

# Renovation of Historical Urban Centre

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## 1. Historical Urban Centres in Kansai

Three of the historical Urban Centers are located in Kansai, which are Osaka, Kyoto, and Kobe. Each of them has the different history of the urbanization and, as the result, the townscape and the theme of the renovation are differed from one another.

Kyoto is the old capital developed in the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century and its urban center is characterized by the densely built-up Machiyas that are the traditional Japanese wooden shop-houses with various stores and workshops of Kimono handicraft manufacturing in the first floor. This urban center has historically been developed as the mixed land use area, but the modern zoning system dose not have an appropriate zoning to preserve the historical space structure and land use. The floor area ratio of the commercial zoning that is applied for the historical urban center in Kyoto is too much for the historical environment, but there was no choice following City Planning Law. Recently, the high-rise condominiums are constructed to bring about the confusion in the traditional townscape.

The theme of the renovation of the historical urban area in Kyoto is how to adjust the preservation of the traditional space structure and townscape to the needs of modernization of the life style and economic activities as the city center.

The historical urban centre of Osaka was developed in 17<sup>th</sup> century as a castle town. The basic block pattern and the standard of site condition are preserved, but the most of the buildings have been rebuilt in the process of the modernization. The present townscape is formed as the result of the continuous reconstruction of the buildings and the renovation of urban functions.

The urban centre of Osaka now is confronted with the difficulty in the policy making in order to maintain the economic and cultural status as the global city. For the future renovation, it is to be effective to take advantage of the value of the old well-designed buildings and the historical and traditional resources in the area to develop the identity and to promote the new business.

The most of the urban centers in the big cities in Asia now are undergoing the drastic change to be a modern city with high-rise buildings losing their traditional environment. In the near future, they will face to the same difficulties as Osaka has experienced to develop the sustainability of the local identity.

Kobe has only about 150 years history. The urbanization started with the construction of the foreign settlements in 1868 and has been developed as the international port city. Even though Kobe has rather short history of the urbanization, it experienced rebuilding several times with the economic expansion and the damage of the war and the earthquake as the turning points.

The representative historical district as an urban center in Kobe is the Old Settlement. As compared with Osaka, the economic expansion proceeded gradually in Kobe and it was possible to coordinate the new townscape with old buildings, preserving the historical



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atmosphere. Kobe has the policy that the conservation of the historical buildings is not the only way to maintain the historical environment, but it is more significant to develop the local unique townscape by preserving the historical landmarks and controlling rebuilding to coordinate the new and old buildings.

## 2. Comparison of Kyoto and Kobe's policy about the renovation of the townscape

### 2-1. Kyoto

#### 1) Critical issue of the present townscape

According to the field research of 2000, the ratio of Machiya in the typical part of the historical area in the urban centre is about 42%. Among them, the original is 12.4%. 16.8% of the buildings in the area are rebuilt to be the modern style and 19.2% of them are to be the single-family housing without any shop or working space in the lot.

Even though Machiya was reconstructed to be the modern style building, the traditional space structure is usually preserved as long as the function of shop-house is maintained. The recent development of the high-rise condominium, however, disorders both the townscape and living environment. The confusion of the townscape appears in tow ways: one is the disorder of the height; the other is the open space in the front along the street (Fig. 1).

The traditional townscape is characterized with the straight building line and the open space is in the middle or in the back of the site. This open space is important for the ventilation and sunlight in the house. The high-rise condominium has the completely different space structure. The present zoning system is not able to control this type of buildings.

Townscape of Machiya and the modern building. The composition of the building type in each community units:



Fig.1 Tow type of the disorder in the townscape. Fig.2 The percentage of Machiya

#### 2) Discussion on the renovation of the traditional townscape

The basic policy to control the landscape in Kyoto is based on the special zoning of Urban Planning Law and the regulations for the zoned area are described in the Townscape Ordinance. The historical urban centre, however, is not covered because the people in the area could not reach the agreement with the regulations. There is still some conflict between those who would like to live and work in Machiya and those who would like to expand the business.

It has just started to discuss about the issue of preservation and renovation of the historical environment in the urban centre with professionals, city planners, and the people in the area at the same table. The reduction of the floor area ratio, the height control, and the community rule for the sustainable environment are on the discussion.

### 2-2. Kobe

#### 1) History of the Old Settlements

In 1868, the foreign settlement was established when the Hyogo Port opened. The settlement was the area of about 22 hectares, developed with the plan designed by J. W. Hart, the British civil engineer, to provide 126 lots with the tree-lined streets and sewage system. The public garden, promenade, and the customhouse were also built in the area. The merchant houses of the bricks with the wooden structure stood along the street.

After the restoration of the settlement to Kobe city government, foreign merchant were prosperous in their business until the First World War. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the area of the foreign settlement was renovated to be an urban center of Kobe with the modern Western-style masonry buildings of the Japanese trading companies, the shipping companies, and banks. That new townscape was composed of 7 or 8 stories buildings designed in the American Renaissance Style and some others introduced from Europe.

Some of them have survived for long through the affliction of the World War Second. During the period of the exceeding growth of the Japan's economy in 1960's, Kobe was losing the position of the domestic business centre. This, in a sense, gave a chance to reconsider the locality. The cultural values of old masonry buildings were discovered in 1980's to lead the reuse of them for shops and offices and the area retrieved the role of the active urban center known as the Old Settlement.

The Hanshin Great Earthquake in 1995 brought the serious damage to the area. The 22 buildings including the four of the old masonry buildings were destroyed. Now 9 of the historical buildings, one of which is the National Cultural Asset, are characterized the area.

## 2) The townscape and cultural value

In the Old Settlement of Kobe, the buildings have been reconstructed several times, but the street pattern is still conserved as they were developed in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the original lot number are also being used today.

One of the merchant houses built when the settlement was established is survived and is designated as the National Cultural Asset. This No 15 building, which once had been the United States consulate, was destroyed completely by the last earthquake but was restored to the original state with wooden structure in the typical Colonial Style referring the old drawings and documents. Besides the No 15 building, there are 8 masonry buildings of 1920's and 1930's in this area.

When this area was designated as an urban townscape control area in 1983 based on the Urban Landscape Ordinance by Kobe City, the Old Settlement Association, which is a group of owners, was organized to cope with the innovation and preservation of the townscape. They agreed with the local guidelines to control building. The guideline indicates the aimed image of the area's townscape with the regulation of the building line in the lower level, the regulation of the building scale, the promotion of the shops in the first floor, and creation of the common public spaces in each lot. The District Plan based on the City Planning Law, which was approved with the agreement of the Association in 1995, legally supports the guideline.

In Kobe, the aim of the townscape policy is to develop the local identity with concerning of the historical environment, and the regulations and promotions of the development of the townscape are based on the Ordinance that is local policy and not on the zoning system of the Urban Planning Law.

## 3. Difficulty of the preservation of the urban center

The historical urban area in Japan has been always taken the role of the city center where the economic, cultural and social activities are accumulated to give the pressure for the redevelopment and rebuilding to provide the more space for the business and commercials. The typical and historical building type composing the urban centre in Japan is Machiya with the two stories of wooden structure. Machiya could hardly cope with the business on the large scale that emerged in the process of the modernization. In the economic expansion

proceeded, it is inevitable to choose either to redevelop the historical urban centre or to develop the new center in other place. In Japan, it is ordinary to redevelop the historical urban area, and we have lost the traditional buildings and the historical environment even if the original block pattern is preserved.

We have the Cultural Assets Law to conserve a building of historical value and to designate the area to preserve the historical environment. The 54 districts are designated by 2000, the most of which are located in the small local cities. The designated districts in Kyoto and Kobe are located out of the urban centre and they are the tourist spots. It is very difficult to take the role of the urban centre and to preserve the traditional townscape at the same time.

Moreover, the modern masonry buildings of about 80 years old such as those in the Kobe Old Settlement have not been evaluated as historical buildings for long in Japan, because they are constructed with the western technology.

From the viewpoint of that the historical environment is significant to maintain the local identity, possible coexistence of the different building types in the urban centre should be considered as the historical condition, and it is more important to develop the local townscape with respect to the historical context and also with the concern to the preservation and renovation of the existing historical buildings, because we are now in the situation to seek for a sustainable urban fabric under the stable economic conditions and populations.

It is very difficult to define what is historical. The present confusion in our townscape is also historical after we lost much of the wooden culture that could not afford the economic growth that people believed to bring us the better life. When we say historical, it does not mean old or original, but we usually identify the local amenity in that environment. Therefore it is significant to preserve the historical landmarks to be a key to renovate an urban environment. The renovation and rehabilitation of the urbanized area is continuous work to develop the local identity based on the culture that is common within the people.