

Consideration on Modern Tourism: The continuity of the past and the present in Kyoto

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Introduction

These days many foreign visitors stream into Kyoto City, visiting the places of historical interest that represent the characters of Kyoto. However, the self-description of these sites differs from place to place. In the present information society, the information on the sites has become diverse, and here occurs the gap between foreign visitors' recognition and provider's intention. Also, along with the rapid changes in the society, the people's views of these sites are changing at an unprecedented speed. Therefore, it is significant to examine how these sites describe themselves.

This paper examines how unmarked facilities come to be recognized as heritage through tracing the transformation of the records and historical backgrounds of several heritage sites of Kyoto. Regarding heritage, David Lowenthal said "To reshape is as vital as to preserve" (19). This means heritage sites are not static and have been reshaped over the years to preserve themselves and maintain their values. Moreover, as the word "heritage" is not always clearly defined, and has a broad range of meaning, its ambiguity makes visitors see each site in various ways. Also, Rodney Harrison mentions, "heritage is not one thing, but can take many different forms"(14). Heritage is an ever-changing interpretation of what present day people want to preserve, so it can change with times. Therefore, 'the present' shapes what the sites currently are like. With an aim to identify the way characteristic sites in Kyoto are displayed and display themselves, this paper examines three main types of tourist sites: Dwellings, Temples and Museums. After that I will propose advisable ways of self-descriptions to attract foreign tourists.

1. Dwellings: the link between the past and the present

The Kyoto Imperial Palace

Firstly, I would examine the Imperial Palace in Kyoto, which is currently under the management of the Imperial Agency. As the Japanese government set the national goal of increasing the annual number of tourists up to 300,000 by 2020, the Imperial Palace started to be open to the public and provide visitors with interesting historical information about its complex through a guided tour and foreign language brochures.

The official descriptions of the Imperial Palace include the history of construction of the complex, such as the transitions of traditional architectural styles. Specifically, “the *shinden*, *shoin*, and *sukiya* styles”. In addition, they often feature the construction that affected these buildings since the complex has repeatedly been reconstructed due to fires. For example, in the pamphlet there is a description such as below.

“When it was rebuilt after having burned down in 1788, the Shishinden and other major structures in the Palace compound were rebuilt in the traditional Heian style. In 1854, when the Palace burned down again, the Tokugawa Shogunate ordered that an Imperial Palace identical to its predecessor be immediately rebuilt, and the work was completed with exceptional speed by the following year. This is the Palace still stands today. (*The Imperial Household Agency* n.pag.)

One of the foreign visitors commented on a tourist website called *Trip Advisor*, the website that contains many pieces of word-of-mouth information in various languages, “The ‘original’ Imperial Palace is still in remarkable great condition.” In terms of the authenticity of the site, it is not necessarily “original” and there are some tourists aware of that. However, no matter how often people are informed of the fact that the buildings are not original; some people feel difficult to keep that in mind.

This sort of forgetfulness of the reality of those sites comes from a psychological reason: according to Rodney Harrison, the world heritage management of the local and national governments tends to choose the “official heritages” according to their superlative quality, such as the oldest or the greatest, which distinguishes the sites from the everyday life. (Harrison 2013: 18) This means that the official heritage tends to be seen as the one that is clearly separated from the contemporary world, and the same can be said of the tourist destinations as well. A case in point is the Kyoto Imperial Palace. Tourists think of this place as a thing of the past. The tourists who rated the Kyoto Imperial Palace as the best on *Trip Advisor* commented, “it is a fine example of

old Japanese culture.” and “Interesting place to visit and learn some Japanese history.” It is often the case that visitors want to experience something different from their everyday life, so the site also self-describe in order to satisfy tourists’ need for authenticity and exoticism. This tourists’ desire, combined with the quaintness of the buildings, inspires visitors to feel as if they had time-traveled from present day to the past when aristocrat culture flourished. Although foreign tourists get a sense of what the life would have been back in the day during their visit, they are likely to overlook the gap between the past and the present. By looking at the connection between the past and present, foreign tourists will be informed how it is regarded as an important site nowadays without losing the site’s credibility. The following chapters will look into this connection of the past and the present.

The key aspect that provides us with the evidence of the continuity of time is the material used in buildings. Even if the Imperial Palace is shown as a collection of buildings representing the aristocrats’ life, just a close look at the buildings will reveal various connections from the past to the present. Such as *tatami* (rectangular straw mattings) and glass windows. The former, used as flooring in present-day ordinary houses, was a luxury only for aristocrats in the Heian period (794-1185). The truth is, *tatami* was just a bed or an item of hospitality for guests in the Heian period. Then gradually it became popular in the Kamakura era (1185-1333) and eventually people started to use it as flooring in the Muromachi period (1392-1573). Some rooms in the Imperial Palace are all covered with *tatami*, which means these rooms were made or at least refurbished after the Muromachi period. The same can be said to the windows implemented in Shishinden.

In the official English brochure of the Kyoto Imperial Palace, Shishiden is introduced as “a one-story building purely made of wood” and “It was built in the architectural design of the irimoya (hipped and gabled roof) and Imperial Palace-style with high flooring.” As you can see from the detailed description on what kinds of timber were used in the buildings, there is no mention of glass. There are glass windows in the building, which implies that the building was reformed from the end of Edo period to the Meiji era. Along with the Westernization, during the era around Edo to the Meiji restoration, Japanese started to import glass for windows. Likewise using glass for windows was only for the rich up until the Taisho period (1912-1926), when people rapidly accommodated themselves to the modern technology. This explains how the Imperial Palace is associated with modern technology, which suggests how the past and the present are closely connected with each other.

Historically speaking, after the Meiji Restoration (1868), Meiji Emperor left the Kyoto Imperial Palace and moved his dwellings to Tokyo. Based on this historical fact, since glass windows became widespread around Taisho period, it can be said that the architectures of the Kyoto Imperial Palace have been changing along with times even after it lost its original purposes

as a residence of the imperial family. This implies how the government keeps putting a value on the ancient capital city of Kyoto. Additionally, even though the basic design and appearance itself have not changed much; its buildings surely incorporate the modern technology, including the system for fire prevention such as water pipes. And this explains how the past and the present are closely connected with each other in the historic site such as the Imperial Palace.

Foreign tourists have their purpose of visiting the Kyoto Imperial Palace. Some people want to walk around its spacious place and enjoy beautiful gardens and others want to learn Japanese history by looking at traditional architecture. Each has different objectives, so it is difficult to meet all of them. However, providing visitors with information concerning how the site has changed from its original gives visitors a clear understanding of its site without losing the site's credibility.

2. Temples: The transformation of significances caused by external factors

Some temples are less recognized than others, and one of the reasons is their lack of historically important objects due to fires. Therefore, although the temples hold valuable cultural assets and historical significance, some need to rely on external factors to maintain its popularity. In this chapter, I will look at Rozan-ji Temple, whose features have been transferred by external influences and suggest how it should be described to foreign tourists.

Rozan-ji Temple

An example of the historical sites that have become replete with external meanings can be drawn from the tourist site Rozan-ji Temple. It is located near the Kyoto Imperial Palace and it used to be regarded as merely a part of Buddhist institution related to Tendai-sects that carried out a Buddhist service in the court. The main building is Gansan Daishi-do Hall that is rebuilt after the Great Tenmei Fire in 1835. However, its feature has currently shifted into Murasaki Shikibu, since Tsunoda Bun'ei (1913-2008), an archaeologist and historian, determined Rozan-ji Temple as a former residence of Murasaki Shikibu in 1965. In the same year, a monument to honor Murasaki Shikibu was erected in the temple precinct. This change was sudden, and apparently the temple has taken benefit from it. It can be gathered from the title of the official brochure "Rozanji Temple and Site of the residence of Lady Murasaki". Furthermore, once visitors enter the temple, they will find a picture of Tsunoda Bun'ei, with an explanation to it as if he was the founder. Moreover, a picture of Edward Seidenstecker (1921-2007), one of the English translators of *the Tale of Genji*, is also on display.

These features are intriguing, as they are not related to the foundation of its place. However,

they have significantly contributed to raising the fame of Rozan-ji Temple as a tourist site by connecting Rozan-ji Temple and a talented woman writer Murasaki Shikibu. The fact that the temple gives credit to Tsunoda Bun'ei reveals how external elements give meaning to a place apart from its intrinsic historical and religious meanings.

The change that occurred to the way Rozan-ji has displayed its own feature is worth considering. As I have already mentioned above, Rozan-ji Temple's significance relies on the theory that the place represents the birth of *The Tale of Genji*. In a historical perspective, since many of its cultural assets have been lost by fire, it was fortunate that Tsunoda Bun'ei discovered the connection between Rozan-ji Temple and Murasaki Shikibu, drawing a clear line between Rozan-ji Temple and other temples. Considering Rozan-ji Temple's initial characteristic that was of purely religious nature, the fact that ancient literature added the value to the temple is intriguing.

Another link between the external influences and the way Rozan-ji Temple appeal to foreign tourists is its Japanese garden. It contains Shirakawa-suna Sand and moss, with beautiful purple bellflowers that bloom from the end of June to the beginning of September. The color of flowers recalls the name of Murasaki Shikibu since "Murasaki" means purple in Japanese. Although, whether the garden is original or not is uncertain, it is understandable that it is one of the exhibitions that appeal to foreign tourists who are interested in Murasaki Shikibu. In these ways, historic sites often draw tourists' attention by the extrinsic, rather than their intrinsic values, in order to make visitors feel a connection with, at least understand 'the past.'

The element that helps this transformation is the development of media, including the Social Network Service (SNS). Since there is no official website of this temple in any foreign language, the advertisement of Rozan-ji Temple is thoroughly dependent on the other web sites, such as *Trip Advisor* and *Japan Travel Guide*. Regarding *Trip Advisor*, currently, there is only one English comment on Rozanji-Temple, but with brief easy-to-understand information. Such as "this small temple, just off the Imperial Palace park, is an active temple and holds a little museum to the author of The Tale of Genji, Murasaki Shikibu, as it was built over the estate of her father. A few items (...) allude to this period, unfortunately most explanations are in Japanese." As the external value-conferring factors are becoming more and more important, the consequence is likely the insufficient understanding of the original purpose of the place. As observed in the case of the Imperial Palace, what people feel or think after they visit a site are hugely affected by the information offered by such authoritative media on their official website, which, unfortunately, Rozan-ji Temple lacks. Thus, weak promotion of a historic site (either by the lack of their foreign-language website or by transferring their cultural treasure to public museums that will be touched on the following chapter) can be highly detrimental to their proper recognition. Therefore, regarding Rozan-ji Temple's self-description of its history, my suggestion would be to make

English site and descriptions on each exhibit to entice foreign visitors.

3. Museums: Continuity from the past to present

According to Rodney Harrison, “Traditions and quotidian aspects of culture are very rarely conceived of as ‘heritage’ in the absence of uncertainty, risk, a perception of threat, or the need to compete for attention with other interests that are perceived to be detrimental to them.”(18) Whereas traditional model of understanding history draws a definite line between the past and the present, these new ways of looking at the sites emphasize the continuity between the past and the everyday modern life. Based on this theory, I will consider the museum’s representation of the connection between the past and the present. For this purpose in mind, I will focus on the changes in the cultural significance of the two museums: Kyoto National Museum and the Museum of Kyoto.-

Kyoto National Museum

Kyoto National Museum is one of the four national museums where visitors can see the reconciliation of the Western and Eastern cultures through their exterior and objects on display. In this chapter, I will examine how Kyoto National Museum became a culturally mixed site with a special attention to the changes it underwent in its history. Due to the trend of modernization, during the several decades following the Meiji Restoration, national properties were in grave danger. Therefore in 1895, the institution was built for the protection of national treasures. Although the Museum is not a treasure in itself, it has its history, and interestingly it has become a tourist destination in present days.

One of the most remarkable changes is the Museum’s name. Initially, it was launched under the name ‘the Imperial Museum of Kyoto’ and then in 1900, it was renamed ‘the Imperial Household Museum of Kyoto.’ After a series of renaming, finally, it was given the current name ‘the Kyoto National Museum’ in 1952.

Not only did the Museum’s name change but also the main building’s name and the number of constructions that consist the Museum has changed as well. As far as the main building is concerned, Main Exhibition Hall changed its name to “Special Exhibition Hall” in 1969 when it was designated Important Cultural Properties (*kyohaku.go*). This change may seem trivial, but it is worth paying attention to. *The Cambridge Dictionary* (2016) defines *Special* as ‘not ordinary’ or ‘unusual’ that also means something “especially significant or important or having a quality that most similar things do not have”. Then, what makes the former Main Exhibition Hall special? It is likely that historical backgrounds have a great deal to do with this name-change. From the end of

Edo period though the Meiji Period, the government set Westernization as a national goal. To become like western countries was a clear destination of that period. Step-by-step Japan developed and reached its goal to equal the western world. It is for this reason; the Main Exhibition Hall was a modernized building that was understood as an institution projecting the present and the future in those days. In short, it was once a building showing people the way they are approaching to, and today it is a symbol of the glorious past that Japanese people have already achieved. It no longer represents the current trend nor shows the future but provides visitors with tangible links to the past. Hence, it is called 'special.'

As I mentioned above, the Museum was built in order to protect national treasures from decay. In some sense, buildings themselves are merely a container of displays and not the treasure themselves. However, the national museum has changed its role to make itself responsive to the changes of the times. Concretely, Special Exhibition Hall, Main Gate, etc. of Kyoto National Museum are designated as Important Cultural Properties in 1969 and recently the Museum constructed a new building in 2014. The designation of the existing constructions predicts the possibility of the latest building (Heisei Chishin-kan) to be one of the Important Cultural Properties in future. It implies the museum itself can be the exhibition by giving additional meanings to it.

Another remarkable feature is the Museum's appearance. The exterior of the buildings has two remarkable aspects: one is fusion of the Eastern and Western culture, and the other is contrast between the early modern and the present. As far as the first aspect is concerned, the existence of a western style building, Special Exhibition Hall, in Ancient Kyoto is worth noticing. Tokuma Katayama (1854-1917), the leading architect for the Imperial household, was in charge of its design. Its features are the walls made of red brick, the roof covered with slate tiles, and the ornamental facade, which symbolize the trend of Westernization. To begin with, Kyoto National Museum was built so as to protect Japanese traditional culture and national properties jeopardized by the influence of westernization. Therefore, the government had harbored contradictory feelings on this particular matter. As stated on various web sites, however, there were many opposing opinions against building a westernized construction in an ancient capital city such as "Western-style buildings are unsuitable in Kyoto" (*Kyotodeasobo.com*). It can be said that the government has made both features coexist successfully, considering current Special Exhibition Hall's reputation as a typical architecture of the movement of Westernization.

What represents the second aspect—contrast of the past and the present is the arrangement of the buildings within proximity. The oldest construction of the Museum is the nostalgic Special Exhibition Hall and conversely, there is Heisei Chishin-kan constructed in 2014, which is one of the great modern architectures, designed by Yoshio Taniguchi. Its feature is a glass-sided skeleton

structure based on straight lines. These contrasting buildings stand comfortably side-by-side and shows entrancing contrast with the present and the age of Meiji period through those distinct appearance. The contrast between the times gives visitors the idea of transition in architecture as well, and Heisei Chishin-kan is currently one of the buildings that consist the Museum, it is likely to be seen as a symbolic figure of the Heisei period in the future.

The Museum of Kyoto

Our next question is how a local museum describes its city. While the National Museum is managed by the national government for preservation and exhibition of the national cultural treasure, the Museum of Kyoto is a local museum that aims to commemorate the 1200th anniversary of the transfer of the capital to Heian-Kyoto. For this reason, its main feature, at its inauguration in 1988, was the Heian era. Currently, however, it shows clear-cut eras in chronologic order from the Heian period up to Meiji period (1868-1912).

This change, which took place at its renovation in 2011, is worth considering. When compared with its previous system of the exhibition that had been formerly known as Heian Museum of Ancient History (1988-2011) focusing mainly on the Heian period; the museum today shows the whole history of Japan comprehensively in order to let tourists take a larger view rather than a limited view at a particular era. This transformation is based on the following basic policy of the Museum summarized in the following statement by Teiichi Aramaki, the ex-Prefectural Governor of Kyoto and the current director of the Museum.

“While receiving the stimuli of technology and society, by constantly pursuing the sense of modernity and humanity, we can enhance our traditional culture as things that has significant value in our modern society, and that efforts, I believe, should lead to our creation of fresh and original culture.” (Aramaki 2003, Official Website; my translation)

Another element that shapes visitors' impression of the city is the way they are guided. In the Museum of Kyoto, a guide gives tourists a brief tour of Japanese history either in Japanese or English. The official website says the museum started to introduce volunteer system to coincide with its renovation in 2011. Their aims were to “connect visitors and the museum through human relations” (*bunpaku.or*). Volunteer guides help visitors understand the exhibited objects. Although the museum makes a great effort to show objects concisely and clearly for visitors and helps them to grasp the idea of Japanese history in a limited time, what people can gain from descriptions on exhibits and brochure about each department is limited. Therefore, a guide is essential to make visitors comprehend and digest information correctly.

The Museum of Kyoto trains their guides through a series of lectures to increase the clarity and accuracy of what they are going to tell. However, there were some drawbacks of having volunteer guides. The advertisement for the Museum of Kyoto volunteer guides says, "You do not need to be knowledgeable about Japanese history." The museum is offering citizens an opportunity to engage in introducing their local history. Since the museum's top priority is not giving visitors accurate descriptions, it raises a problem that is the trustworthiness of the guides. The possibility that these guides' description might be misleading is far from negligible, especially since volunteer guides are expected to work at the coming event, the Tokyo Olympics in 2020.

Firstly, it is important to realize how tourists' impressions are vulnerable to information that is given to them. Based on foreign tourists' comments on *Trip Advisor* that the museum of Kyoto was "A reasonable size museum located in the heart of Kyoto with great exhibition about the history of Kyoto" and "There was an English language brochure, and short English descriptions on most of the exhibits", their purposes to visit the museum were to educate themselves about Japanese culture. Considering that English has become the common language in the world, the volunteer guides who can explain their exhibits in English is required. There is also a comment on the Museum of Kyoto such as "Good history of Kyoto but limited English". These firsthand opinions show that guides are responsible for giving information to tourists and in the end they will be the one who shape people's idea of the place they visit.

For these reasons, it can be said that volunteers are a crucial element that contributes to the work of Museum. Therefore, there ought to be a training program for the volunteer guides to enhance the accuracy of their knowledge. In short, giving potential guides adequate training is necessary as they are the distributors of the image of the site. This approach would help to avoid possible misconception among foreign visitors.

Conclusion

Thus far, I claim that if not all, many foreign visitors have continually been influenced by various media, including guidebooks, websites, and even online reviews. By and large, although most people think of Kyoto as representing the spirit of Japan, how people digest what they see and hear differs from person to person. Since visitors tend to have an inherent desire to add value to the sites, how they interpret the site eventually results in people's impression. However, we must admit that there are many resources affecting visitors' impression, regardless of its credibility. Additionally, considering the rapid development of modern technology, the visitors' and the site's intention will change as times passes. That is why it is crucial to keep up with this transition. In a word, how sites are understood and addressed by multimedia influence visitors'

reception. This means the way sites are displayed functions as an indicator of one's thinking process that shapes our impression of tourist sites. Therefore, in order to lure foreign tourists, each site has to dedicate themselves to promote their sites and offer accurate background history in English to avoid losing the trust of credibility.

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