

Examples and Significance of Culture that is Created through Transmission of the Spirituality of Space

Dr Kunie SUGIO (ICOMOS CIIC)
PREC Institute Inc. Kojimachi 3-7-6, Chiyodaku, Tokyo, 102-0083.
Japan
E-mail address: k-sugio@prec.co.jp

Abstract. The spirit or spirituality of place or space (hereinafter “the spirit of place”) can exist in a fixed or static fashion at the place; on the other hand, as part of people’s inspiration, memory, or impression, it can move with the people who are inspired by, keep memory of, or impressed by the place.

It can even transcend time and space, by being transplanted and transmitted by people, resulting in a new culture (tangible or intangible) in another space. When established, the chain of transmission of the spirit of place continues further over time and space.

In other words, the spirit of place can be said to be a mother to cultural heritage or a creator of diverse culture over time and space.

This paper introduces several examples to explain the above with the aim of demonstrating the concept and diverse values of the spirit of place or space.

The role of the spirituality of space is most outstandingly evident in its role as the abundant source of culture that produces various forms of culture. People have various feelings and inspirations from space such as respect, awe, fear, relaxation, excitement, dream, expectation, trust, salvation, etc. Broadly speaking, space can be understood as tantamount to the concept of the environment. In addition, the environment is construed as the sum of complex and diverse forms of space. The environment is something that people can physically feel and experience or something that appeals to the physical perceptions of people. The source of what makes such appeal is, it can be said, nothing other than the spirituality of space.

Space that spiritually moves people so powerfully is often sacred places that are revered as the object of worship or faith, places of scenic beauty, and/or environmental places that have strong interaction

with people and therefore have great importance to people. The most outstanding example of this spirituality is the space conceived as sacred sites.

1. Spirituality of Space

When we think about the spirituality of space, sacred areas are the good entrance to understanding the various characteristics evolving around the concept of the spirituality of space. Therefore, I give my thought firstly to sacred sites as a motif.

Sacred sites in folk religions are viewed as follows:

- Space of a certain extension where a certain sacred statue, icon, grave, a site or a monument associated with a saint, etc. is worshipped;
- Rough and difficult site deep in the mountain that forbids or defies human access;
- Place where a certain special power exists: natural features such as mountain, forest, river, tree, rock, stone, waterfall, cave, and animals that inhabit the area are conceived as being gifted with a certain special power;
- Sacred sites that are associated with especially important persons or divinities such as saints, martyrs, and heroes; and
- Space as a chaotic and integral combination of the above-mentioned.

Characteristics of the genes of cultural spirituality of space

Space assumes cultural characteristics and transmits the spirituality of cultural value as its genes. The cultural genes of space can be dynamically transformed through human interactions – without being changed at the core -- into a space that moves people by different modes of “appearance”, “transmission”, and “reproduction”, depending upon how “time”, “place”, and “occasion” are intertwined.

Such spiritually exhibited by space can transport, transmit, and reproduce its cultural genes that lie at the core of the generation of spirituality freely to anywhere. It is one of the outstandingly distinctive characteristics of Japanese culture that it has a system in which the spirituality of space and its cultural genes make dynamic appearance anywhere.

2. Culture that is Formed by the Transmission of Cultural Spirituality of Space

The core of the spirituality of space becomes cultural genes and spreads from the place of origin to new places, where it takes root and reproduces the space of kin to the original spirituality. Traditional gardens of Japan show many examples of such cases, which can also be seen in how styles as well as unique forms and garden techniques of Japanese gardens have been produced.

2.1. REPRODUCTION

Outstanding examples of this phenomenon are given below.

2.1.1 *“Fujizuka” (Mt Fuji mound) as the Reproduction of the Sacred Mountain, Mt Fuji*

Mt Fuji, the sacred mountain symbolic of Japan, has traditionally been the object of worship in Japan since the ancient times; it attracts the worship of many Japanese people even today. During the Edo Period, earth mounds in the shape of Mt Fuji were built in many places throughout Edo as the substitute object of worship for elderly people and women for whom climbing Mt Fuji by way of worship was too tough and difficult. These earth mounds are called “Fujizuka” (Mt Fuji mound) and spread through the citizens of Edo (present Tokyo), who worshiped Mt Fuji.

Mt Fuji mounds were built in many places where the real Mt Fuji was visible at that time. The part of Mt Fuji that was visible from Edo (present Tokyo) was the mountain body higher than the 5th stage (10th stage corresponds to the summit area) and the direction ranged from south-west (from Edo) to north-west (from Edo).

The part of Mt Fuji higher than the 5th stage was considered to be the celestial area where gods and divinities dwelled and it was distinguished from the secular world. In particular, the phenomenon known as “divine appearance” on the summit of Mt Fuji was most revered and worshipped. “Divine appearance”, also known as “divine light of sunrise”, was likened to the appearance of the triad Bodhisattvas of Amida, Avalokiteshvara, and Mahasthamaprapta in the sunlight.

Mt Fuji is the space or place that produces the spirituality in the form of worship in the minds of those who perceive the Pure Land of the Utmost Bliss. The distant view of Mt Fuji was the spiritual center of the citizens of Edo (present Tokyo) during the Edo Period and was considered to be the symbol of Edo. A large number of Mt Fuji mounds, which copied Mt Fuji in miniature, were built throughout Edo, out of which as many as 80 mounds remain to exist today.

Mt Fuji-shaped mounds are approximately 10 m in height and covered with lava stone of Mt Fuji or similar-looking stone; at the top of Mt Fuji mounds, the soil taken from Mt Fuji was buried. They were built for the purpose of creating Pure Land in miniature where men and women of all ages could experience the climbing of Mt Fuji even if they were unable to climb the real Mt Fuji in their real life.

In other words, this is an example in which the spirit of place, or the worship of Mt Fuji in this case, transmitted its cultural genes to other places that are located far away from origin and reproduced pseudo-Mt Fuji.

2.2. SUBSTITUTION OF SCENES

This is a method of bringing “extraordinary scenes” into the daily and ordinary space of people’s life. Original landscapes are shrunk and “imitated” into Japanese gardens. This is one of the garden-making methods for Japanese gardens, known as “shrunk scenery”.

Beautiful landscapes representing Japan such as the view of Mt Fuji are transferred and copied in reduced scales into Japanese gardens; this garden-making technique transports the spirituality from the original places of scenic beauty to other places.

Examples of this are given below.

2.2.1. *Miniature Scenes of Mt Fuji*

Mt Fuji is a classical example of a famous Japanese scene, and Fuji-style volcanic-shaped) mounds constitute an integral part of many gardens. The best example is found in the Suizen-ji temple, a garden in Kumamoto Prefecture, where clipped grass swells up in the shape of a large, pointed mound.



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Figure 1. Mt Fuji (photo by Kôyô Okada)



Figure



Figure 3. Mt Fuji-shaped mound in Suizen-ji Garden

2.2.2. Miniature Scenes of Japan's Representative Place of Scenic Beauty, "Ama no Hashidate" (Bridge to Heaven)

"Ama no Hashidate" (Bridge to Heaven), which is situated on the coast of the Sea of Japan is reproduced with a spit of land in the foreground of Katsura Detached Palace, Kyoto.

2.2.2. Spatial Substitution

The space that divides the divine space and the human world is called “kekai” (literally, boundary) in Japan; it is a special type of space that is sequestered for the purpose of religious practice or training. This type of space is set up often to prohibit the entry of people who would disturb the religious training of Buddhist monks (as is practiced, for instance, in sacred mountains such as Koyasan, Hieizan, Nantaisan, and Omimesan). While the “kekai” area is closed to women, special worship areas for women were created outside the mountain area to substitute the “kekai” area.

The spirituality of the worship for mountains, forests, rivers, waterfalls, etc. produced the space where gods descended from these places of their dwelling to the places of people’s daily life and where gods and people communicated with each other through rituals, traditional arts, festivals, and other intangible culture.

On the other hand, there were cases where space itself was revered as sacred; water in waterfalls and trees in forests were brought back to the places of people’s daily life as holy water or sacred trees that contained and maintained the spirituality of the sacred place.

“Amagoi”, the Japanese ritual to call for rain, is a tradition that mediates between gods and people and is considered to be an interesting example showing how people can feel the unique spirit of space real and alive.

These examples lead to the understanding that the spirit of space is the source of various historical and cultural properties; it is therefore important to conserve and transmit the space that exhibits special spirituality to future generations.



Figure 4. Ama no Hashidate (“Bridge to Heaven”)



Figure 5. Rendering of Ama no Hashidate at Katsura Detached Palace, Kyoto

2.3 SPIRITUALLY AND GENIUS OF SPACE

2.3.1. Animism

Even before animism, recognition of spirituality in all entities (including space), existed, there had been a pre-animism, primitive belief known as “manaism”. This type of belief had existed in the West, too, since old times. In relation to this, legend says: “the sword of *mana* enabled its holder to beat as many enemies as it wished. Therefore, people fought each other for the sword”.

“Tamaism” of Japan is based upon the “sun worship” at its root; houses and tombs are made in circular shapes with open space at the

center.

Stone circles were “observatories of the sun”, “ritual stages for the sun”, “sacred sites to receive the round gem of the sun”, and also the playing grounds where people communicated with gods. Particularly in the case of the sun worship of the Japanese people, it is characteristically easy to see the signs of the energy of the sun; geological and natural conditions of Japan made the existence of the sun easily recognizable and it was the origin of people’s life.

2.3.2. *Festivals of Shinto Shrines*

This is an example in which gods inhabiting a certain space (eg. genius loci, spiritual gods) show up before people.

The “mikage” festival of the Shimogamo-jinja Shinto shrine (a.k.a. Kamomioya-jinja), Kyoto, is a sacred ritual in which a “god” descends from Mt Mikage, 4 km away in the north-east, to the Mikage-jinja Shinto shrine and then down to the Shimogamo-jinja Shinto shrine, where the god settles on a stone seat called “iwakura” and performs a festival. There exist archeological remains of the “iwakura” stone seats, consisting of fist-size stones being packed in holes of 25 cm to 80 cm in diameter and 10 cm to 50 cm in depth.

Today, it is believed that the god settles on the “iwakura” situated in the garden in front of the main hall of the shrine. On occasions of a ritual, people dance enthusiastically, waving arms in the air and stamping the ground heavily; the shrine compounds become a playing ground where people become intoxicated with the joy of receiving the god.

2.3.3. *“Asobinaa” and “Utaki” of Okinawa, Japan*

The ancient settlements of Okinawa, Japan have sacred mountains or forests called “utaki” (sacred mountain) and sacred spaces called “kamina” (gods’ garden). While “utaki” was a place where prayer was given to gods, the place where rituals and festivals were conducted was called “asobinaa”. “Sefa Utaki” (literally meaning a sacred site of high spiritual power) was the most sacred site in the Kingdom of Ryukyu and is characterized by space surrounded by gigantic rock and sacred trees, a sacred place of prayer-giving in a hollow on a rock hill, and the extraordinary triangular cave-like space

that is formed by two gigantic pieces of rock leaning upon each other. The mysterious and fantastic scene of the sunbeam shining through from the opposite side of the prayer-giving place is strong enough for those who see it to feel instinctively that this is a sacred site. This sacred site does not have any single artificial object but a series of awe-inspiring natural landmarks such as gigantic rock, picturesque rock, stalactite, caves, lavish forests, and trees. The nature sometimes defies and confronts humans harshly but at other times gently embraces humans with grace. The sacredness that springs out of this nature or the spirituality, inspiration, and moving sensations of the natural environment become the object of worship.

2.3.4. Water Boundary to the Sacred Area

At the entrance to sacred space, objects that symbolically indicate the boundary to separate the sacred space from the secular world are put up. Torii gates standing on the Ujibashi Bridge that spans over the Isuzugawa River, leading to the Isejingu Shinto Shrine, signify the “gateway” to the sacred area and symbolize the division between the sacred and the secular. Just before the sacred area begins, there is water spot for purification. The rite of purifying one’s body with water is of religious significance and reminds people of the ideal of humans -- pure and clean both physically and spiritually.

Without touching water or going through water, no entry to the sacred area will be granted. The “purification” through nature is an essential process, although it took different forms ranging from “mitaraigawa” (stream running near Shinto shrines where worshippers wash their mouth, etc. for purification), “shinchi” (sacred pond) to “tsukubai” (water basin).

The moats surrounding ancient tumuli have the function of water boundaries; islands or river isles are perceived as river gods, as is still evident in traditionally-observed festivals in which people go around an island on a boat.

The spirituality of the space that has acquired a common purpose is transmitted to anywhere and reproduced to serve the same purpose shared by people there in harmony with local climate and characteristics.

3. Spirituality of Space in the West

Now the author turns its attention from Japan to the West.

In the West, “[e]very clearing was called a *lucus*, in the sense of an eye, as even today we call eyes the opening through which light enters houses” (qtd. In Harrison 9). The Roman Empire in its effort to conquer the world conquered forests. In ancient Europe, forests existed more dominantly, e.g. in Italy, Gallia, Spain, and the Mediterranean coast of the United Kingdom.

Since forests of ancient times were forbidding to the entry of people, forests functioned as walls to protect cultural uniqueness as well as sovereignty and diversity of tribal states. They provided “hides” for unique languages, customs, divinities, traditions, styles, and so forth. Forests nurtured the diversity of culture. Forests defied the moves toward standardization. Because of this buffer provided by forests, settlements maintained independency and nurtured endemic spiritualities. Each forest had its own fairies, divinities, or pans, which differed from forest to forest.

The Roman forces cleared and conquered these forests not by rampage or destruction but through the construction of a long-distance communication network consisting of roads and infrastructure facilities. Their rule promoted standardization. Consequently, unique cultures that had been maintained by the existence of forest-separated lands were eliminated. As a result, the space became more homogeneous and the spirituality became less diverse. The more homogeneous the space is, the less necessary it is for the spirituality of space to spread its genes.

Therefore, examples of “culture that is created through transmission of the spirituality of space” are to be seen more often in the East, including Japan, and characteristic of the formation of Occidental or Japanese culture.

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