

MURAMATSU & HAYASHI LAB.

[Modern Architectural Heritage in East Asia: Why and How to Evaluate?]

Department of Human and Social Systems

Urban Heritage / Resource Development; History of Urban Residential Landscape

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1. Conventional Understanding of Architectural Heritage

There is not much architectural heritage of the distant past that survived the 'natural selection'. Its value therefore has been in a sense attributed with regard to its rareness. And before one starts questioning which of this heritage is indeed important, we tend to value all existing. Preserving certain works for the sake of the country's and the people's prestige, in other words, as an ideologist move, often happens to be a reason as well. The Old Japanese Temples and Shrines Preservation Law (1897), for instance, is hardly a heritage preservation law but merely and majorly a means to compete in 'national excellence' under the UNESCO World Heritage label.

2. Difficulties Related to Modern Architecture Evaluation

However, the modern era heritage evaluation is not an easy affair for a number of reasons: 1. There is a lot of instances of equal importance and therefore it is hard to attribute value for rareness only. 2. The architectural heritage left by foreign and local architects is mixed and therefore difficultly inscribed among valuable assets serving national aggrandizement. 3. Instances of when Western architecture is poorly imitated seem superficial. 4. Surrounding us architecture may serve well without being aesthetically unique.



Agricultural Experiment Station (Beijing, 1906): Designed in Western style adopted by the Qin government; vaguely positioned within the modern architectural history.
pic : <https://zh.wikipedia.org/>



Industrial Training Center (Seoul, 1907): A piece of architecture built by a Japanese architect during the Korean Empire times is today condemned by general public and a movement towards its demolition is growing stronger.
pic : <https://japanese.visitseoul.net/>



The Warehouse #5 of the Mechanical Bureau in Taiwan (Taipei, 1880s): Factories buildings that once were a commonplace are being gradually immersed by mixing with the residential district.
pic : <https://mapio.net/>



Moribun Asahikan (Ehime, Uchiko, 1926): Before becoming Nakanaka heritage, wasn't considered heritage at all but merely a regal facility.
pic : <http://nakanakaisan.org/>

How can these types of modern architecture be reconsidered today?

3. Modern Architecture as an Approach to Understand East Asia

Facing such a confusion about heritage, its value and evaluation, are we better not to put aside the hitherto applied Western approach to our problem and seek one more suitable for our own set of values? For the first time we aim to develop neither an oriental nor an occidental approach to the problem but to find one at the scale of the Globe and the Human history. The current exhibition by Muramatsu & Hayashi lab. seeks to demonstrate how this idea works with the non-Western modern architecture of the past 200 years and proposes a vision to its evaluation using East Asia (China, Japan, the Korean peninsula and Taiwan) as an example.