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**A Comment concerning the International Course  
on Wood Conservation Technology in Relation  
to the Venice Charter**

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One of the aims of the International Course on Wood Conservation Technology has been to stimulate an exchange of information between experts from East and West, but there is still room for improvement if mutual cultural understanding and enrichment is to be achieved. The practical organization of the course could perhaps be better, but one may also ask whether the theoretical foundation for the discussion really encourages mutual cultural understanding.

The preamble of the Venice Charter states that «it is our duty to hand on (ancient monuments) in the full richness of their authenticity». The urge for authenticity is internationally acknowledged as a guiding principle in architectural preservation. It implies the preservation of the physical object, i.e. material values. This can be interpreted as a world view, but one deeply rooted in the cultural history of Europe. Yet in some Asian countries, important historical structures are periodically «revitalized», such as the Grand Shrine of Ise every 20 years and the Royal Temples and Palaces in Bangkok every half century. This «revitalization» represents traditions upheld by popular support and deeply rooted in the cultural history of the two countries concerned.

This phenomenon is considered alien to current architectural preservation philosophy, which does not seem to allow for the preservation of spiritual or intangible values.

Japan and Thailand also contain several good examples of large-scale or even total reconstruction of badly deteriorated structures, executed in traditional techniques and using traditional tools: examples include the total reconstruction of the west pagoda of the Yakushi-Temple in Narathe recently completed or the partial reconstruction of the temple buildings of Wat Chalerm Prakiet in Bangkok currently going on.

In the case of temple buildings like these, the work is normally financed through religious donations, so that the physical reconstruction of a temple can be interpreted as a symbol of spiritual revival.

Monuments which are «revitalized» or reconstructed can serve as excellent workshops for practising old and outdated techniques. Large-scale projects need many skilled craftsmen able to work with traditional tools in traditional techniques. Knowledge and skills acquired in this way are also useful for preservation work in the more literal sense of the word.

In many countries, the loss of technical knowledge and lack of craftsmen able to undertake preservation work represent a threat to the fulfilment of the fundamental idea of the Venice Charter: the preservation of the authentic physical character of the monument.

A further improvement to the dialogue aimed at on the International Wood Conservation Course could be obtained if also «revitalization» and reconstruction projects could be accepted as being of equal interest as physical preservation. This would also imply a recognition of the importance of such work for the training of craftsmen.

The cyclic «revitalization» and occasional reconstruction of monuments in Japan and Thailand represent cultural values which are quite in accordance with the purpose of the Venice Charter, albeit not literally. They may be seen as expressions of intangible cultural values and can be defined as «living witnesses of age-old traditions».

## Résumé

Knut Einar Larsen, professeur d'architecture à l'Institut de technologie à Trondheim, Norvège, est un des organisateurs du Cours international sur la technologie de la conservation des structures en bois. Il pose ici le problème du concept d'authenticité d'une part tel qu'il est émis dans le préambule de la Charte de Venise, d'autre part tel qu'on le pratique au Japon et en Thaïlande. En d'autres termes, l'authenticité du matériau, idée fondamentalement occidentale, est confrontée à l'authenticité de valeurs intangibles qui est un concept oriental. A son avis, il faudrait mettre à l'ordre du jour ces deux concepts pour entamer un véritable dialogue.