

CONSERVING HISTORIC URBAN NICHEs WITHIN THE
CONTEXT OF CULTURAL HABITAT — A CASE FOR COMMUNITY
INTEGRATION IN THE INTEREST OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

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With urban conservation and creative reuse gaining ground, a new genre of historic sites has emerged worldwide. What do they really offer, and at what price?

Despite the geological and cultural divides that separate them, these "new" corners are morphing into near-mirror images of one another, i.e., an instantly sterilized stage for cultural consumption. In the process, or in lieu of a process, the host communities are routinely rendered irrelevant, or outright expendable, and the course of transformation truncated.

Whereas they may still be distinguished by architectural appearances, geological settings, and cultural expressions, the highly formulized environs that characterize them tend to share as many similarities as differences, if not more. In the worst case, authenticity becomes skin deep, integrity selective; and the very genius loci of a place a mere camouflage at most.

The proposed paper intends to help advance the operating tenet that for urban conservation to succeed beyond preserving physical authenticity and integrity, community integration holds the key to sustaining historic places in form, in substance, and in spirit. It will attempt to substantiate that only by integrating the host community into urban conservation can historic urban niches be sustained as part of a living cultural habitat. Only as such, will each bear a genuine testament to the community that cultivates them, the culture that shapes them, and the historical passage that transforms them, thereby enriching the cultural diversity of our collective heritage.

A case study will be conducted on Liu-Li-Chang in the Da-Zha-Lan area of Beijing, China. Liu-Li-Chang began as the imperial lazurite kiln in 1267. In the ensuing centuries, the 700-meter long street has evolved into a cultural landmark alongside Da-Zha-Lan. The conservation of Liu-Li-Chang and other historic niches as a living cultural heritage will enhance and sustain the ancient capital city's distinctive identity and unique sense of place that underpins Beijing's claim amongst the global ensemble of great cities.

A combination of exploratory, descriptive and explanatory approach will be adopted. The subject of community integration will be examined in relation to operating ideology, policy making, execution, finance, and management. Both primary and secondary data sources will be used. Interviews will also be conducted with leading researchers, authors, and commentators.

References:

- Relation between proposal and doctoral dissertation: The proposed subject has been drawn from an approved dissertation proposal.
- Advisor: Prof. Yukio Nishimura, University of Tokyo e-mail: nishimur@ud.t.u-tokyo.ac.jp
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