Pasts of the Present: Iconicity and Authentication at Two Reconstructed Heritage Sites in Japan

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Abstract

In light of today's global boom in landmark architecture, urban megaprojects and reconstructions of cultural heritage buildings, this paper analyses two large-scale reconstruction projects at iconic historical locations in Japan: the Heijō Palace in Nara and Dejima in Nagasaki. Since the 1990s, the two projects have recreated long-lost built environments, gradually transforming the sites, turning them into museums and exhibition spaces and giving rise to thorough reform of the surrounding urban fabric. In this paper I trace the involved agents' motivations to engage in historical reconstruction from early-phase experimental efforts to legitimise the sites' protected status to present-day politico-economic mobilisations of important historical locations to boost city attraction values. In this way, I link these two unfolding projects in Nara and Nagasaki to issues of urban boosterism, heritage production and the facilitation and commodification of tourist experiences of past realities. Approaching the reconstructions as contemporary heritage in traditional guise, the paper argues that both sites revolve materially, spatially and thematically around the master-metaphors of flow, growth and intercultural connectivity that characterise the present age. Elucidating processes of authentication and intersections of ideological and economic interests in and around the two sites, the paper asks in what ways Japanese cities exploit lost iconic localities and reconstructed heritage under post-industrial conditions marked by globalisation and intense cultural-economic competition.

Keywords: *cultural heritage; historical reconstruction; Nagasaki; Nara; place branding; urban development*

Introduction

A monumental hall, white and dark vermilion, towers majestically over a grassy field at the western end of the Japanese historic city of Nara.

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The imposing edifice known as the Great Audience Hall (*Daigokuden)* appears to have survived intact the thirteen centuries since Nara, then known as Heijōkyō, was the capital city in the early centralised Japanese state. The two-storied Tang-style wooden hall rises gracefully from its stone foundation, reaching over 20 metres in height before ending in a massive terracotta-tiled roof crowned with gilded ornaments. The Daigokuden, however, is not an eighth-century structure; it is a full-scale reconstruction which was finished as recently as 2010. Meanwhile in Nagasaki, Japan's westernmost main city, the small downtown site that once held a Dutch trading station on the artificial island of Dejima now hosts a rebuilt incarnation of its own historical self. Although the Dutch abandoned Dejima a century and a half ago, an atmospheric collection of wooden townhouses and storage facilities occupies the site today, part of an ongoing, meticulous reconstruction of historic Dejima.

As these two examples illustrate, Japan has been at the forefront of a cultural heritage boom unfolding internationally since the late 1980s, leading, among other things, to expensive large-scale reconstruction projects of lost historical landmarks. Affecting not only parts of Europe, where the fall of the Berlin Wall and the break-up of the Soviet Union led to numerous monumental reconstructions in Germany, Russia and other parts of Central and Eastern Europe, the recent surge in recreations of lost architecture has made itself felt across the world, including the Yongdingmen Gate in Beijing (2005), the Hurva Synagogue in Jerusalem (2010) and Shakespeare's Globe in London (1997). This global development attests to 'the enormous popular appeal of reconstructed buildings' (Stanley-Price 2009: 43), but, as Mager (2015: 1) notes, despite 'the phenomenon of reconstruction being poorly investigated, no other recent architectural trend can claim comparable persistence along with global validity'. In this paper, I analyse the gradual reappearance and expansion of Dejima and the Heijō Palace site (*Heijōkyūseki*) as representatives of Japanese contributions to this global phenomenon and seek to analytically connect the redevelopment efforts at the two sites to larger place-making and rebranding strategies in contemporary globalising cities.

I aim in this analysis to connect the two projects to architectural iconicity, a well-known component in urban boosterism (Sklair 2010, 2012) and entrepreneurial strategies to reinvigorate post-industrial cities (Jones 2009). Sklair (2012: 349) attributed the recent international surge in iconic architecture and urban megaprojects to cities'

aspirations for global status and recognition, noting that the process is primarily driven by the urban affiliates of 'the transnational capitalist class' and the commercialisation and profit-maximising interests it represents. Sklair (2010: 147) takes special note of landmark projects meant to boost civic pride and strategically 'turn cities that were once centres of productive labour into sites devoted to the culture-ideology of consumerism'. As Jones (2009: 2526) notes, cities around the world compete for inbound investment and increased attraction value in a 'highly contested symbolic economy of cities', in which iconic architecture plays a central strategic role. This phenomenon has been especially pronounced in museums and cultural institutions, where investments in 'starchitectural' exhibition buildings have led to increased visitor numbers and city attraction values, a development often referred to as the 'Bilbao effect' (Macleod 2013; Skot-Hansen 2019).

While most of this literature is concerned with new modern-looking landmarks, I argue that, similarly, these historical reconstructions are products of local and national ambitions to boost their cities and communities, enhance their cultural and historical brand values and increase their potential for inward investment, tourism and big events under conditions of regional and international competition. I have argued elsewhere (Sejrup 2019) that unrealised 'starchitectural' projects present a lacuna in theorisations of the architectural dimension of capitalist globalisation. In this paper, I approach recreations of lost icons as efforts to exploit the resource that historic environments represent in Japanese post-industrial development and adaptation to experience-economy conditions. Here, I use the term 'iconic' in accordance with Sklair's (2012: 349) overall definition as 'buildings and spaces that are famous for professional architects and/or the public at large and have special symbolic/aesthetic significance attached to them'. My argument is that these reconstructions can be approached as contemporary heritage in traditional guise. I draw inspiration also from Macdonald's (2013) idea of 'past presencing' and her discussion of anthropological viewpoints on the societal meaning of memorialising and re-establishing past structures. In her words, 'past presencing is the empirical phenomenon of how people variously experience, understand and produce the past in the present' (2013: 52).

The main agents organising, funding and promoting these two Japanese sites are national and local agencies, authorities and elected officials. Corporate and commercial agents have contributed in various ways over the years as well, much as they have in developments of

foreign-country theme parks (*gaikokumura*) (Hendry 2000), in addition to castles (Benesch and Zwigenberg 2019), rural architecture museums (Ehrentraut 1995), idyllic hot-spring resorts (McMorran 2008) or other heritage-related (re)construction projects in Japan. Much of the reconstruction work is performed by agents in the private sector, construction companies and entrepreneurs, often with specialised knowledge of traditional building techniques and preservation.

In Nara, shifting governors have consistently supported and championed the palace reconstruction project. However, the central government is the main funder, channelling resources through either the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism or the Agency for Cultural Affairs (*Bunkachō*) and its sub-departments for cultural heritage maintenance and on-site research. In 2008, the Heijō Palace site was upgraded to national park status, and the national government took over the financial responsibility for maintaining and continuing the reconstructions there, largely based on expert reports and research conducted by the Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties (*Nabunken*). In Nagasaki, the most active proponents of the reconstruction project have been shifting mayors and city council majorities who have provided most of the funding while attracting central-government funding and lobbying prefectural officials and local business associations for additional contributions. Thus, the central government and its relevant agencies play an important role as sources of funding and as regulators and controllers of the two nationally protected sites. In both cities, however, local initiative was crucial for the reconstruction projects, not least in providing and attracting support and resources for their continuation, growth and maintenance.

In a Japanese museum context, the projects are only two prominent examples of a larger trend towards recreation and musealisation of lost buildings and environments. The Heijō Palace project recalls other reconstruction efforts, including the prehistoric settlements at Sannai-Maruyama in Aomori Prefecture (part of the 2021 UNESCO World Heritage inscription 'Jōmon Prehistoric Sites in Northern Japan'), Yoshinogari Iron Age Historical Park in Saga Prefecture and the Shizuoka City Toro Museum in Shizuoka Prefecture.

The Dejima project resembles other reconstructed early-modern and modern monuments across Japan as well. Nagasaki Prefecture especially hosts museum sites focused on historical exchanges and interconnections with the West, including the reconstruction of the

Dutch Trading Post (*Oranda Shōkan*) in Hirado (destr. 1640, rec. 2011). Furthermore, Dejima is thematically connected to several nearby sites that recently obtained World Heritage status as part of either 'Hidden Christian Sites in the Nagasaki Region' (inscribed in 2018) or 'Sites of Japan's Meiji Industrial Revolution' (inscribed in 2015). The latter nomination included the abandoned coalmine island of Hashima off Nagasaki as well as Glover House (1863), the private residence of Scottish merchant Thomas Blake Glover (1838-1911) which is now part of the open-air Glover Garden museum in Nagasaki. In addition, nearby Sasebo city hosts the large resort city Huis Ten Bosch (1992), a so-called 'foreign-country village' (*gaikokumura*) featuring replicas of old buildings from the Netherlands (Hendry 2000). In other words, Dejima and the Heijō Palace are indicative of a significant development in contemporary Japan towards reconstructing and/or heritagising built environments of the past.

What defines historical reconstruction, and how does it differ from other types of building maintenance? It is important to make such a terminological distinction, especially in Japan's case where most traditional buildings are made of wooden constructions that require comprehensive care. The relevant vocabulary is often used inconsistently and somewhat confusingly, in English as well as in Japanese, so I will briefly clarify the term 'reconstruction' as I use it here.

This paper does not concern itself with architectural *preservation*, which in this connection refers to the act of disassembling a weakened or damaged structure and replacing compromised parts or sections with new ones (*kaitai shūri*, 'dismantle-repair'). This is the most common method of preserving traditional wooden architecture in Japan (Fukuda 2017, Gfeller 2017). Traditional preservation practices gave rise to Japan's involvement in challenging the authenticity paradigm enshrined in the Venice Charter (1964) and the UNESCO World Heritage convention (1972) in the 1990s, which led to the adoption of the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994) and a subsequent turn from a Eurocentric to a more pluralistic and contextual understanding of material authenticity in a World Heritage context (Brumann 2021).

Nor do I analyse cases of *restoration* (*saiken*, 'rebuilding'), by which I mean the act of recreating a demolished or severely damaged building. In such cases, the building's appearance is usually well known and documented, and the destruction likely took place within living memory. Famous examples include the restoration of the Main Hall at Hōryūji Temple in 1954, the Kinkakuji Golden Pavilion (Brumann

2008) in 1955 and the ongoing restoration of Shuri Castle after a 2019 fire.[1] In addition, the Japanese term *fukko* ('restore-old') mainly refers to returning an altered or modified edifice to its earlier appearance.

Instead, this paper analyses cases of *reconstruction* (*fukugen*, 'restore-origin'), the act of recreating in their original locations lost buildings, structures or environments 'primarily from archaeological evidence' (Okamura and Condon 1999: 63) but with a different function in mind. Such buildings were lost many generations ago, outside living memory, leaving many aspects and details of their former appearances unknown. One could say, in this connection, that while the purpose of preservation and restoration is in most cases to retain or reinstate a compromised structure in its existing or previous function, reconstruction seeks instead to recreate a long-lost (and often only partly known) structure in order to make it serve a new and different function. Unlike restored or preserved buildings, I argue that reconstructions occupy a complex cultural and attitudinal space in Japan, deriving authenticity not from their presumed originality or restored integrity, but from past-presencing authentication processes enacted on site.

The empirical data for this paper is a combination of published sources and observations from the field. Reflecting the *longue-durée* character of the two projects, I sought to combine impressions and insights from the field with media coverage and publicised discussions of the two projects since the first large-scale construction phases began in the 1990s. I have made visits to both sites – the Nara site in late 2018 and Dejima on an annual basis between 2016 and 2018. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 travel bans made follow-up visits impossible while I was working on this paper. I have studied the Japanese news-media sources and articles in the original Japanese language, though I quote from them here in my English translation.

The Two Sites: Why Reconstruct?

Nara and Nagasaki are famous historical cities, in and beyond Japan. Nara/Heijōkyō was an urban receptacle of select importation of Chinese technology, culture, religion and state administration in the Nara period (710-794). Nagasaki/Dejima was the only place open to foreign trade in most of the Edo period (1603-1867). However, both historic sites had subsequently lost their original function, and no particular efforts had been made to maintain them after they became examples of what Ehrentraut (1995: 216) termed 'obsolete architectural forms'.

By the turn of the 1990s, both sites led quiet lives under national protection, but neither contained buildings nor environments from their respective peak periods. They were little more than archaeological sites for specialists. Completely integrated into the surrounding urban landscape by land reclamation projects since the Meiji period (1868-1912), Dejima was even known as 'the most disappointing tourist sight in Japan'.[2] Indeed, some locals were hard pressed to point out its exact location when asked by the occasional interested tourist where Nagasaki's famous Dutch trading station might be. For its part, the Nara site was an open grassy field, used by locals as a neighbourhood park for picnics, ballgames and midsummer fireworks, and it sported only a few unremarkable stone foundations and other archaeological marks where once its majestic Tang-style palaces, wide boulevards and ornate city gates had been. It was located rather far from downtown Nara, as the city centre had historically moved eastward. In fact, some locals considered the grassy parkland a 'black hole' that might be put to better use either as residential development or perhaps even as a golf course.[3]

The reconstruction projects sprang from a desire in local and national political and cultural-bureaucratic decision-makers to enliven the historical sites and raise public interest and 'understanding' of them and their protected status. In due course, both sites grew to become strategic instruments for attracting tourists and commercial revenue, as I discuss towards the end of this paper. The reconstruction efforts have been carried out alongside archaeological excavations, so these sites have become archaeological field sites, museum spaces exhibiting excavated artefacts and reconstructed historic environments at the same time. The two projects represent all five 'justifications for reconstruction' that Stanley-Price (2009: 35-37) identified in reconstruction projects around the world: 'national symbolic value', 'a new, different function', 'combined research and popular education roles', 'tourism promotion', and 'site preservation' to help 'protect it from development pressures'. Importantly, over the course of history, these environments were lost but never forgotten. Both places held high symbolic value, but their physical and material constitution was out of sync with their popular image and cultural significance; thus, the sites were perceived as disappointing to visitors and wasteful to some locals. Consequently, the reconstruction efforts can be viewed as organisational efforts to bring the physical sites up to par with their symbolic weight and resonance and to anchor connotative value in a correspondingly

Figure 1. **Dejima. Reconstructed streetscape.** *Source:* Photo by Jens Sejrup, 2017.

poignant built environment. Essentially, the reconstructions are a way for the sites to live up to their own historical reputations.

Consequently, the expensive, meticulous projects have unfolded in several phases since the 1990s. Both projects seek to recreate built environments from another era with the use of techniques, materials, colouring and tools believed to have been available to craftsmen and artisans at the time. New architectural landmarks and building ensembles have emerged, appearing for all the world as historical structures, although they are in fact contemporary architectural interpretations of lost localities. In accordance with Japanese regulations, once archaeological excavations had uncovered and documented the remains of individual structures, the plot was carefully reburied with the material remains intact. Only then could a contemporary reconstruction be produced above the plot, at times leaving a small section of the excavated remains visible under a glass floor in the reconstructed building for exhibition purposes. As such, the reconstructions are fundamentally different from the buildings that once preceded them on the same site, built for different purposes, creating a different atmosphere and

representing a different historical reality than the lost structures. As Stanley-Price (2009: 42) puts it: 'reconstructions are new buildings; they do not reproduce original conditions'. Although they look old, these buildings are new. They conform to current building standards and regulations regarding access and safety, structural reinforcement and earthquake proofing. But the fact that they are new does not make them 'fake' or necessarily less authentic as items of cultural heritage; it is just a different, contemporary, heritage that they embody.

Authentication: Forging Engagements with the Past

A millennium younger than the Heijō Palace, historical Dejima is the less obscure of the two, and the reconstruction project there placed the first quarter of the 1800s as its point of reference. The outer appearance of most buildings at that time is fairly well documented, but precious little is known of the interiors. The site is small and compact, roughly 200x50 metres, and centres on a reconstructed streetscape along the western half of the former trading colony's main thoroughfare, lined on both sides with wooden dwellings and warehouses in an Edo-period townhouse style (see Figure 1). The island was financed and constructed by local 'town-elder' (*otona*) merchants, originally in order to house Portuguese traders. The Tokugawa authorities ordered the Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie (VOC) to relocate to Dejima from Hirado in 1641 after the Portuguese had been expelled from Japan (Nao 2006). The buildings here thus appear more Japanese than European in their general design, materials and structure. They are, for the most part, wooden timber-frame houses with white plaster walls and tiled roofs. The timber elements are painted dark brown, with the more prominent buildings sporting turquoise-coloured façade elements. In addition, there are European decorative features on some buildings, such as carved balustrades and mounted glass lanterns.

The most important reconstructed buildings are the Sea Gate (*Suimon,* 2006) where arriving cargo and crew used to land, the Chief Factor's Residence (*Kapitan-beya,* 2006) and the First Ship Captain's Quarters (*Ichibansensendō-beya*, 2000). Interspersed between these main structures on the former island's western half are reconstructed Japanese officials' quarters, kitchen facilities and several warehouses now used for commercial or practical purposes and for thematic exhibitions. The eastern half houses a number of protected buildings from a later period, including the Former Nagasaki International Club

(*Kyū Nagasaki Naigai Kurabu*, 1903) and the Former Dejima Protestant Seminary (*Kyū Nagasaki Shingakkō*, 1878). The presence of these Meiji-period buildings is temporally and stylistically incongruous with the reconstructed Edo-period environment, and the eastern half holds a number of additional idiosyncratic elements including a large open-air model of Edo-period Dejima and a lawn area featuring a cut-out billboard of Dutch cartoonist Dick Bruna's rabbit character Miffy holding a Dutch flag and the word 'Holland' written in large orange letters. The main attraction, however, is the townscape on the western half with the Japanese-style wooden townhouses and European-inflected building elements.

The Nara site, by contrast, is vast and occupies approximately one square kilometre, coinciding more or less with the imperial enclosure in Heijōkyō, a palace structure that contained the capital's ceremonial state buildings, administrative offices and imperial residences. The reconstruction project aimed to recreate the palace as it appeared in its first thirty years of existence, as that configuration best illustrates the characteristic symmetry of the continental-style urban design (Aoki 2006). The reconstruction project here has not created a townscape but

Figure 2. Heijō Palace. The reconstructed Daigokuden. *Source:* Photo by Jens Sejrup, 2018.

rather selected the largest and most imposing individual structures for reconstruction. As a consequence, a few Tang-style imperial buildings stand fully reconstructed in (ahistorical) isolation from the urban environment that once surrounded them. The most striking reconstruction is the Daigokuden which used to be the central edifice in the imperial state architecture (see Figure 2). A reconstruction of the building was completed on the occasion of Nara's 1,300th anniversary in 2010. Measuring 44x20 metres, the two-storied edifice took nine years to complete and carried a price tag of over 18 billion yen. The other most important reconstructions are the Suzakumon (1998), the former main gate to the imperial enclosure and the Tōin Garden (1998), once part of an aristocratic villa located east of the imperial palace. In 1998, the Heijō Palace site was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list as one of eight constituent properties in the 'Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara' nomination. However, the site's main attraction is the meticulous reconstructions of the Daigokuden and the Suzakumon that lend the site a distinctive historic-monumental feel.

In both sites, visitors are invited to engage with the location affectively, to experience, wonder and be charmed by the reconstructed buildings and environments by imagining and stepping into the historical periods they represent. The atmosphere in both sites is somewhat less reverent than in many history museums in Japan or elsewhere. The museum element in both these places is complemented by the encouragement to feel the sites, imagine the past and relive the realities of the people who once lived and worked in these spaces. As Macdonald (2013:94) notes, 'Place is bound up with a wide range of affects, (…) and it is central to heritage – which is always emplaced. In heritage it is through place – and its specific physical elements, such as buildings or natural features – that the past is made present'. The dissemination of historical and archaeological information and artefacts is correspondingly set off by activities, technologies and place-making acts that appeal to experiential, aesthetic and emotive registers.

On the Nara site, the main technique for eliciting emotive responses is the spatial *mise-en-scène* of the reconstructed palace buildings, stressing their size and symmetrical grandeur. In this way, the site engages and moves its audience by means of a 'starchitectural' vocabulary, reproducing impressions of the Nara period and capital as primarily one of technical, organisational and aesthetic accomplishment, scale and sophistication.

Figure 3. Dejima. Interior in the reconstructed First Ship Captain's Quarters. *Source:* Photo by Jens Sejrup, 2018.

The iconicity of reconstructed Dejima, by contrast, lies in its meticulous rendering of the architectural and material framework for everyday life. The artificial island was a quintessentially functional and mercantile environment with no monumental buildings. Frequent fires, rebuilding and alterations meant that the built environment was neither particularly stable nor very clearly fixed. Instead, the reconstruction offers a feeling of intimacy, bringing the Dejima site to life through a combination of its hybrid Euro-Japanese material culture and the picturesque compactness of its streetscapes, warehouses and interiors. Everything is human scale, and visitors can peek into reconstructed dining rooms, bedrooms, kitchen facilities and servants' quarters furnished mostly with antique objects that the Dejima museum acquired for the purpose (see Figure 3).

Both sites invite visitors to engage in embodied forms of experience. Such registers include not only seeing and feeling the materiality of the reconstructed buildings but also participating in various acts of embodied past presencing. In Dejima, visitors can rent kimonos and period garb from a private costume-rental business housed in one of

the reconstructed houses or join various events on the site, including the annual 'Dejima Festa' (*Dejima Fesuta*) and Dejima Music Heritage festivals. Likewise, at the Heijō Palace site, numerous events and festivals stage performances of Nara-period imperial rituals and various other thematic activities that invite participants to experience and enjoy historical dishes, music, craft-making, etc. In addition, both sites organise guided tours and thematic walks with research staff or volunteers.

The two reconstructed environments come alive as heritage spaces through these processes of authentication: through carefully coordinated interweaving of, on the one hand, material and architectural reconstruction enabled by expert knowledge and craftsmanship, and, on the other hand, encouraging affect and discovery through facilitating visitors' emotive and experiential engagement with the sites. These authentication processes are intellectually as well as emotionally charged, at the same time temporally transposed between present and past, belonging overtly and professedly to both temporal dimensions. This is especially evident in Dejima, where visitors come across two types of guides and volunteers. Dressed in orange construction-site jackets, one type disseminates information about the buildings and the reconstruction process, stressing firmly the present, reconstructive moment, while the other type imitates Tokugawa officials and townspeople dressed in period costume, posing for photographs and delivering anecdotes about everyday life on the island, thus clearly embodying the past, reconstructed moment. Similarly, the Dejima museum maintains a functional distinction between objects acquired for museum display and objects excavated on site. While the former type is part of the reconstructed interiors, the latter is presented as material documentation of Dejima's past reality: exhibited behind glass and disconnected from daily use and other object categories inside restored or extant warehouses dedicated to that particular purpose. As such, the two sites heritagise present-day mastery of past forms, institutionally encouraging different types of affective and embodied engagement across two temporal dimensions to authenticate their recreated symbolic iconicity. But what is it about them that invites such careful reconstruction in the present day? How do these two particular sites reflect contemporary concerns and circumstances?

Japan in Circulation: Localising Transformative Flows and Exchanges

'Given that historically heritage has been entangled with attempts to forge and maintain bounded, homogenous identities, especially of the nation-state', writes Macdonald (2013: 162) in *Memorylands*, 'a major question is whether heritage is capable of accommodating other kinds of identities, especially those that might be considered, variously, "hybrid", "open" or "transcultural"'. These two sites suggest a way to answer that question from a contemporary Japanese perspective. Whether nationally designated as 'important cultural property' (*jūyō bunkazai*) or 'national treasure' (*kokuhō*) or internationally acknowledged, for instance, in a UNESCO World Heritage context, much cultural heritage in Japan contains elements of international interaction. However, these two sites emphasise movements and processes of the intercultural and global more directly and powerfully than most. Both sites represent influxes and exchanges of culture, goods, capital and technologies, and they both function symbolically as spatial and material interfaces of Japanese past encounters with powerful external

Figure 4. Dejima. Exhibition of excavated artefacts in the Archaeology Pavilion. *Source:* Photo by Jens Sejrup, 2018.

agents. Both sites generate Japanese heritage by linking the archipelago to larger cross-continental and global geographies and processes, the effect of precisely such processes being the master metaphors of the contemporary phenomenon known as globalisation (Tsing 2000).

I argue that these emerging sites are iconic heritage of the contemporary globalised era. The focus in both sites is on contacts and exchanges with the outside world that transformed Japan. By consequence, visitors are introduced to a vision of transcultural exchange as one taking place between discrete cultures, those of Japan and external others. The main narrative at reconstructed Dejima is one of global movement, encounter and circulation of people (VOC merchants and sailors sojourning at Dejima, Japanese scholars, traders and officials engaging with the foreigners there, the Chief Factor's ceremonial passages from Dejima to the shogun's court in Edo, etc.), of objects (commodities, resources) and of knowledge (Western learning flowing into Japan, knowledge of Japan flowing into the West). The reconstructions and exhibitions at Dejima represent Japan as a receiver of capital, knowledge and intercultural exchange. This motif is especially pronounced in the so-called 'Archaeology Pavilion' (*Kōkokan*), a space dedicated to displaying Western everyday objects excavated on the site, such as jars, bottles, utensils, ceramics and even a rusted handgun (see Figure 4). Another building is dedicated to displaying Western scientific items introduced to Japan through Dejima, primarily in the form of devices and contraptions of so-called 'Dutch learning' (*rangaku)* such as clocks, a projector, a stethoscope, a hearing aid, etc.

Reversely, the narrative in the Heijō Palace depicts Japanese crossing the seas in search of foreign knowledge. Here, Japan is the extroverted party, sending off envoys and individuals eager to absorb and reproduce advanced continental culture. This motif comes through in multiple references to the Silk Road and efforts to position Heijōkyō as its end station. Over the years, top officials at the Nara site have publicly communicated messages to the effect that Heijōkyō was built 'as the end point of the Silk Road, aiming to absorb foreign cultures and institutions and to establish a full-fledged national governance system'.[4] Indeed, as Tseng (2015: 97) points out, the act of reconstructing the Heijō Palace reiterates the site's own history of 'cross-cultural repetition, replication, and reproduction' of continental forms and ideas. Furthermore, although Nara is not a coastal city – it lies in a basin surrounded by mountains a good 25 kilometres from Osaka Bay – the exhibitions at the Heijō Palace are remarkably maritime in theme.

The site prominently exhibits a reconstruction of a so-called 'envoy ship to the Tang' (*kentōshisen*), in itself a 200-million-yen project, 30 metres long and made with traditional shipbuilding techniques.[5] Thus, the two reconstructed sites share a thematic preoccupation with water-borne exchange and circulation of objects and people, fluidity, sailing and global flows. As such, the sites appear ideologically as anchor points of transformational global contact and as historical gateways to the larger world. They are amalgamated hybrid locales, emphasising the globalised roots of a present-day Japan founded on native absorptions of external stimuli.

This ideology of 'Japan as cultural synthesizer' (Lincicome 2020: 1) is well-established in Japan. Indeed, as Lincicome (2020: 4) notes in a study of Japanese pursuits of international cultural recognition, the country has a long intellectual tradition of considering Japanese culture a unique outcome of native processes of 'cultural hybridity, that is, its talent for selectively adopting, adapting and synthesizing the superior attributes of foreign civilizations'. As Iwabuchi (2002, 53-54) has argued, such an understanding of cultural adaptation and vernacularisation rests on an exclusivist logic:

> Foreign origin is supposed to be purged by the Japanese tradition of cultural indigenization. Japan's hybridism strategically attempts to suppress ambivalence generated by the act of cross-fertilization, relentlessly linking the issue of cultural contamination with an exclusivist national identity, so that impurity sustains purity.

Certainly, it is a very particular narrow kind of 'adopting, adapting and synthesizing' that these two sites commemorate: both exhibit historical instances of firm Japanese control over circulation and exchange, whether the tightly regulated Dejima trade or the select importation of continental culture by the Nara-period elite. The material and exhibitionary messages at each site arguably 'sustain purity' by not fundamentally challenging or dislocating conservative Japanese notions of national 'identity as a sponge that is constantly absorbing foreign cultures without changing its essence and wholeness' (Iwabuchi 2002: 54). Nevertheless, what stands out in both sites is their exhibitionary framing and presentation of the two localities as inherently globalised. The two sites seem to ground and fix transformative movements and channel the flow of external contact into a continuous trans-historical process of becoming contemporary Japanese. Thus,

both sites are shaped, framed and promoted ideologically as globalising nodal points, ideally suited, retrospectively and for the future, to attracting and accelerating contemporary influx by linking up to domestic and international networks of flow.

Boosting Value: Inviting Contemporary Influx

The trope of exchange and accumulation in the exhibitionary framing of Dejima and the Heijō Palace find reflection in the extra-archaeological ambitions that drive their physical and material expansion, decade after decade, building phase after building phase. Increasingly over the years, the projects have lent themselves to promotional efforts meant to boost local revenue and rebrand the two host cities. The reconstruction projects have expanded far beyond the original aims of legitimising the underutilisation of attractive land plots. Today, the sites are part of larger place-branding and value optimisation efforts, enmeshing, as Tseng (2015: 109) phrases it, 'often contradictory priorities of heritage management and commercially-driven educational entertainment'. McMorran (2008: 350) notes 'the complex relationship between the ideological and economic aspects of heritage', and shows how the two elements intersect closely in the empirical field. Okamura and Condon (1999: 72) emphasise that 'reconstruction sites have started to be increasingly employed for a political and economic purpose. (…) Simply put, modern, socio-political demands are dictating which image of the past should be presented to the present'.

But why would Nara and Nagasaki desire further promotion? Despite their, for Japan, relatively small populations (around 400,000 inhabitants), both cities welcome millions of domestic and international visitors annually. Nara Prefecture holds many national treasures and World Heritage-listed properties, and the city is home to sublime continental-style temple architecture. Nara Park attracts well over 15 million visitors a year, hosting the Nara National Museum, the Kasuga Grand Shrine, the impressive Tōdaiji and Kōfukuji temples and about 1,200 tourist-friendly sika deer. The picturesque landscape around the city is dotted with ancient keyhole-shaped megalithic tumuli (*kofun*), and just a few kilometres south are the historic towns of Asuka and Sakurai and the Yoshino Mountains, one of the archipelago's most famous areas for cherry-blossom viewing.

Likewise, Nagasaki has much to offer visitors. Its main attraction is the Atomic Bomb Museum and associated monuments in Urakami just

north of the city centre, drawing in almost 2 million annual visitors. But the city also stands out for its rich multicultural history. Apart from Glover Garden, World-Heritage-listed Ōura Church and the *fin-de-siècle* grandeur of the former foreign settlement area, Nagasaki hosts Japan's oldest Chinatown – today, a colourful plethora of narrow streets, red-and-gold storefronts, eateries and trinket shops. Private tour operators whisk visitors off to the abandoned industrial ruins on tiny Hashima, another World Heritage site. Beyond Nagasaki city, tourists can enjoy Sasebo's Huis Ten Bosch, and further afield are historic sites in Hirado and the Shimabara Peninsula, picturesque islands, natural hot springs and the active volcano Mt. Unzen. In all respects, Nara and Nagasaki are generously endowed with top-level cultural and natural attractions.

The real picture is less rosy, however, and both cities struggle with challenges caused by their respective locations. Nagasaki sits on the western edge of Japan's southernmost main island of Kyushu, far away from the country's main urban centres. In fact, Nagasaki is geographically closer to Seoul and Shanghai than it is to Tokyo. A two-hour train ride from Kyushu's main city of Fukuoka, Nagasaki has yet to be included in the ever-expanding national *shinkansen* bullet-train network. Although a new high-speed line opened to nearby Takeo-Onsen in 2022, passengers still have to change trains to access the main Kyushu *shinkansen* line and larger national network. Due to Nagasaki's inconvenient location, the bulk of atomic-bomb tourism descends upon Hiroshima on the main island of Honshu instead. Rebranding the city to de-emphasise its dark image of death, defeat and nuclear destruction has been a priority for shifting Nagasaki governors and mayors, city-hall officials and local businesses for decades, along with a wish to attract more visitors from continental East Asia[6] beyond short-stay cruise tourists. In the accelerating domestic and international competition for tourism revenue and brand value, Nagasaki found itself disadvantaged by the historical loss of Dejima, lacking a heritage space to represent the unique history of (Japanese control over) globalised encounter, exchange and connectivity during the centuries of national near-seclusion. The reconstruction of the trading station reflects local interests in diversifying the city's heritage attractions in temporal and thematic terms.

Nara's problem is the opposite of Nagasaki's. Reaching Nara is too easy for the city to reap the full potential of its tourism sector. Although not connected to the *shinkansen* network either, Nara lies centrally in

the Kansai region, a mere 30 kilometres from downtown Osaka. Kyoto and Kobe are not far away either, and Nagoya can be reached in about 2 hours. The very large number of visitors to Nara Park clearly reflects this geographical convenience. However, convenience has the unfortunate consequence that the majority of tourists visit Nara on day trips from bases in larger nearby cities. Day-trippers generate significantly less revenue at a destination than overnight guests, and so glaring was the mismatch between tourist numbers and accommodation demand in Nara that before the Daigokuden opened in 2010, Nara Prefecture had the lowest total number of overnight guests of all Japanese prefectures.[7] So, while Nagasaki's challenge is to attract more tourists, Nara's problem is to make its many visitors stay longer. And unlike Nagasaki, Nara had no particular interest in diversifying the temporal reference points of its built heritage: the Nara brand associated with being Japan's first 'permanent' capital, its monumental architecture and the history of selective Japanese importation of continental culture is consistently strong. What the reconstructed Heijō Palace added was secular state architecture to supplement Nara's Tang-style religious monuments. In thematic terms, the political and business interests in the reconstruction of the Heijō Palace were reduplicative and cumulative rather than image-adjusting or diversifying.

The logic of growth and value accumulation that drives the politico-economic interests in the reconstruction projects finds spatial reflection on the reconstruction sites, as the projects continue to grow and expand. This is true also for the urban and infrastructural fabric surrounding the sites. In 2018, Nagasaki inaugurated the pedestrian Dejima Gate Bridge (*Dejima-omotemon-hashi*) across the Nakashima River, a steel bridge marking a new, grander, main entrance to the Dejima site. Furthermore, only about 100 metres separate Dejima from the downtown harbour front, a section of which has been recently overhauled and turned into the Dejima Wharf (*Dejima Wāfu*) shopping and dining facility, a picturesque marina lined with wooden buildings vaguely reminiscent of the reconstructed warehouses in nearby Dejima. The city has ambitious mid- and long-term plans for further development in and around the site. More buildings and gardens are to be added, 'building interiors fully utilized, and exhibition facilities expanded'.[8] Furthermore, a busy tram line and Route 499, the city's main thoroughfare, currently dissect the narrow stretch between Dejima and the wharf, cutting off a corner of the historical site right where VOC ships used to land. The city plans to divert these major transportation

Figure 5. Heijō Palace. Reconstruction work on the Daigokumon. *Source:* Photo by Jens Sejrup, 2018.

arteries and reconstruct the historical landing jetty. On top of that, there are plans to revert the courses of the Nakashima and Dōza rivers to create a waterway around the site and finally make Dejima an island again.

When the national government took over responsibility for the Heijō Palace site in 2008, Nara Prefecture and City shifted their focus to developing the surrounding urban area. Inside the protected site, the current phase of reconstruction efforts most recently recreated the Daigokumon gate to the Daigokuden (inaugurated in 2022) and is bringing back the towers and fences surrounding the grand ceremonial hall in an architectural arrangement known as the Daigokuden'in (see Figure 5). Meanwhile, the city and prefecture have overhauled the large area south of the Suzakumon where Heijōkyō's main thoroughfare, Suzaku Avenue (*Suzaku-ōji*), once began. Much of this land belonged to the Sekisui Chemical Company, and only after years of negotiations did the company agree to evacuate the land, allowing a major transformation of the area to take place: in 2018, the Suzakumon Square (*Suzakumon Hiroba*) opened – a large multipurpose complex

of low-rise modern buildings on both sides of a resurrected Suzaku Avenue hosting museums and exhibition halls, an observation deck, restaurants, cafes and a well-stocked gift shop. In effect, establishing Suzakumon Square represented a spatial expansion of the site, annexing a whole city block and transforming it into a supporting facility for the flow of visitors to the reconstructed buildings.

Arguably, the Nara city centre seems to be slowly gravitating back toward the west, moving closer to the Heijō Palace site, as a sleek new Prefectural Convention Center with a JW Marriott hotel, the first international luxury hotel in Nara, now sits across the street from Nara City Hall, one block from Suzakumon Square. And further reform seems to await the wider Heijō Palace neighbourhood: A section of the busy Osaka-Nara Kintetsu railway still runs across the palace site, having been laid shortly before the area was designated a national historic site in 1922. Comprehensive plans to optimise the site by getting rid of the railway tracks have materialised at different points, most recently in 2017, but have yet to be realised.

What all these efforts and plans illustrate is the centrality of the two reconstructed sites for large-scale urban development, unfolding as Japanese cities follow a global post-industrial trend, reconfiguring and transforming their central districts and built environments in order to better profit from competition in the globalising experience and culture economy. As evidenced by the recent global boom in acts and places of 'past presencing', it is an economy where heritage and iconicity take on important strategic functions. Significantly, the urban developments around the sites are not historical reconstructions, and they do not compete for iconicity with the protected historical sites. Instead, their role is to emphasise, accentuate and support visitors' feelings of recreated historical reality and optimise their experience of the reconstructed sites and the authentication processes enacted there, as well as facilitate increased consumption of site-related commodities and services. These redevelopments reflect a desire, especially in local and prefectural decision-makers, to boost the brand value and attraction of their cities, taking advantage of large-scale historical reconstruction similar to how other cities have constructed contemporary 'starchitecture', as 'architectural capital projects to maximize their global attraction and marketable iconicity', and stimulate civic pride and economic growth in the national and global competition for 'inbound investments, tourists and accelerated consumption' (Sejrup 2019: 825).

Clearly, in these two Japanese cities, the added attraction value of the historical localities derives from the symbolic/aesthetic iconicity and two-layered authentication processes that the expert-sanctioned heritage reconstructions enact. The logic is that reconstructing a lost iconic environment increases the attraction value of the historic site, provided that the reconstructions undergo site-specific processes of authentication that invite trans-temporal affective engagement with past realities.

Conclusion

Analysing authentication processes and thematic motifs of global flow and interconnection at two high-profile historical reconstruction sites in Japan, I have argued that the ongoing reconstructions of Dejima in Nagasaki and the Heijō Palace in Nara are examples of contemporary Japanese heritage-making in traditional guise. Furthermore, I have linked these two long-term projects to ongoing discussions in museum and urban studies of iconic architecture and urban boosterism and to anthropological conceptualisations of past presencing and metaphors of flow and interconnection in globalisation rhetoric. I argue that the current global boom in reconstructions of lost landmarks is related, and effectively parallel, to similar efforts around the world to boost city images and reputations through contemporary-looking 'starchitectural' statements and megaprojects. Doing so, I have attempted to elucidate the ways in which post-industrial Japanese cities today mobilise lost iconic monuments and authenticate their material resurrection in order to better capitalise on accelerated global exchanges and to boost their destination brand values in the intense regional and global competition for increased revenue in the tourism and experience sectors.

Although these reconstructed buildings look old, they are contemporary structures. They derive their heritage authenticity from embodied site-specific processes of authentication, enacting past presencing by strategically framing the sites as exhibitionary spaces of emotive engagement and trans-temporal convergence of the reconstructing and the reconstructed moments.

Reflecting such contemporary dynamics, a logic of growth and expansion permeate both sites, a logic repeated in three distinct dimensions:

-materially, as the sites gradually fill up with more reconstructed

buildings and features, phase after phase, despite limited expert knowledge as to their exact historical appearance;

-thematically, as museum exhibitions, activities and events stress the inherently globalised nature of the localities and their ultimate roots in transformative processes of circulation, exchange and accumulation;

-politico-economically, as the two cities reform the urban fabric around the sites to boost attraction values and revenues in the regional and global competition.

The reconstruction of historical buildings remains informed by professional input from expert knowledge workers reporting to the Bunkachō and its central cultural-administrative bureaucracy in Tokyo. But the reconstruction projects and the heritage buildings they continue to spawn are no longer mainly directed towards legitimising the sites and their protected status. Even with their traditional and historical appearances, these sites have also become important strategic instruments in larger, thoroughly contemporary, politico-economic endeavours to develop, transform and enhance their host communities' civic pride, intercity competitiveness and marketable attraction value.

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NOTES

1 Arguably, another example of restoration is the famous *shikinen sengū* renewal process of the Ise Grand Shrine repeated every 20 years.

2 Nihon Keizai Shinbun 2000. 'Nagasaki de fukugen-chū no Dejima o miru, rekishi no kaori tadayou machinami' (Visiting Dejima Under Reconstruction in Nagasaki, A Townscape Fragrant with the Scent of History), *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 28 October, *Nikkei Purasu Wan* section, p. 15.

3 Nihon Keizai Shinbun 1993. 'Kansai Torendii – Saidaiji, kaihatsu, hozon… omoi chirijiri' (Kansai Trendy: Scattered Thoughts on Preserving or Developing Saidaiji [area]), 1 April, Osaka evening edition, p. 30.

4 Yomiuri Shinbun 1998. 'Tanaka Migaku, Nara Kokuritsu Bunkazai Kenkyūjo-chō – Iseki o gendai shakai ni saisei no kokoromi' (Tanaka Migaku, Director of Nara National Institute of Cultural Properties: Attempts to Bring the Ruins Back to Life in Modern Society). *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 23 April, Osaka evening ed., p. 9.

5 Yomiuri Shinbun 2010. 'Kentōshisen – Shu azayaka – Fukugen hobo kansei' (Envoy Ship to Tang, Bright Vermilion, Reconstruction Almost Completed). *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 11 March, Osaka evening ed., p. 10.

6 Asahi Shinbun 2000. 'Nagasaki-shi kankōbuchō, Taguchi Shūzō-san: Tō-Ajia chūmoku' (Taguchi Shūzō, Nagasaki City Tourism Manager: We Have an Eye on East Asia), *Asahi Shimbun*, 19 August, morning ed., p. 22.

7 Nihon Keizai Shinbun 2009. 'Nara no kankō-gyōkai, miryoku-zukuri honsō, sento 1300-nensai semaru: Shukuhaku-kyakuzō e shoku o migaku' (Nara Tourism Industry in Strenuous Efforts to Create Attraction as 1,300th Capital Relocation Anniversary Approaches: Improve Food to Increase Number of Overnight Guests), *Nihon Keizai Shinbun*, 14 September, morning ed., p. 27.

8 Nagasaki Dejima 2022. 'Dejima Restoration Project'. https://nagasakidejima.jp/english/restoration-work/. Accessed 25 May 2022.

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