give importance to the study of urban history

in each city. The analysis for evolutions of urban settlements as past community's achievements will make un-stipulated standards appear, and then the guideline of approval will be more active.¹⁵

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¹ <http://www.mlit.go.jp/common/000221199.pdf>, accessed April 16, 2015.

² <http://machi-nami.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/teikan.pdf>, accessed April 16, 2015.

³ http://www.bunka.go.jp/english/pdf/2014_policy.pdf, accessed April 16, 2015.

⁴ <http://www.icomos.org/en/charters-and-texts/180-articles-en-francais/chartes-et-normes/384-resolutions-of-the-international-symposium-on-the-conservation-of-smaller-historic-towns-at-the-4th-icomos-general-assembly>, accessed April 16, 2015.

⁵ *Machizukuri* translated 'Community Building' in the *Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Settlements of Japan*, 2000, so called *Machinami Charter*, is a Japanese word that contains a range of concepts that can lead to a variety of actions related to economical, spiritual, and physical community planning and building. These could also be articulated by different expressions according to the particular context, such as community revitalization, neighborhood preservation, or planning with community involvement.

- ⁶ In fact, now about 40% of the Preserved Districts are designated as areas of decreasing population by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.
- ⁷ http://www.unesco.org/culture/natlaws/media/pdf/japan/japan_lawprotectionculturalproperty_engtof.pdf, accessed April 16, 2015.
- ⁸ http://www.bunka.go.jp/english/pdf/2014_policy.pdf, accessed April 16, 2015.
- ⁹ <http://law.e-gov.go.jp/htmldata/S25/S25HO201.html>, accessed April 16, 2015.
- ¹⁰ http://www.unesco.org/culture/natlaws/media/pdf/japan/japan_lawprotectionculturalproperty_engtof.pdf, accessed April 16, 2015.
- ¹¹ On the interpretation by the law, thus, the group of traditional buildings is just the cultural property. The area designated by municipalities can give a guarantee of conservation of whole surrounding environment, especially natural environment such as trees, streams, ponds etc.
- ¹² <http://www.mlit.go.jp/crd/townscape/keikan/pdf/landscapeact.pdf>, accessed April 16, 2015.
- ¹³ This paper is based on individual point of view, not on the Agency for cultural affairs.