

HISTORIC CONSERVATION NOW NEEDS RE-EXAMINATION OF ITS BASIC CONCEPTS

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1. Introduction

The period from the Venice Charter of 1964 to Nara Conference on Authenticity of 1994 saw many increases and enlargements of concepts in historic conservation, which corresponded to wider spread of the idea of historic conservation around the world.

Yet, the period from Nara Conference till now witnessed rather clashes of ideas concerning historic conservation. Contrary to our expectation, the concept of authenticity secured no firm foundation even after the conference. The debates on intangible heritage, the original theme for the scientific symposium in 2002, also showed a deep conceptual rift among ICOMOS executives. Now at many conferences on historic conservation we frequently see such conceptual clashes. What is the cause of these clashes?

There is probably more than one answer to this question. In my view, one answer is that many of the basic concepts for historic conservation are now unable to fit present-day social realities. If so, the question demands re-thinking the relation between historic conservation and society as a whole. I would like to shortly introduce main points at issue here.

A. The relation between historic conservation and the public

The participation of the public in historic conservation now became very important. Yet, most of the international charters, inclusive of the Venice Charter, have no reference to the roll of groups of people except experts.

B. The value of historic heritage

It seems to me that concerning the value of historic heritage there are two contrastive views. The one thinks the value exists intrinsically in heritage itself and is found by experts. The other maintains that the value of heritage is recognized by the people concerned, hence there can be plural values according to viewpoints.

C. The relation between memory and historic heritage

The notion that memory is a foundation of arts and history existed since ancient times. This relation recently became a very acute problem in historic conservation. But it is not scrutinized enough and needs re-examination.

D. The relation between region and historic conservation

Despite the globalization of economy and communications, the roll of region is increasing, especially in cultural spheres. Historic heritage is an indispensable element of strong regional bonds. From such viewpoint we have to re-examine

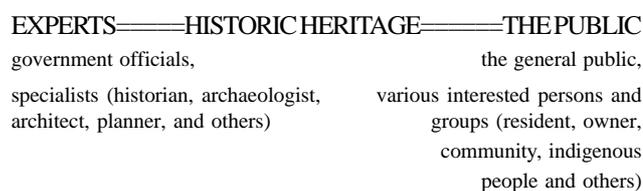
the roll of conservation in region.

It is ironical that very popular concepts in historic conservation such as the public, value, memory, and region need re-examination. But the concepts popular in a period are often the ones accepted with little examination. I would like to examine these points at issue in detail. And in conclusion I will present my comments for resolving the conflicts of concepts.

2. The relation between historic conservation and the public

Around a historic heritage as material object there are many groups of people who have own relation to the heritage in question. According to common knowledge, these groups can be classified as Diagram 1.

DIAGRAM 1



Until recently, our attentions were mostly focused on the roll of experts who guide decision-making for historic conservation. By contrast, there were few references to the roll of the public in historic conservation. When the public was mentioned, the public was just the subject of education for the respect of monuments. (1).

Even at the general assembly of ICOMOS in 1996, there were few doubts on such a way of thinking. But reflecting changing realities, some reports pointed out situations that demanded re-thinking the domination by experts. The report by Gregory Young from Australia, *Deconstructing authenticity*, said that "Cultural mapping is a powerful tool to establish what communities value as their culture (including cultural heritage) and their ideas about authenticity." Another report by Marilyn Truscott from Australia described the debates in Australia about "the right to make decisions about places.

Also in Japan, after the midst of the 1990s, some examples of historic conservation by owners and residents themselves appeared. Those conservation projects were not only planned and realized by owners and residents, but also found new kinds of value in historic heritage overlooked by experts up to that time. (2)

The Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, 1999, first stated a new clear concept about the roll of people in historic conservation, which says in Review as follows. "The Charter recognises the need to involve people in the decision-making process, particularly those that have strong associations with a place."

The difference between the traditional view and the alternative one like Burra Charter is apparent. According to the former view, historic conservation is a highly specialized operation and should be controlled by experts. According to the latter, each cultural group has a responsibility to identify places of significance and the right to make decision about places.

3. Value in historic conservation

Value is a term frequently used in charters for historic conservation. However, we have no clear definition or explanation of the value in historic conservation.

Concerning the value in historic conservation, it seems to me that there are two views which show a remarkable contrast. The first view considers the value to exist intrinsically in historic heritage itself and to be found and measured by experts who explore information sources about the value. The view of Nara Document is similar to this view.

The second view maintains that who decides the value is not experts but the people, for example residents, owners, and indigenous people. Experts can only help them find and measure the value. The view of Burra Charter is similar to this second view.

These two views are also different in terms of evidences supporting the value. According to the first view, concrete evidences, usually written evidences and archaeological findings, primarily prove the value. In contrast, the second view thinks less tangible aspects such as use and association important for supporting the value.

A relatively neglected question about the value in historic conservation is the one concerning kinds of the value.

The modern historic conservation until recently regarded a monument as a work of arts or historical evidence. Most historic heritages have both of these values. But in the present-day society values of historic heritage are not limited to these two values. At many sites of World Heritage we see the economic value overpowering the artistic or historical value.

But we have also some new types of value now appearing in historic conservation, which give us some expectations. At the symposium in Morelia, 1999, I reported about a new type of adaptive reuse of vernacular building in Japan, that is, the reuse for medical purposes. (3)

In 1975, Dr. Tadashi Yoshimura, an obstetrician in Okazaki City, Japan, found out that a old farmhouse removed to the backyard of his hospital gave good effects to pregnant women, stimulating labor pains. He now uses it for training pregnant women for natural childbirth.

The value found by Dr. Yoshimura is not in the known scope

of value of historic heritage. Burra Charter adopted the term of cultural significance, which means "aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value for, past, present or future generations." If we think about value of historic heritage as an important element of social resources, such a wider scope of value will be needed.

4. Memory in historic conservation

Memory is also a term which was unexplored until recently in historic conservation.

The close relation between memory and arts, including history, has been well known from ancient times. The Greek myth of Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory who gave birth to Muses, was an expression of such a view. The relation between memory and historic heritage was also sometimes mentioned as in Nara Document. But we paid not so much attention to this relation until recently.

Memory and remembrance are now getting much more meaning than before in historic conservation. The paper by Dinu Bumbaru from Canada for preparation of the symposium in Zimbabwe was titled "Tangible and intangible-the obligation and desire to remember." Also in Japan the word of memory or remember is now used more empathy than before concerning historic heritage. What is the reason of increasing consciousness about this relation?

In my view, the main reason is that in the past decades we had to tackle with the conservation of heritages of the 20th century, specifically negative heritages.

The experiences of conservation of negative heritages taught us first the fact that the survivors of a tragic event react to the event not uniformly. The reaction changes according to individual survivor and as times passes. The early reaction is usually refusal of remembering. Some survivors flee to other places far from the site of tragedy. After a long time, which was necessary for reconciliation of the will to forget and the will to remember, they are now trying to keep the memory of the event and protect its remains. Many survivors of A-bomb in Hiroshima showed such reactions. (4)

The second thing we learned is that this process of change from refusal to remembering was accompanied by many intangible actions: not only memorial ritual and publishing of memoirs of the event, but also voluntary talking own experiences to the public, performances on stage, and others. These things teach us that the protection of material remains from a historical event was originally, or essentially, accompanied by many such intangible actions to memorize the event, though traces of these actions were lost as time went on. I think we are now becoming aware of this fact.

5. The relation between historic heritage and region

We now witness regional dimensions increasing significance in many aspects of social life including historic conservation. It is usually hard to specify such a region

according to present-day administrative zones or on topographical features. For example, the region of Kumano in Japan is a southern part of Kii-peninsula and the name of Kumano was well known from ancient times. Kumano was famous with deep mountains and deep valleys, which fostered many myths and legends. After the 10th century Kumano became a famous sacred place visited by numerous pilgrims who thought Kumano as the country for the dead and pilgrim to Kumano as a journey with dead relatives.

Kumano is a region with a relatively wide area. In contrast, there are many small regions called Machi or Chonai in historic quarters of Kyoto, Tokyo, and other old cities in Japan. In each of them we see historical documents, tools and costumes for Shinto shrine rituals, dialect and way of life, especially of children, peculiar to the region handed down from very old times. We find such small regions scattered around the world.

There are many types of region. Therefore one special term can not embrace these many kinds of region. Burra Charter adopted “place” as a term, which means “site, area, land, landscape, building or other works, and may include components, spaces and views”. This definition of “place” is too wide and may lead to confusions in practice. But, in my view, what is more important is rather the intention included in the adoption of this term.

One of the most important qualities of region concerning historic conservation is that many historic remains, regardless tangible or intangible, are piled there like thick layers. Each historic heritage keeps its meaning in the close relation with the region. It is impossible to pick up and protect one heritage alone from the region without damaging its value.

The other important quality of region is that we can add our own stratum to the layers. Many small shrines, crosses, and stone lanterns built along pilgrimage routes in Europe and Japan show such endeavors of adding up own stratum.

I think such a region is not a historic heritage in the strict sense of the word. But it is very important for historic conservation as a vessel to breed, foster, and keep historic heritage.

6. Conclusion

The most remarkable change in historic conservation in the past decade is increasing rolls of the public. On one hand, they voluntarily participate in activities for historic conservation, but on the other, they fill the World Heritage sites as customers of mass tourism. Few experts anticipated these situations. The thought of the public about historic conservation is also profoundly changing. In old days they obediently accepted results of conservation practiced by experts. Now they seek after their own feeling of achievement or challenge in the activities for historic conservation. For young people, historic heritage is a part of social resources for the future, not a mere work of arts or historical evidence handed down from the past.

Most of the concepts used until now in historic conservation are defined from the perspective of experts and with less regard to the roll of the public in historic conservation. These concepts are also not reflecting the changes in society we experienced in the past decade. In my view, unless we start re-defining concepts in historic conservation to fit with these changing realities useless conceptual clashes will not go away.

References

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