

Conservation of Large-Scale Modern Cultural Heritage in Japan

Nakayama Shunsuke

National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Tokyo

Recently in Japan, as in other countries, the public has become aware of the value of modern cultural heritage, and attempts are being made toward their conservation. However, there are not so many examples of modern cultural heritage in Japan, and many of those that are conserved as nationally designated cultural heritage are buildings. Thus, in reality there is an imbalance in the types of modern cultural heritage conserved. One of the reasons for such a situation is that there are not many brick and stone buildings constructed in the early years of the Meiji period remaining today since they were damaged by wars and earthquakes or reconstructed. The rarity of such buildings seems to draw the attention of the public toward those brick and stone buildings that they find around them in their daily lives, making it easier for the public to understand them as important objects to be protected. Another reason for the imbalance lies in the fact that since the concept of "industrial heritage" is fairly new it takes time for people to become aware of their historical value, and many valuable heritage have been neglected and lost in the meantime. In addition, as will be mentioned later, the lack of space available for use in Japan and the fact that this industrial heritage had been constructed at favorable locations may be considered as other factors. Finally, it is also a fact that remarkable progress in technology from the modern to contemporary times has made the technical value of industrial heritage seem old-fashioned to such a degree that they are quickly becoming neglected by society.

Modern heritage that are nationally designated in Japan today consist of:

184 buildings

51 industrial heritages related with transportation, civil engineering, etc.

26 others (dams, bridges, docks, tunnels and other railway facilities)

10 historical materials (railway-related archives, etc.; these include such matters as photographs, technical papers, or others which are not the subject of this meeting)

There are few districts in Japan that have maintained blast furnace sites or large factory sites as monuments, unlike in Germany. This is because since many such industrial facilities were located in important places of industry and transportation the high commercial value of the land on which they were located made it more profitable for their owners to use them as other types of industrial facilities than to preserve them as they were. Another reason is that in Japan there was not enough spatial freedom to leave such large pieces of land unused. However, in recent years movements have

started to convert a part of these large sites into parks as a way of improving the welfare of the residents. Even then, since these will remain as parks and not as industrial heritage, in many cases only a part of the buildings in the heritage or the machinery therein are conserved as monuments.

In such currents of the time, the site of the Tomioka Silk Mill is an important modern heritage in that its factory has been conserved in its entirety and many of its related facilities have remained. Of course, the Tomioka Silk Mill site being a nationally designated Important Cultural Property, it is a target for protection. The local public body, which is its present owner and the people of the city, are working toward its registration on the World Heritage List, making necessary preparations.

In the Kiso River valley, the Yomikaki Power Plant, which at the time of its construction in 1923 was the largest conduit type power plant, is also nationally designated an Important Cultural Heritage. Included in the designation are the main building, reservoir, iron pressure pipes, conduit bridge and wooden suspension bridge built for construction work (Momosuke-bashi Bridge). These are still in service, and at the time of their designation in 1994 they were the first constructions to be designated while still in use.

Not to be forgotten among modern heritage are transportation facilities and, especially among them, railway heritage. In the early years of the Meiji period many steam locomotives were introduced to Japan. Today the No. 1 Locomotive, No. 2 Locomotive and the first Imperial Train Car No. 1 are nationally designated Important Cultural Properties. In addition, the former Temiya Depot in Otaru, Hokkaido was nationally designated an Important Cultural Property for its being the first railway facility constructed in Hokkaido. It is now conserved as an important exhibit of a railway museum. Other railway facilities designated Important Cultural Properties include those of the former Usui Pass (4 brick bridges, 10 brick tunnels and a brick substation) that were closed down with the introduction of the Nagano Shinkansen. Part of these facilities has been made into a promenade and is utilized as an attractive tourist spot. However, the condition of conservation of these brick constructions are not necessarily the best when the progress of deterioration due to natural causes such as repeated freezing and thawing, salt formation and weathering is considered. Moreover, since brick constructions are not resistant to earthquakes, when they need to be protected from natural deterioration, they are made earthquake resistant. Although in such a case some change may necessarily be made to the original structure, it cannot be helped since the visitors must not be exposed to danger.

Other transportation-related facilities that are now protected as nationally designated Important Cultural Properties are the No. 1 Dock and No. 2 Dock of the former Yokohama Dockyard. No. 1 Dock had been relocated to a nearby place before it was designated and is now used as a part of a commercial facility under the Landmark Tower of Yokohama. This, of course, is one way of utilizing heritage, but there is room for debate in that it is not utilized in its completely original state. With regard to No. 2 Dock, however, since the last Nippon Maru is now moored and exhibited there it is utilized