BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY: Historic Cities in the Japan’s Capital Region

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ABSTRACT

The Japan’s Capital Region, “Shutoken”, consists of Tokyo and other 7 prefectures. In this region, there are three characteristic cities that historic buildings and landscapes at their central urban areas are preserved. Those three cities are the city of Kawagoe, the city of Tochigi, and the city of Sawara. Each locates in a different prefecture, and Tochigi and Sawara are at the periphery of the Capital Region.

The main purposes of this paper are:

(1) to clarify reasons why these three cities have kept their historic characteristics,
(2) to understand and evaluate the ways and to preserve historic environment as a sustainable environment at the central urban areas,
(3) to study the effects of preservation especially to the minds and attitudes of people living in those historic buildings and landscapes, and
(4) to examine the significance of preservation of historic environment as a planning tool for coming century.

Key words: Historic Cities, Sustainable Community, Preservation

Introduction

The Japan's National Capital Region, called "Shutoken", consists of Tokyo and other 7 prefectures. (Table 1)
The purpose of the capital region development conception is to remedy various problems resulting from overpopulation and congested function, and to establish a large efficient complex body. In this region, there are three characteristic cities that historic buildings and landscapes at their central urban areas are preserved. Those three cities are the city of Kawagoe, the city of Tochigi, and the city of Sawara. Each locates in a different prefecture. The city of Kawagoe is 1 hour away from the center of Tokyo by train. It has a lot of cultural properties and historic sites which represent the culture of Edo-era. The city of Sawara, located 70 km to the northeast from the center of Tokyo, retains its historic district a number of well-preserved, more than a century old town-houses once common in Edo. The city of Tochigi is about 80 minutes from Tokyo by train. There are many historic warehouses and rows of white-walled houses at its historic site.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Population of the National Capital Region</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tokyo Metropolis</td>
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<td>Kanagawa Prefecture</td>
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<td>Saitama Prefecture</td>
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<td>Gunma Prefecture</td>
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<td>Tochigi Prefecture</td>
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<td>Ibaraki Prefecture</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>National Population</strong></td>
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Source: 1995 Census

Brief History of Three Cities

The following are the brief histories of Kawagoe, Tochigi and Sawara.

Kawagoe

In the Edo period (the 17-19th centuries), Kawagoe played an important role as the northern military base for the defense of Edo, and also prospered as a castle town.
It was after the Kawagoe great fire in 1893 when "Kurazukuri shops" which now symbolize Kawagoe's historical landscape started to develop. The fire destroyed more than one-third of Kawagoe and left the serious damage to the town. For the reconstruction of the town, merchants in Kawagoe who traded with Edo by boat introduced into Kawagoe "Kurazukuri" (Japanese traditional fire resistant storehouse built with thick mortar walls) which were commonly built in Edo at that time.

Although many towns of the National Capital Region have lost such historical buildings, Kawagoe's residents actively preserved those buildings and called the area "the historical town of Kurazukuri." The town still has an atmosphere of the old days when it was referred to as "Little Edo" [1]

Tochigi

Tochigi is situated in southern Tochigi prefecture and surrounded to the east by Mt. Tsukuba, to the west by Mt. Ohira and to the north by the Nikko mountain range. Nikko has national heritages such as Nikko Toshogu where Tokugawa Ieyasu (the
third shogun of the Edo period) is buried. This Nikko Toshogu and two other temples in Nikko were designated as the world heritages in 1999.

During the last days of the Tokugawa Shogunate, Tochigi was originally a rest stop along the main route to Nikko. Due mainly to the Uzuma river, this city became a prosperous merchant town and the centre of politics, economy and culture in Tochigi region. It became the regional capital in 1871 and the city fully prospered until the administrative office was moved to Utsunomiya City in 1884. [2]

Sawara

In the Edo period, Sawara was owned directly by the Tokugawa Shogunate. Sawara prospered as a port town on the Tone River in the Edo period and the decades after the Meiji Restoration (1868). Merchants were engaged in trade with Edo and the neighboring areas. Breweries of sake and soy sauce also thrived. Backed by the prospering business, merchants introduced into Sawara various building styles of Edo, such as the heavily-walled, black plastered townhouse.

The start of steam ship service (1877) and railroad service (1898) between Sawara and Tokyo reinforced Sawara's role as a port town. More magnificent townhouses than those seen before were built around this time. However, after the 1920s, when transportation by trucks and buses became dominant in this area, Sawara ceased to develop as a commercial town. [3]

Historic Preservation of 3 Cities

Kawagoe

After merchants' "Kurazukuri" houses were torn down one after another during the time shortly after WW II, the preservation movement of "Kurazukuri" started around 1965.

The neighborhood shopping center conducted "The Investigation for the Activation of Kawagoe Ichiban-gai Shopping Center" as a model project of their community mart plan. This was both for the preservation of historical properties and for the activation of the shopping center.

They have their own agreement "Community Planning Model" for the community design and the preservation of the town, and they also have their own organization called "Historical District Committee."
Their efforts have been contributing to the attractive landscape of Kawagoe, which gives a well-harmonized appearance of historical buildings and modern ones built with new conception and materials as well as traditional features.

In December 1999, the area of 7.8 hectares around Ichiban-gai Street was designated as "Important Preservation District for Groups of Historic Buildings" by the Agency for Cultural Affairs. [1]

The designated area has been the central shopping area since the beginning of the history of the area and still shows the dignified look of "Kurazukuri" town houses, a group of "Shinkabezukuri" town houses and a group of westernized town houses built around the Taisho period (1912-1926) and the early Showa period (around 1926-).

The cost for repairs, landscaping, restoration and maintenance of the buildings in the preservation district is subsidized along "The Summary of the Subsidization on Kawagoe City Preservation District for Groups of Historical Buildings" [4]

Tochigi

The central Tochigi City (former Tochigi-cho) was one of the largest commercial towns in northern Kanto area and the area still has more than 400 "Kurazukuri" buildings.

It was after "The Investigation of Kurazukuri (1985) "along the main street of the city when the district started to be called "Kuranomachi" (means "the town of storehouse") and preserved as a historical town. In fiscal 1988 (April 1988 - March 1989), Tochigi Prefecture conducted a project of "Community Planning for a Town to be Proud of" as one of its support projects to cities, towns and villages in its region, and the improvement of the main street, where most of "Kurazukuri" buildings are, started.

This street landscaping area covers the entire district of former Tochigi-cho, the Central Tochigi City. The purpose of this landscaping is to develop an original historical town of "Kurazukuri" and to make the main street that cuts across the district the symbolic street of the town. The landscaping and the improvement of the street should be done simultaneously in this particular case.

The concrete plan for landscaping is described in "Guideline for Landscaping of Historical District in Tochigi City (1990)." The landscaping within the range of this guideline is subsidized by the municipality of Tochigi. It includes subsidies for part of the landscaping cost of buildings’ and other structures' appearances which influence the historical landscape and the loan with a lower interest for the cost of interior renovations.
Usually the municipal construction section decides whether a case is applicable to the subsidy or not by the guideline. If the case is ambiguous, it will be examined by "Tochigi City Historical District Committee" consisted of scholars, architects, neighborhood representatives and regional and municipal officers.

The project to develop a historical district explained above is all prescribed in "Summary for Planning the Historical District in Tochigi City."

The improvement of historical district of Tochigi City will face serious challenges from now. One issue is that there has not been any preferable influence to the sales of small shops. Another is how to shift the initiative of this project from administration to residents. [5]

Sawara

As many merchants in Sawara City were wealthy enough to have real estates outside the city too, they could keep their old town houses. When the residents of Sawara had to choose between urban development and preservation of the historical town, they chose preservation. They wanted both the success in their commercial activities and the success in developing a nice sightseeing spot.
The conservation itself was not easy. There have been three stages so far. The first was the investigation of Sawara conducted by the Agency of Cultural Affairs as one of its support projects in 1974. The second was the investigation of the historical district by the Foundation for Preservation of Tourist Attraction in 1982. Some signs of the preservation movement were seen after this investigation, but not flourished. The third stage was "Idea Contest for the Use of the Furusato (Home Town) Recreation Fund" in 1988. It activated the residents of Sawara to the preservation. "Regulations on Historical Landscape of Sawara City" was prescribed in 1994 along this movement. Then, 1996, the central area of Sawara City was designated as "Important Preservation District for Groups of Historic Buildings" by the national government.

As shown in figure 5, the historical preservation area in Sawara City consists of the preservation district for groups of historic buildings and the landscaping district designated by the Regulations on Historical Landscape. These two districts are called together as "The Historical District of Sawara."

"Guide Plan of Landscaping of Historical District" has standards for repairs and landscaping of this district. Repairs and landscaping within the range of this guide plan is subsidized.

The number of tourists has been increasing probably because of these efforts. As it has also increased the number of automobiles and sightseeing buses coming into the city, however, it has caused some problems to solve, such as chronic traffic jams, the lack of parking lots and interruption of residents' everyday life. [6]

Conclusion

In this paper, the preservation of historical district in the center of three cities located at the periphery of the National Capital Region is surveyed.

As the conclusion of this paper, I would like to consider the difficulties Japanese cities are facing now and why preservation of historical district is necessary from the viewpoint of "center-periphery."

Difficult Situation of Central Urban Area

With the spread of automobile, people have become more mobile and it has caused sprawl phenomena. Now, in larger cities or local cities, we see less and less people living in the central urban area.

Vacant houses and vacant lots can be seen in the central urban area after people moved out to the suburbs seeking for the convenience with automobile. Then, the
share of older people at the central urban area becomes higher. Without young consumers and decrease of population, stores and shops of the urban central area have been in very difficult condition to keep their sales. So, many of them have moved out to suburbs (or closed), which consequently accelerates the sprawl, and thus the central urban area or a city loses its community and landscape too.

**Sustainable Community: the Preservation of Historical District and Improvement of Central Urban Area**

Japan in the early 21st century is presumed to be a society of aged people that no other country has experienced before. However, we should not think about it only as a welfare issue.

Aged people in the 21st century are working people. Compared with western people, aged Japanese are very strongly motivated to work. For these aged people, the central urban area is an ideal place to live in and work in because it saves them from commuting long. It is same for working women. For their social participation without being anxious about their children, they need a place to live in, which is close to their working place and also has day nurseries and schools for their children. The suitable place is, in this case too, the central urban area.

The main attraction of a central urban area is its convenience to have facilities with diversified functions and its accumulated culture after a long period of time. A central area is expected to have well-arranged historical streets as well as convenient facilities and things.

The street landscape of the central urban area is considered a cultural asset, which presents the area's climate and history. So the street landscaping there should be done in relation to its own culture.

The three cities of Kawagoe, Tochigi and Sawara are located in the periphery of the National Capital Region and each city has historical district at its center. These three cities have tried hard to preserve their historical districts, to activate the central urban area of the city and to establish sustainable communities. During the process, there were some frictions between residents and administration or among residents. With these difficulties, they decided to preserve their historical districts of their cities. It should be highly evaluated that the foundation for preservation of historical districts that were precious public properties was laid, and what is more important here is that through the experience where the administration and the residents cooperated with each other, they understood each other and residents began to realize the value of their town and feel a strong attachment for it. These changes are very important because whether the community planning of central urban area preserving historical properties
will be successful or not depends on what the residents think about their town and how strongly they are attached to it.

At the same time, however, the increase of tourists caused significant problems such as traffic jams, air pollution, the lack of parking lots and the fact the sales of central shopping area has not been any better than expected. While the living environment of the central urban area has been improved by preservation of the historical district, problems were caused by developing a profitable sightseeing spot. This seems to be a very contradictory situation.

What is required most now is to find the best balances between the preservation of historical districts and the activation of the central urban area and also between the central urban area (center) and the suburban area (periphery).

References


2. The City of Tochigi, *Welcome to Tochigi*" p.4.

3. The Department of Construction of the City of Sawara, "SAWARA" (1999).

