

EVERYTHING THAT GIVES BIRTH IS CHAOTIC: REFLECTIONS ON THE WIDER APPROACH TO SETTING

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Introduction

To date we have been little concerned about the roll of setting in historic conservation. At least, setting was not one of the main topics of our research and practice.

But lately, we are facing a broad range of challenges concerning setting, in both its dimensions and territories, as Y. Nishimura, W. Lipp, and D. Bumbaru observed (ICOMOS NEWS 2005 No1).

These challenges concerning setting would not be easily solved by the existent measures for conservation such as legal regulation and economic incentive. It seems that the characters and substances of setting are not so simple or obvious. In particular, if the intangible aspects of setting like cultural dimension (Bumbaru) and locality (Nishimura) are included within scope, we would have a very wide range of examinations.

The relationship between heritage places and their setting has dynamically changed with time. So, my proposal starts with a short historical survey of the relationship in order to show its basic character. Then, after exploring today's chaotic situation of setting and the causes for that, I will make two proposals for our discussion.

The first proposal is enlarging the concept of historic heritage to cover not only tangible and intangible heritage but also their surroundings. The second is related to rescuing and regenerating remnants and fragments of heritage left in the deteriorated surroundings. For it, instead of the idea of restoration now popular in historic conservation, I will propose a new model of regeneration using DNA as a metaphor.

The relationship between monuments and settings before modern times

Before modern times, monuments had usually much greater size than other buildings and made profound impacts on surrounding landscapes. Especially, the impacts of large-scale monuments of the early civilizations, like Pyramid in Egypt, Ziggurat in Mesopotamia, and Imperial

mausoleum in ancient China, were most impressive and dramatic. First of all, this enormousness of impact on surroundings made them monument.

But their impacts on surroundings were not at all one-way relationship. The monuments themselves were obliged to follow the principles which were considered to be inherent in their surroundings. We find several kinds of such principle in the history of city and architecture.

The most definite example is the layout of monument depending on absolute orientations. Four sides of Pyramid are running along the compass directions. Four corners of Ziggurat direct cardinal points. It seems the people in the ancient Near East believed their monuments were assured of permanence by following the perpetual principle in the universe.

We find its most consistent example also in ancient cities in Northern China. Their streets and city walls were laid out on a grid pattern oriented along the compass directions. All buildings in a city had the south-north axis and faced south. This principle of layout of city spread to most parts of Northern China and the neighboring countries.

The second and probably most popular type of the principle is the one according with the features of surrounding land. In many places of the world, villages and their buildings were located to face the lower part of surroundings to have wider scope of the field and in most cases oriented just about south or north to have more sunshine.

In China, this principle developed through long years of experience to the theory of Feng-shui, literally wind and water. This theory influenced many parts of Southern China and the neighboring countries like Korea and Japan.

There is another type of the principle which regards a point in landscape as sacred or very meaningful and lays out a city or village around this point. Many sorts of particular point, such as a legendary tomb or palace of ancestral hero, a hill with beautiful view, a fountain supplying plentiful water, were chosen for that purpose. I think the acropolises in ancient Greek cities belong to this type.

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In the Middle Ages, neighborhood communities of merchants developed widely. In ruined ancient cities like Nara and Kyoto in Japan, merchants filled empty grounds with their shops and dwellings. Their communities created through long years of endeavor beautiful townscapes such as narrow winding streets fringed with houses characteristic of the region. In many cases, there were churches or temples at the center of city and town. The merchants created also many festive events to pray to gods or Buddha for good luck and safety of residents. Therefore, secular buildings could not rank with the churches or temples in height and mass. Farmers also developed beautiful landscapes composed with natural surroundings, well kept farmlands, and their decent houses.

The beauty of these cities, towns, and villages and their harmonious relations with natural surroundings can not be explained by a few principles such as climate, function, adaptation to the topography and neighborhood spirit. It seems that they have been created by a set of so many factors which is still a mystery for us. We can find many such examples in East Asia. One of them is Hongcun Village, in Anhui Province, China, which is designated as World Cultural Heritage(Slide 1~2).

The era of modernization

The era of absolutism and the industrial revolution has brought great changes to the balance between monuments and their surroundings. New royal palaces in the metropolises became more impressive than cathedrals. Concentration of population into the cities enlarged them upward and outward. Traditional merchant houses were remodeled to have more floors. Residential quarters were spreading on the farmlands outside city walls. Large-scale factories and clusters of worker's dwellings were growing on the periphery of metropolises.

It is well known that the early stage of industrialization produced chaotic townscapes such as miserable residential areas for workers and desolated natural surroundings. But after the mid-19th century, the governments of industrialized countries started projects to prevent the deterioration of townscape and landscape, along with the projects for improvement of sanitation and traffic.

The results of their efforts show both the brilliant and gloomy aspects. Metropolises of industrialized countries and colonial countries constructed wide thoroughfares fringed with imposing public buildings and residences, along with

large parks, botanical gardens, and zoos. The residential quarters for the newly established middle-class citizens had also relatively beautiful townscapes, arranged with neatly unified rows and leafy streets, and dotted with small parks and market-squares. But such achievements were concentrated on a few streets and districts, which were, so to speak, showcases for the glorification of newborn nation state. In many parts of cities other than such privileged districts there were miserable townscapes same as before, usually with roofs and walls badly smeared by smoke from factories.

In the mid-19th century, the efforts to protect historic heritage were started by the national governments of industrialized countries. But the efforts were concentrated on a limited number of selected heritages, which were evidences of the glorious national history. Except for them, ordinary historic buildings such as common people's houses and small churches and temples were left unprotected. In some cases, ordinary historical buildings which surrounded a particularly important monument were taken down, with the intention of giving a wider or purer view to the monument. Such wrong attitude to the setting was not rare until recently.

Yet, it seems to me that citizens in this era could enjoy more comfortable townscape and landscape in and outside their cities than citizens of today. We see such joyful scenes and feelings in the pictures of townscape depicted by their contemporary painters.

Why was that possible, though there was no advanced scientific theory about townscape and landscape? I suspect that it was possible probably because citizens in this era respected many factors which contributed to create beautiful and harmonious landscape. For example, while they planned many developing projects for new residential quarters, these projects were not as completely sweeping as today. Many former market places, greens, and monasteries were left untouched. This modest attitude in relation to landscape and setting was functioning till about the 1920s. We can find many examples of modest but very beautiful townscape, which were created in the last stage of this era (Slide3~4).

Toward the far more devastation of setting

After the suspension during World War , city developments restarted in the 50s. They brought far more severe and sweeping devastations and changes to the setting of cultural heritage than before the war. The first stage of the changes appeared in the 60s with the rapid increase of motor

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traffics. Now owner-driven cars became leading facilities of travel. To avoid traffic congestion, many new highways and roads were constructed through historical cities and beautiful natural landscapes.

The degree of devastation and change of townscape and landscape was beyond the expectation of residents in roadside area. In many places around the world appeared the movements of citizens fighting against such construction works. Some new measures for the protection of townscape and landscape were established by national governments. Some movements for the conservation of cultural heritage succeeded, like the conservation of the Covent Garden in London against a highway project. Some beautiful townscapes and landscapes were designated as protected area by new measures. But these efforts were almost helpless to stop the devastation widely promoted by the new motorized society.

Another act which brought much loss of harmonious landscapes and settings for monuments was the large-scale housing complex. The housing project, which is composed of standardized apartments and radical, formal layout of street, appeared in the 30s in Europe. It stayed at that time just experimental project. But after the war, such housing projects spread all over the world and produced similar, monotonous townscapes bearing little reference to the existent surroundings. It goes without saying that such projects didn't respect cultural heritage and its settings. Many historical quarters, especially those destroyed by the bombing during the war, as in Dresden, Warsaw, and Tokyo, became victim of such housing project. We see such idealistic town planning projects still proceeding in many places, as in Kobe after the great earthquake in 1995.

The second stage of the changes appeared in the early 90s after the collapse of the cold war order and is now under way. It seems that while the feature of the first stage was the large scale of devastation of setting, the second stage made the nature of devastation more clear.

The main factors pushing the devastation are, in my opinion, the so-called globalization of economic systems, the development of high-technology sector, and thriving mass-tourism. In Japan, the process of devastation and change takes the forms as follows. I think these forms could be seen in many places around the world.

a. New upscale development complexes, comprising high priced hotels, housing, and corporate offices, are appearing in many places. Their service life is far shorter than before.

Hence, they are changing at high speed not only individual townscapes but the skyline of a city as a whole.

b. Global gigantic capitals are always seeking more profitable land and place in order to gain the highest profit. For that purpose, they craftily utilize economic or legal incentives and find means of escaping legal regulations. They are using also existent monuments or restored monuments as decoration of new development project. Now many conservation projects are involved into such development system.

c. The existent monuments in developing areas, which sometimes retain only some parts of former façade, are isolated from the context of townscape. They are becoming just settings for the new development project (Slide 5).

d. New features of building, such as a peculiar appearance or unprecedented height, are contributing to the upscale developments, because the newest mode of architecture fits for their policy of incessantly producing differentiations.

e. The landscape of the areas surrounding metropolises are also rapidly changing. In the villages, where formerly most residents were farmers, residents are now engaged in many kinds of job other than farming such as independent businessman and IC technician. The development of convenient traffics and communications made such life style possible in the villages. The dwelling houses retaining the traditional style are becoming rare, and the houses of new style such as mass produced house are increasing (Slide6~7).

f. In the remote districts such as isolated island, the changing of landscape is more rapid. The modernization of life style and the increase of tourists are introducing artificial building materials and reducing traditional natural vegetation. I think there are far more rapid changes of landscape in villages and towns in developing countries in Southeast Asia.

g. The influence of mass-tourism on setting of historic site is much more serious than we anticipated a decade ago. Many hotels, parking lots, restaurants, and shops are emerging in the area bordering heritage site. If the number of tourists visiting a small historic village or town annually becomes more than 2 million, it is hard to stop the devastation of not just natural surroundings but the moral atmosphere in the site.

The true cause of devastation of settings

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What is it that brought such sweeping devastation of setting of historic site, inclusive of the indirect dimensions such as cultural features? Are the defects in the legal systems for historic conservation or insufficient concern of people for landscape and townscape responsible for that? Can we get the better relationship between historical sites and settings, after successively improving legal and other social factors concerning with the problem?

I do not think such explanations and answers are historically acceptable, because before World War , at least before the industrialization, we had relatively harmonious relationship between historical site and setting. The point of the question concerns the way of thinking and evaluating setting itself.

As already seen, before modern times, both monument and setting belonged to common, universal orders. Their relations were not one-way ones. But today we regard setting merely as backdrop for monument, in other words, as subordinate serving monument. The notion of buffer zone typically shows such attitude toward setting. While we regulate the appearance of buffer zone in order to better conserve historic sites, we pay little attention to individual buildings and townscapes in buffer zone. We could not save settings from devastation while giving them such secondary roll in historic conservation.

We have already expanded the concept of cultural heritage to include ensembles and cultural landscape. Our attentions are moving from individual heritage places to their mutual relations and the whole system which includes cultural heritages, regardless tangible or intangible, natural environments, and their relations. Now we should redefine the concept of historical heritage to give setting more proper roll in historic conservation, which is my first proposal for our discussion.

The regeneration of setting using remnants and fragments as DNA

My second proposal is concerned with remnants and fragments of cultural heritage. When we look at the areas composing settings for a historic site, we find many remnants and fragments of former historical townscape or landscape. They now exist in various forms, such as a traditional merchant house standing alone among new office buildings and parking lots (Slide 8), or a village where the percentage of houses retaining traditional style is far under fifty percent. Most of them are deprived of former intimate harmony with the neighboring buildings and surrounding

landscapes.

They are also being deserted as valueless by conservation policy. Only when they are located in areas bordering important historic sites, they are designated as components of so-called buffer zone.

But, it seems to me that these remnants and fragments are most important factors supporting peculiar atmospheres of individual city, town, and village. In many cases they are the bulk of direct settings of a historic site. The number of these remnants and fragments are rapidly diminishing. If we do not stop this trend of diminishing, if we can not reverse this trend, we could not save setting of historic site.

The work to stop and reverse this trend is naturally very difficult. It would be impossible, if we use existent measures for historic preservation such as the restoration to former townscape or building form. As a matter of fact, it is impossible to reverse many alterations of landscape and building which occurred in a wide area during a long period.

But, I think, if we see these remnants and fragments from another viewpoint, it would be possible to reverse this trend. The grounds for that are as follows.

Many people regard these remnants and fragments as material remains of former heritage which are no more important as evidence of history or as artistic work. I think, however, they are not material remains but they involve much information about technique, way of life, sensibility, and other facts in the past. They have quality similar to DNA in living things.

As far as I know, it is Yutaka Terada, a tie-dyeing artist in Kyoto, who has first noted the similarity between remnants and fragments of cultural heritage and DNA. He is cooperating in conservation of traditional merchant houses in Kyoto.

In regard to traditional merchant houses left among new office buildings in Kyoto's historical quarters, Y. Terada argues as follows. "While I do not hope a row of merchant houses is restored as in old days, I think such old houses should be conserved as DNA that will contribute toward the regeneration of townscape."

The regeneration of living things is based on information included in DNA. But the process of the regeneration is not the restoration to the former forms. They might unexpectedly mutate adapting to changes in environment or according

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other factors. In the same way, remnants and fragments are very valuable for regeneration of townscape and landscape.

Another point about remnants and fragments of historic heritage is the fact that they are isolated from former systems and contexts of townscape or landscape. They are lying outwardly almost in confusion. From the conventional viewpoint of historic conservation, this chaotic state is deplorable and valueless. But, I think, residents understand real values of cultural heritage for the first time after experiencing devastation and chaotic state of their living space. This process is, in other words, the step of individualization of cultural heritage.

If we understand and evaluate the chaotic state of setting of cultural heritage of today in the way as mentioned above, we need not to become pessimistic about the situation. In history, there are many cases in which people regenerated their culture from remnants and fragments of former civilization. The Renaissance is just a famous example.

In the 20th century we developed the conservation of cultural heritage, focusing largely on the conservation of individual, tangible heritage. The point of our works in the 21st century would be the rescue of devastated settings, regenerating them from remnants and fragments.

Abstract

My proposal starts with a short historical survey of the relations between monument and setting, then examines their chaotic situation at present, and closes with two solutions for it. Before modern times, monument had powerful impact on setting like pyramid and Chinese Imperial mausoleum. Yet, the monuments were obliged to follow the principles inherent in setting. These balanced relations begun to crumble with the advent of the industrial revolution. Concentration of population into metropolises extended them toward outside and upward. The latest development complexes are more powerfully damaging settings, and their service lives are far shorter than decades ago. Gigantic capitals are always seeking more profitable places. Concerning such situation, I will make two proposals. The first is to use more expanded concept of historic heritage that covers not only tangible heritage, also intangible heritage and surroundings. The second is related to regenerating the remains fragmented by such deterioration. Instead of restoration, I propose a new model by using the keyword of DNA as a metaphor