

Architectural Preservation Process in Japan: Theoretical discourse and its application

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Abstract

The process of architectural wooden preservation of cultural properties in Japan has been analysed, primarily through a case study involving the process of preservation at Gekko-den Pavilion, within Gokoku-ji confines in central Tokyo. Areas of study included carpentry methods, decisions made by architects, legal provisions in place for protection in governmental administration sectors, definitions of cultural properties, partial and full dismantlement and training and theoretical discourse.

The practice of wooden preservation in Norway has also been reviewed via analyses of both the Stave Church Programme and the Uthusprojekt. These observations provided the opportunity to review the intangible skills and living traditions attached to the actual preservation. Current examples of management activities in a living historic town with a multi-faceted approach to protection, sustainable conservation and capacity building have been outlined.

Frequently, discourses pertaining to Japanese wooden preservation practices portray Japan as holding minimal regard for material authenticity. Timber re-use and disassembly is not specific to Japan and I argue it is a matter of degree of replacement. What differentiates Japan are the acknowledgement of intangible skills and knowledge in relation to architecture and the skills and knowledge accompanying the structure itself. With regard administration and legal aspects, I emphasise the importance of historical overviews. The legal transformation is representative of societal changes and refinement of the training systems historically occurs continuously as each relate to the preservation of Important Cultural Properties.

Typically, original members remain after a major preservation involving full dismantlement of Japanese wooden structures. The amount of replacement is a central question surrounding Japanese wooden preservation and associated discourse on material authenticity. Throughout this study a commonality between Japan and Norway became apparent, but equally so did the distance between the theory and the reality. Theoretical discourse in this context clearly involves both written scholarly works and oral discourse.

Future directions for Japan and for worldwide dissemination must include realisation globally that material authenticity is a small component of a multifaceted approach to wooden preservation. Acknowledgment of essential intangible skills and continued transference of knowledge place Japan at the forefront of international discourse alongside innate significance and social context.