Japan's Monument Problem: Ise Shrine as Metaphor

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In Japan there is a shrine that is rebuilt every twenty years. A new shrine, identical to the old one, is built on a site next to it. The sacred objects are transferred from old to new and the old shrine is razed to the ground. The main building of the shrine thus moves back and forth between two adjacent sites. The practice dates back to the late seventh century.

The shrine in question is the Grand Shrine of Ise (*Ise Dai Jingū*), a name that is in fact a loose designation for two large Shinto shrine complexes, the Inner Shrine, dedicated to Amaterasu Ōmikami, the sun goddess and mythical ancestor of the Japanese imperial line, and the Outer Shrine, dedicated to Toyouke no Ōmikami, a deity of agriculture and industry. The two are located several kilometres apart, and there are 123 minor subshrines in the vicinity. Not only the main buildings but all of the structures at these 125 shrines undergo the same periodic reconstruction. Ritual objects and priestly vestments are also made anew every twenty years.

The periodic renewal at Ise Shrine is probably the single best known fact about any architectural monument in Japan. It is even something of a 'meme': type the words 'rebuilt every' into Google and the search engine will finish your phrase with 'twenty years' and provide a list of sites making reference to Ise (Figure 1). A large scholarly literature treats the history of the shrine and offers a variety of theories on why the practice of renewal began, since this question is unanswered in the shrine's earliest documents.[1] An even larger literature, scholarly and semi-scholarly, interprets the distinctive practice of periodic renewal in cultural terms. This essay contributes to neither of these

[1] For historical and architectural studies of Ise Shrine, see Yasutada Watanabe, *Shinto Art: Ise and Izumo Shrines,* translated by Robert Ricketts (New York, 1974); William Coaldrake, *Architecture and Authority in Japan* (London, 1996), 16-51; Fukuyama Toshio, 'Jingū no kenchiku to sono rekishi' in *Jingū: dai rokujukkai* (1975); Inagaki Eizō, 'Kodai, chūsei ni okeru jingū no shikinen sengū', in *Jingū: dai rokujukkai* (1975), 173-94. For a study of the changing interpretations of Ise Shrine's architectural form, see Inoue Shōichi, *Ise Jingū: Miwaku no Nihon kenchiku* (Tokyo, 2009).

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Figure 1. Ise Shrine in Google Maps, September 2013. In preparation for renewal ceremonies in October, 2013, new shrine buildings stand on the left while the old shrine buildings stand on the right. The buildings on the right were dismantled in early 2014. Image [©] DigitalGlobe; map data [©] Google, Zenrin.

literatures. Instead, I will present a history of how the renewal has been interpreted. Since the end of the nineteenth century, Ise Shrine has provided an unusually versatile metaphor in discourses of Japanese culture, of Asian culture, and of heritage and architectural monumentality. The shrine raises in particularly pure form a classic question in the preservation and restoration of monuments: how does replacement of material elements affect our perception of the antiquity of a monument? Repeatedly, in multiple variations, talk of Ise has been accompanied by interpretive problems concerning newness and age, modernity and antiquity.[2]

Although native Shinto tradition has defined Ise Shrine's religious meaning, the metaphoric meanings of the shrine's renewal that I will be discussing are a product of international dialogue. I will briefly review perceptions of the shrine before the establishment of the modern state and Japan's emergence on the international stage in the mid-nineteenth century. It happens, however, that the evolution of Ise Shrine as a metaphor fits tidily into the century from the 1890s, when Japan joined the club of imperial powers with its victory in the Sino-Japanese War and the termination of unequal treaties, to the 1990s, when Japan signed the Convention for Protection of World Heritage. The 1890s happens also to be when Japan established its first national architectural preservation law, the Law for the Preservation of Ancient Shrines and

[2] The question is an ancient one. Randolph Starn recounts the story from Plutarch of a debate in ancient Athens over whether to regard Theseus' ship as the original ship or not, since it had been preserved for generations by replacing the planks as they decayed. Randolph Starn, 'Authenticity and Historic Preservation: Towards an Authentic History', *History of the Human Sciences*, 15:1 (2002), 2.

Temples. And in the 1990s, at the same time that Japan signed the World Heritage Convention, the case of Japan played a key role in a global rethinking of the definition and boundaries of 'cultural heritage'.

The historical record indicates that Ise's periodic renewal was begun on a twenty-year cycle by Emperor Tenmu in 690. Scholars' explanations for the practice have clustered around three areas of emphasis: (1) Shinto rituals of purification and the associated belief that the god should be periodically welcomed in a new structure—as has been practised in the Shinto rituals performed at the time of imperial enthronements (*daijōsai*); (2) the dependence on ephemeral materials in Shinto architecture—thatch, untreated wood, and posts sunk directly in the ground rather than set on foundation stones; and (3) the value of periodic renewal on a cycle of slightly less than one generation for perpetuating the craft knowledge necessary to keep the buildings in their original form in perpetuity. These explanations are of course not mutually exclusive; it seems likely that some combination of all of them lay behind the decision of Emperor Tenmu and the early custodians of the shrine to initiate the cycle of renewal.

Already at the time that the periodic renewal cycle began, Ise's architectural style was an anachronism (or an invented archaism). Continental building techniques and ornament had been used in Japanese palaces and Buddhist temples since the sixth century. These buildings were also post-and-lintel wooden structures, but stood on foundation stones and used complex bracketwork to support heavy tile roofs. These features made them both more sophisticated and more permanent than the buildings at Ise. Since the earliest recorded period in the shrine's history, therefore, Ise represented an intentionally backward-looking style of architecture, like the Gothic Revival in nineteenth-century England. More importantly, just as the Gothic Revival was championed as an indigenous response to sophisticated but alien architectural styles, the primitive architecture of Ise asserted indigeneity. Its significance was defined partly in the context of a dialectic between the native and the foreign. This pattern would reemerge twelve hundred years later vis-a-vis architectural styles and thinking introduced from Europe.

The origins of the tradition of renewal are one question, but why it persisted in subsequent centuries is a distinct and equally important question. The critical factor here was surely patronage. Although the structures are simple, rebuilding the entire shrine complex and replacing all of the implements of worship every twenty years cost extravagant sums.[3] The same

[3] For costs and funding of the renewal in the modern era, see Rosemarie Bernard, 'Ise Jingū and Modern Emperorship', in *The Emperors of Modern Japan*, ed. Ben-Ami Shilloney (Brill, 2008), 87-8.

practice of periodic renewal was seen at several other major shrines in Japan before the Meiji Restoration, when the new imperial government limited it to Ise, primarily for financial reasons. All of these shrines enjoyed imperial patronage. Under the manorial system that developed in the ninth century, Ise was granted provincial lands whose taxes were sufficient to sustain the rebuilding. Not surprisingly, when the country was engulfed in civil war after the breakdown of that system, shrine coffers emptied, and the buildings were left to the ravages of time and the elements. There was no renewal between the late fifteenth and late sixteenth centuries. Little was left standing when the shrines were revived in 1583 with the aid of military hegemon Oda Nobunaga.[4] The continuity of patronage and craft having been broken for so long, builders in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century renewals were compelled to reconstruct the shrines on the basis of past documents. The shrine has thus not seen perfect continuity throughout its thirteen-hundred-year history. Scholars have also noted several significant changes in site plans and in the ornament of the buildings over the course of time.[5] Nor were the builders always from the same lineage or guild.[6] Nevertheless, as long as either the imperial court or a military ruler with the imprimatur of the emperor was able to guarantee the shrine's sources of income, the buildings were renewed, each time affirming the continued power of the imperial system of patronage and ritual. This system was greatly enhanced with the Meiji Restoration of 1868, which transformed the emperor into a modern sovereign and made Ise into the high church of a state cult.

'Nothing to see and they won't let you see it'

Writings about Ise for Japanese and for foreign audiences naturally differ due to their different contexts and audiences. The *Jingū gishikikai*, the most detailed native text on the shrine written before the modern era, described periodic renewal and related what the ancient religious texts recorded about how it was to be performed, but included no interpretation of its meaning. Meanwhile, the few Western texts mentioning Ise before the 1870s, when foreigners began to enjoy free rights of travel in Japan, relied on hearsay, and presented garbled explanations that suggest a puzzle over whether to regard the shrine as new or old, probably derived in part from misunderstanding of explanations from Japanese interlocutors. The German doctor Engelbert Kaempfer, physician at the Dutch factory in Nagasaki between 1690 and 1692 and author of the best foreign account of the country published

[4] Fukuyama, 'Jingū no kenchiku to sono rekishi', 126-7.

[5] Coaldrake, *Architecture and Authority*, 16-51.

[6] Inagaki, 'Kodai, chūsei ni okeru jingū no shikinen sengū,' 186-7.

during the Tokugawa era, wrote that 'all those who have visited it say that the temple is situated in flat country, is poorly built of wood and not very high, and is covered with a low roof of hay. It is maintained with great care in the image of the original poor temple of early times, built in their poverty by the first inhabitants and founders of this nation.'[7] Kaempfer, who makes clear that he did not visit the shrine himself, grasped that the shrine buildings were carefully maintained, but apparently not that this was done through periodic reconstruction. Carl Thunberg, who visited Japan in 1775-6, seems also to have heard of the shrine's antiquity and humble architecture, but misunderstood the nature of the renewal, understanding the care devoted to the buildings as a sign of their dilapidation: 'This temple is most ancient in the whole empire and at the same time in the worst condition, being now so exceedingly decayed with age that it can scarcely be kept together with the greatest care and attention.'[8] Phillip Franz von Siebold, resident physician in the Dutch factory from 1823 to 1829, also never visited the shrine and seems to have heard similar stories or cobbled together his own understanding on the basis of his predecessors' writing, but closed with a note of scepticism: 'The Isye temple is a peculiarly plain, humble, and unpretending structure, and really of great antiquity, though not quite equal to that which is ascribed to it.'[9] It is impossible to know what Siebold understood of the periodic renewal, but this scepticism about the shrine's antiquity hints at the dilemma of whether to consider buildings reconstructed every twenty years as old or new.

Beginning in the 1870s, foreigners were able to visit Ise themselves. By the 1880s, visits had been described in several English-language travelogues; by the turn of the twentieth century, full instructions for visiting, including rail travel times, could be obtained from an English-language guidebook. Yet as Ise Shrine became part of the Western tourist itinerary, the dominant adjective that characterized the shrine in one description after another was 'disappointing'. Lacking either elaborate ornament or monumental scale, its innermost precincts off-limits to all but priests and royalty, Ise Shrine struck Victorian tourists as arid and unrewarding. As Basil Hall Chamberlain warned readers in a 1902 guidebook, the 'disappointed tourist' might conclude "there is nothing to see, and they won't let you see it".[10]

[7] Englebert Kaempfer, *Kaempfer's Japan: Tokugawa Culture Observed*, ed. and trans. Beatrice Bodart-Bailey (Honolulu, 1999), 117.

[8] Carl Peter Thunberg, *Japan Extolled and Decried: Carl Peter Thunberg and the Shogun's Realm, 1775-1796*, annoted and introduced by Timon Screech (Routledge, 2005), 206.

[9] Phillip Franz von Siebold, *Manners and Customs of the Japanese* (London, 1852), 343.

[10] Basil Hall Chamberlain, *A Handbook for Travellers in Japan*, 6th edn (London, 1901), 302.

By the time that Chamberlain wrote these words, the sentiment was already almost cliché. British diplomat Ernest Satow, the first European to write a first-hand account of the shrine, described it in an 1874 publication as 'disappointing in its simplicity and perishable nature'. For Satow, the shrine's periodic renewal served as part of the explanation for this let-down: 'The perishable nature of Japanese architecture of course renders it impossible that the original buildings should have lasted down to the present day, and in fact it seems to have been the rule from time immemorial to rebuild the temple once every twenty years, alternately on each of two sites which lie close to each other.'[11] American adventurer Isabella Bird, who visited in 1878, pressed the point further, describing her encounter with the shrine in detail, but in a sarcastic tone, as if in revealing the shrine's failure as a tourist site she were demonstrating that the emperor had no clothes: 'there is nothing, and all things . . . lead to NOTHING . . . . here too there is nothing but disappointment . . .'. Like Satow, she concluded her discussion with the note—almost an afterthought—that the sanctuary was rebuilt every twenty years.[12]

Phase I: Japan's ephemeral abode

The disparagement of Victorian tourists toward Japan's holiest of holies was in itself probably of little consequence domestically, yet it was symptomatic of a broader dilemma that vexed Japanese architects in the first generation after Western architectural education was introduced to the country. Expressed in crude terms—and these were the terms of several Western writers—Japan possessed no architecture. The country lacked a tradition of masonry construction, therefore lacked permanent monuments—and without monuments, one architect judged, the Japanese had 'no architecture as we understand it . . . no lasting style, have never been able to realize any grand conceptions that would last for ages.'[13] Japanese, architecture historian James Fergusson declared in 1876, 'do not belong to one of the building races of mankind'.[14] Josiah Conder, the Englishman who instructed the first

[11] Ernest Satow, 'The Shinto Temples of Isé', *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, series 1, no.2 (1874), 121, 126.

[12] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (1881; London, 1971), 275-7. Inoue Shōichi cites other disappointed Westerners' accounts of Ise. One noteworthy exception in this era was the Scottish designer Christopher Dresser, who visited Japan in 1877-8, and referred to the periodic renewal and the shrine's long history of pilgrimage as 'singularly impressive'.

[13] R. Phené Spiers, in 'Discussion of Mr. Conder's Paper: Notes on Japanese Architecture', *Sessional Papers Read at the Royal Institute of British Architects, 1876-77* (1877), 210.

[14] James Fergusson, quoted in Don Choi, 'Domesticated Modern: Hybrid Houses in Meiji Japan, 1870-1900' (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2003), 3.

generation at the Meiji state's new architecture academy, shared the view that Japan's entire architectural tradition was peculiarly 'fragile', as evidenced by the frequent conflagrations in the capital as well as the lack of stone monuments. Conder himself was an enthusiast for Japanese traditions, but regarded Buddhist architecture derived from the continent as more significant historically.[15] As Gregory Clancey has observed, it was partly the misfortune of late nineteenth-century Japanese to have adopted a British-dominated architecture curriculum, since North America, for example, still had many wood-built cities.[16] Several of Conder's students wrote graduation theses on the problem of creating a more permanent architecture for Japan.[17] Even Itō Chūta, the doyen of Japanese architectural history and modern Japan's first restoration architect, looked forward to the time that Shinto shrines too would be built of brick and stone.[18] By 1899, the government had embarked on construction of a steel-frame and brick neo-baroque palace modelled on Versailles. Since the very nature of the profession of architect in the new system was to design durable structures for the state, it is not surprising that before the twentieth century Japanese architects had little to say about Ise.

The first interpretations of Ise Shrine to address the cultural meaning of periodic renewal came not from native architects explaining Japanese building traditions but from cultural interpreters explaining the new imperial Japan to Western audiences. Lafcadio Hearn and Okakura Kakuzō, two of the most popular Japan apologists writing in English at the turn of the twentieth century, both turned to Ise in their explanations of Japanese culture. Both authors made reference to Ise in writings published when Japan was in the flush of war victory, and both reread the lack of permanent architecture

[15] Josiah Conder, 'Notes on Japanese Architecture', *Transactions of the Royal Institute of British Architects* series 1, vol. 2 (1877-78), 179-80, 186.

[16] Gregory Clancey, *Earthquake Nation: The Cultural Politics of Japanese Seismicity* (Berkeley, 2006), 16-17.

[17] Clancey, 16, 58-9; Choi, 'Domesticated Modern', 53-5. These architects did not condemn Japanese wood construction. They saw brick and masonry as essential to the nation's modernization, however.

[18] Maruyama Shigeru, *Nihon no kenchiku to shisō: Itō Chūta shōron* (Tokyo, 1996), 121. Itō switched to advocating traditional wood construction when he was commissioned to design the Meiji Shrine in 1914. At the time of the 1909 renewal, the Home Minister and Imperial Household Minister expressed concern that there would soon be a shortage of large timbers for the Ise renewal and proposed rebuilding the shrine on a concrete foundation so that the structures would last for two hundred years instead of twenty. The Meiji emperor rejected this proposal. Kunaichō, *Meiji tennōki dai 10 kan* (Tokyo, 1974), 802.

that had presented a dilemma for architects to make impermanence instead the country's great virtue. Hearn's essay 'The Genius of Japanese Civilization', published in the *Atlantic* in October 1895, opened with the question of how to explain Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese War, and found the answer in national character, which he called the 'race ghost'. Despite the country's sudden and surprising accession to military dominance, Hearn assured readers, little had changed in Japan at its core. Japanese were innately frugal, and accepted the ephemerality of life. Hearn presented Ise Shrine's periodic renewal as exemplary of this, and found that ultimately, not only was this the strength of the Japanese people, but it revealed 'weaknesses in our own civilization'.[19] In effect, Japan and its humble, regularly rebuilt shrine offered a new model of civilization, a virtuous antithesis to the West. A decade and another imperial war later, Okakura Kakuzō similarly pointed to Ise as an example of a peculiarly Japanese—or, in Okakura's pan-Asianist rhetoric, 'Eastern'—sensibility toward life. Okakura's classic, *The Book of Tea*, written in English based on lectures the author had given to audiences in Boston, and published in New York in 1906, also sought to explain a militarily ascendant Japan in terms of race and culture. Okakura related Ise's periodic renewal to the ephemerality of the Japanese tea hut (which he called the 'abode of fancy'), finding them both rooted in a Shinto practice of abandoning a house upon the death of its master and the accompanying belief that 'everyone should have a house of his own.'[20] A canny reader of his audience, Okakura thus turned an exotic-seeming and 'disappointing' architectural practice into evidence for a claim that Japanese placed a high value on home-ownership: an ethic that would have had reassuring familiarity for New Englanders.

In the rhetoric of 'national character' that these apologists deployed to defend Japanese imperialism, Ise Shrine could serve as the ephemeral 'abode' for Japan as a whole, and a lesson to the West about 'who' the Japanese really were. This was a new way of reading the shrine. The logic was metonymic. Although the metonym remained implicit, in the context of an explanation of the rising imperial power, Hearn's cultural interpretation in effect proposed that 'Japan does not engage in imperialism in the manner of the West, simply to acquire territory, she is not grasping and acquisitive'. And Okakura implied, on the other hand, 'everyone must possess his own home; Japan's home is Asia'.[21]

[19] Lafcadio Hearn, 'The Genius of Japanese Civilization', *Atlantic* (October, 1895).

[20] Okakura Kakuzō, *The Book of Tea* (1906; Rockville, Maryland, 2009), 46.

[21] Ise Shrine today is renowned for its unspoiled natural setting and austere beauty, but in the years that Hearn and Okakura were writing, the site also presented visitors with tangible evidence of Japan's imperial wars. The 1914 edition of *Terry's Guide to the*

In the same years that Hearn and Okakura were turning Ise Shrine into a metaphor for the national character, architecture history was emerging in Japan as an independent field and the state was establishing an institutional framework for conservation of historic structures. Itō Chūta, who would become the country's first professor of architecture history in 1903, began tracing the historical lineage of Japanese architectural styles in the early 1890s.[22] Itō's two-part study, 'The Development of Shinto Architecture,' published in 1901, was the first systematic treatment of the subject. In this study as in the travelogues of Victorian visitors, Ise Shrine's periodic reconstruction is described with a subtle note of disappointment. Itō regretted that since Shinto shrines in general were frequently rebuilt, it was difficult to classify them by period. He pointed out that the present structures at Ise were an imperfect gauge of the style of their ancient predecessors, noting frankly: 'indeed, if we compare what is written in the Enreki ritual records with what stands today, we can easily find the difference.' In later writing, Itō would come to champion the renewal as a unique feature of Japan's imperial tradition, but the more pressing issue for him at the turn of the century was how to establish that Japan possessed a history of indigenous stylistic development that would put it in the company of the progressive nations, escaping the status of a stagnant 'Asiatic' nation, a short branch low on the evolutionary tree of world architecture.[23] Cyclical reconstruction served poorly in a progressive evolutionary model.

Other early twentieth-century Japanese intellectuals writing in the domestic context did find Ise Shrine a useful metaphor for the nation. In modern Japanese imperial ideology, Ise readily served as a national symbol, since it was the shrine of the imperial house and the nation was regarded as inseparable from the unbroken imperial line. As the ideology of the *kokutai* (often translated to English as 'national polity' but signifying the eternal unity of emperor and people) became a more prominent part of intellectual life in the first decades of the twentieth century, interpretations of Ise frequently

Japanese Empire describes a Krupp gun captured at Port Arthur and other 'grim relics of Japan's titanic struggles with the Muscovites and Chinese' displayed at the entrance to the Inner Shrine.

[22] On Itō Chūta and architectural preservation, see Cherie Wendelken, 'The Tectonics of Japanese Style: Architect and Carpenter in the Late Meiji Period', *Art Journal*, 55:3 (Autumn, 1996), 30-4; Coaldrake, *Architecture and Authority in Japan*, 245-9; Stefan Tanaka, *New Times in Modern Japan* (Princeton, NJ, 2004), 173-5.

[23] On Itō's reconfiguring of Bannister Fletcher's evolutionary scheme of world architecture, see Muramatsu Shin, 'Jūgun kenchikushika no yume', *Gendai shisō*, 21:7 (July, 1993), 181-95.

presented the shrine as the ideal embodiment of the emperor-centred nation. These interpretations did not usually extrapolate a message about the nation from the phenomenon of periodic renewal in the manner of Hearn and Okakura, however. In a 1915 tract on Ise Shrine and the *kokutai*, for example, Shinto theologian and moral philosopher Hiroike Chikurō found the essence of the shrine and of the Japanese empire in Japan's 'spiritualism', which stood in contrast to Western materialism. Yet he did not connect this explicitly to the practice of renewal, which he described instead with the same historian's caution as Itō, acknowledging that 'the process and attending rituals have evolved somewhat since ancient times', but concluding that 'generally speaking it has remained fairly similar'.[24] Hiroike stressed the spiritual importance of the shrine, but treated periodic renewal as a minor impediment to historical knowledge rather than a value in itself.

Kokutai ideology subsequently became a more prominent feature in architecture historical discussion of the shrine and of renewal. The name for Ise's architectural style in Itō's schema came in the 1920s to be prefixed by the word 'unique', indicating that no other shrines belonged to the same classification as the august imperial shrine.[25] Itō's colleague Sekino Tadashi, writing in the late 1920s, would describe Ise as exhibiting in living form 'humanity's first construction'. Its periodic renewal reflected 'the preservation of a primitive form of building belonging to our ancestors . . . a miraculous thing not found elsewhere in the world, a gift of our august *kokutai* (national polity)'.[26] This view required emphasizing that the shrine had been unchanged over the centuries, despite the historical evidence to the contrary. As a loyal imperial subject, Sekino understood the shrine as a manifestation of the unbroken imperial line, while at the same time, as an architecture historian, he saw the significance of the reconstruction in what it revealed about ancient architecture.

Phase 2: A duck-rabbit problem (1929-1945)

The periodic renewal of 1929 came at a time when the various earlier strains of discourse surrounding the shrine were fully developed and the dialogue

24 Hiroike Chikurō, 'Ise jingū to waga kokutai', in *Hiroike hakase zenshū dai 4 satsu*, by Hiroike Chikurō (Kashiwa-shi, 1937), 42, 277. Hiroike's description of Ise's stability over time is in fact more mealy-mouthed than my translation here implies.

25 On Itō's nationalist reading of the reconstruction, see Jonathan Reynolds, 'Ise Shrine and the Modernist Construction of Japanese Tradition', *Art Bulletin*, 83:2 (June, 2001), 322-3. On the circumstances in which the architectural style of Ise Shrine came to be designated as 'unique Shinmei style' see Tsunoda Mayumi, 'Shinmeizukuri to iu shinwa' in *Fukugen shisō no shakaishi*, ed. Suzuki Hiroyuki (Tokyo, 2006), 60-71.

26 Sekino Tadashi, quoted in Inoue, *Ise jingū: miwaku no Nihon kenchiku*, 133.

between Japanese and non-Japanese interpretations of the shrine was becoming more intimate. This is glimpsed in the treatment of the renewal ritual by the *Japan Times*, the country's leading English-language newspaper, which reported the events prominently on its front page. An editorial offered a fuller elaboration of the ethos of impermanence that Hearn and Okakura had proposed earlier.

Previous renewals had also received notice in the English-language press, but without commentary on the cultural meaning of the renewal. At the time of the renewal in 1889, the weekly *Japan Mail*, a precursor of the *Japan Times*, had reported that the emperor would be going to the shrine to make offerings, whose extravagant cost, the newspaper noted, gave 'some idea of the solemnity of the occasion'.[27] The *Mail* did not mention that the shrine had been rebuilt. At the time of the 1909 renewal, the *Japan Times* reported on the ceremonies at Ise in a detailed series of articles, but paid little attention to the rebuilding itself. In fact, it would have been difficult for a reader not already familiar with the practice to know from these articles that the shrine was rebuilt entirely every twenty years. Nowhere was it indicated that the new structures were identical to the structures being razed.[28]

As Hearn and Okakura had drawn upon the Ise metaphor in the aftermath of war, the *Japan Times* editorial printed at the time of the 1929 renewal ceremonies, titled 'Permanence in Impermanence', also interpreted the renewal in relation to a recent violent event. In this instance, the event was the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, which had cost 100,000 lives. Reconstruction was still under way in Tokyo at the time. The editorial explained that Japanese people recognized the 'permanence of the life spirit' and therefore had no need for permanent structures, either for the enthronement of their sovereign or for their most sacred shrine. 'This spiritual insight of the Japanese', it concluded, was 'the secret of their resiliency . . . . To a people who appreciate that the material is but an expression of the essence, the entire destruction of Yokohama and Tokyo at the time of the Great Disaster was but a tempest withering the flowers which, with the rain and spring, would again bloom. If the building of the Ise Daijingu only lasts twenty years, what matters it if a city or two are destroyed?'[29]

This use of the Ise renewal to express a national spirit of resilience and a casual concern for the physical world (not to mention for the massive loss of

[27] 'The Approaching Ceremony in Ise', *Japan Mail* (28 September 1889), 281.

[28] 'Removal of the Ise Daijingu', *Japan Times* (1 October 1909), 3; 'Ancient Festivals at the Ise Shrines', *Japan Times* (3 October 1909), 2; 'Festivals at the Ise Shrines', *Japan Times* (5 October 1909), 2; and (6 October 1909), 2.

[29] 'Permanence in Impermanence', *Japan Times* (3 October 1929), 4.

life in the 1923 earthquake) fleshed out the 'impermanence' idea expressed in earlier English-language interpretations. This time, the idea spoke to a Japanese audience too. An article by Shinto scholar Kobayashi Kenzō published in the historical journal *Shien* a few months later quoted the *Japan Times* editorial at length, and commented approvingly. Yet even as the English and Japanese interpretations seemed to coincide completely in this article, ultimately they subtly diverged. For whereas the *Japan Times* editorial took Ise as evidence of a general national culture of impermanence, Kobayashi found greater significance in the editorial's emphasis on the uniqueness of the imperial shrine itself. Following quotation of the *Japan Times*, he turned to an anecdote about Chinese and Koreans failing to understand why the Japanese emperor had no grand monumental display of his authority. What they could not see, Kobayashi asserted, was that the emperor had no need for such things. The periodic renewal of Ise Shrine transmitted the throne's ancient character and expressed in ideal form the Japanese spirit of ancestor worship. Thus for Kobayashi, periodic renewal affirmed a spiritual link between the Japanese nation and sovereign that other Asians could not appreciate, and this sacred national tradition was affirmed by outsiders (meaning Westerners), as represented in the *Japan Times* editorial.[30]

With the arrival in Japan of Bauhaus architect Bruno Taut in 1933, the East-West dialogue over reading Ise Shrine would return to the field of architecture and become yet more intimate. Since international-style architecture was making inroads in the Japanese academy at the time, Taut was welcomed and his opinions were valued. In several lectures between 1933 and 1935 and in publications in Japanese and English, Taut praised Ise along with the Katsura Palace in Kyoto as Japan's greatest architectural achievements. His admiration was not unprecedented—and it is clear that he was influenced in part by the opinions of his hosts—but the endorsement from an eloquent representative of the high church of modernism was influential. Through Taut's remarks and subsequently through his publications, Ise Shrine came to be widely regarded among architects both Japanese and foreign as a masterpiece. The shrine buildings' simplicity of structure and form were reread through the tenets of modernism as examples of functionalist beauty. In 1935, Itō Chūta quoted Taut's opinion of Ise and noted the 'fine irony' that Victorian visitors had reviled the shrine and Japanese had agreed; now Taut praised it and Japanese agreed again. Later the same year, Taut quoted

[30] There is no certainty that the anonymous *Japan Times* editorial was written by a Westerner. Oddly, at one point in the editorial reference is made to 'our ancestors', despite references to the Japanese elsewhere in the same editorial as 'they'.

Itō, admiring his 'Oriental irony'. In 1941, Itō would retell the story in the context of a lecture and urge his audience to buy Taut's book.[31]

Taut praised the renewal as well as the buildings themselves, but he did so with a different intent from previous interpreters. In *Houses and People of Japan*, published in English by a Japanese press in 1937, he began by dismissing what most Japanese authors on Ise had stressed, remarking 'actually, the theological side of the matter seems to be entirely unimportant'. He concluded the same paragraph describing the renewal: 'Not only are the religious rites and the everlasting stream of worshippers a living presence, the shrines have yet another vital quality, which is entirely original in its action, intention and perception. It is the fact that the shrines are always new.' Appropriate to the perspective of a modernist, Taut's reading swept aside tradition and placed freshness and originality at the heart of the renewal. This view of Ise as ever new stood in precise opposition to the view of architecture historians like Sekino and Itō, for whom the renewal's importance lay in the fact that it transmitted ancient forms, meaning in essence that the shrine was ever *old*.

Naturally, 'ever new' and 'ever old' can be seen as two sides of the same coin. Yet in these years, when the antiquity of the *kokutai* formed the core of national ideology, it was difficult to comprehend the two perspectives at once. Rather than two sides of a coin, Ise Shrine in the 1930s and 1940s presented something like the 'duck-rabbit' problem discussed by Wittgenstein: a picture that could be read as representing either of two things but not both at once.[32]

Japanese translations of Taut's writing did not include the remark that theology was irrelevant. Nor did they state that the shrine was 'always new', at least not in quite the same terms. Instead, reflecting an emerging view of Ise as the 'people's shrine', they described the shrine buildings' freshness as a reflection of the Japanese nation's efforts to maintain it.[33] In his 1941 lecture, Itō reported that Taut had told him the value of the building lay in the beauty

[31] Itō Chūta, *Kenchiku yori mitaru Nihon no kokuminsei* (Tokyo, 1941), 25-7. On the exchange between Itō and Taut, see Jaccqueline Eve Kestenbaum, 'Modernism and Tradition in Japanese Architectural Ideology, 1931-1955' (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1996), 91-2; Inoue Shōichi, *Ise Jingū*, 150-3.

[32] Travis J. Denneson, 'Wittgenstein on Seeing', *The Secular Web* http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/travis_denneson/seeing.html

[33] Bruno Taut, *Nippon*, trans. Hirai Hitoshi (Tokyo, 1934) , 19-20; Bruno Taut, *Nihonbi no saihakken*, trans. Shinoda Hideo (Tokyo, 1939), 19-21. Taut appears not to have published writing on Japanese architecture in his native German, and I have not seen his manuscripts, so I cannot say what he himself said precisely either in writing or in the lectures he gave.

of the materials and purity of form. He made no mention of Taut's remarks on the renewal. Itō's lecture was titled 'Japanese National Character as Seen in Architecture', but rather than speaking of the Japanese love of impermanence or the freshness of the rebuilt shrine buildings, Itō presented the renewal as evidence of the unique longevity of the Japanese imperial line, in contrast with China, where dynasties had changed several times.[34] Hence even as he wrote in approving terms of Taut's interpretation of Ise, it appears that Itō continued to see a duck where Taut saw a rabbit.

Phase 3: The people's shrine (1940s-1980s)

The new democratic nationalism after World War II made it possible for the first time to bundle duck and rabbit together in a single portmanteau. Post-war architects repudiated the wartime ideology of the emperor-state.[35] Once one severed Ise Shrine from *kokutai* ideology it became possible to imagine the site's antiquity and modernity in symbiosis. With the official history based on imperial myths and chronicles delegitimized in mainstream discourse, historians and archeologists strove to construct a new history that would rejuvenate the injured nation by showing the continuity of a people's culture from the prehistoric past to the present.[36] Ise after the war thus became part of a nationalism that rooted itself not in the arcana of imperial lineage but in the conception of a national identity that needed no lineage, because it had always been and would always be.

The first post-war renewal came in 1953. Delayed because of war and occupation, the renewal took place in a national and international climate quite different from 1929. Imperial tradition and the *kokutai* were now tainted by association with militarism. Yet a wide segment of the Japanese public desired cultural symbols reaffirming the nation in the wake of defeat. For the first time in its history, the renewal was paid for entirely by public contributions rather than taxes or government and imperial household funds.[37] Mass media

[34] Itō, *Kenchiku yori mitaru Nihon no kokuminsei*, 28.

[35] Reynolds, 'Ise Shrine', 324. The central figures in pre-1945 architecture history themselves came in for criticism.

[36] For discussion of an excavation that played a key role in this post-war reimagining of Japan's prehistoric past, see Walter Edwards, 'Buried Discourse: the Toro Archeological Site and Japanese National Identity in the Early Postwar Period', *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 17:1 (Winter, 1991), 1-23.

[37] At the same time that the 1953 renewal mobilized the support of a post-imperial national public, the timbers for this reconstruction may have been partly from Japan's former colonies. At least this is what is implied by a remark from MoMA curator Arthur Drexler, who visited Japan in 1953 in preparation for an exhibit of Japanese architecture in New York. Drexler, *The Architecture of Japan* (New York, 1955), 35. Since timbers are

showed less enthusiasm than in the past, however. The leading English-language newspaper provided only brief notice of the renewal ceremonies, referring to the object of the rites as 'mythical'.[38] On the first day of the renewal, the Japanese newspaper *Yomiuri shinbun* ran an op-ed piece by a former Home Minister about the importance of separation of church and state, along with an article about the rites stressing the fact that this was the first time they had been citizen-sponsored.[39] An earlier editorial had registered concern, however, that contributions to the public campaign were being raised by means that bordered on coercion.[40]

The populist revision to interpretations of the renewal emerged in the years following, again in the context of an international dialogue. Taut's view of Ise and Katsura as triumphant demonstrations of the modernist principles in Japanese tradition became architectural orthodoxy worldwide after the Japanese house exhibition held in 1955 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. MoMA curator Arthur Drexler's *The Architecture of Japan*, published to accompany the exhibition, devoted more space to these two buildings than to any others. Of the renewal, Drexler emphasized both modernity and the continuity of tradition, referring to Ise's 'perpetual youth', and noting that 'each time the buildings are consecrated anew', the new shrine was 'identical in every respect to the old one, except for its polished, golden freshness'.[41] By this time, appreciations like this one were familiar to architects outside as well as inside Japan. But since the English version of Taut's book had been published by a Japanese press at a time when views of Japan in the Anglophone world were generally not sympathetic, Drexler's work, accompanying as it did the international architectural debut of a rehabilitated Japan, introduced Ise Shrine and its unique tradition to a large new audience that knew nothing of Taut.

Although the fundamental ideological tension around Ise's antiquity and modernity disappeared after the war, interpretations of the shrine for native

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cut at least seven years prior to the renewal, and the 1953 renewal was originally to have taken place in 1949, this seems quite possible. Securing large timbers domestically was already a matter of concern at the turn of the twentieth century, as noted above.

[38] 'Ceremonies Held at Ise Inner Shrine', *Nippon Times*, (3 October 1953), 3. The *Nippon Times* was formerly called the *Japan Times*. The name reverted to *Japan Times* in 1957.

[39] 'Koyoi hare no ongi: Ise jingū hatsu no min'ei sengū', *Yomiuri shinbun* (2 October 1953), 7; Kanamori Tokujirō, 'Shikinen sengū ni yoseru: kokka to shūkyō no bunri ni tsuite', *Yomiuri shinbun* (2 October 1953), 2.

[40] 'Shasetsu: Gyaku kōsu e no hansei', *Yomiuri shinbun* (15 November 1951), 1.

[41] Arthur Drexler, *The Architecture of Japan*, 35. An advocate of Bauhaus modernism, Drexler also published a book on Mies van der Rohe.

and for foreign audiences continued to differ in emphasis, as evidenced by the Japanese and English versions of the landmark volume of photographs *Ise: Prototype of Japanese Architecture* (Japanese, 1962; English, 1965).[42] Architecture critic and theorist Kawazoe Noboru contributed essays to each. Kawazoe was spokesman for the Metabolist movement, which advocated the development of a new architectural language for the continuous organic growth of cities.[43] In both editions, Kawazoe surveyed the historical origins of the shrine and discussed the meaning of the shrine's architectural form and the renewal. However, the English and Japanese essays under Kawazoe's name were different texts. Kawazoe's Japanese text, reflecting the post-war climate of cultural roots-searching, revolved around the claim that Ise's design represented a people's architecture, while his English text stressed the idea of a Japanese ethos of impermanence. In his Japanese introduction, Kawazoe noted how highly regarded the shrine was outside Japan, but insisted on its special spiritual importance to Japanese people: 'Particularly for us, Ise Shrine is a treasury that arouses images of the ancestral home of the Japanese people.'[44] Since as early as the 1909 reconstruction, when a public subscription was raised to build a new road between the Inner and Outer Shrines, some writers had spoken of Ise as the people's shrine, noting the increasing involvement of ordinary citizens as sponsors and spectators of the renewal, but prior to 1945 these authors invariably wrote of the shrine as a gift bestowed on the people by the emperor.[45] Kawazoe claimed not simply that the Japanese people shared in the cost of rebuilding the

[42] Kenzo Tange and Noboru Kawazoe, *Ise: Prototype of Japanese Architecture* (Cambridge, MA, 1965). *Ise* reproduced photographs of the shrine buildings taken by Watanabe Yoshio at the time of the 1953 reconstruction. Shrine authorities had permitted Watanabe special access to photograph the inner sanctuaries for promotional purposes, and several of the photographs had already appeared in publications at home and overseas, including in Drexler's book. Essays by architect Tange Kenzō and by Kawazoe accompanied Watanabe's photographs in both the Japanese and the English editions. Jonathan Reynolds discusses the circumstances of Watanabe's photographing the shrine in 'Ise Shrine and the Modernist Construction of Japanese Tradition', 325-9.

[43] On Metabolism, see Zhongjie Lin, *Kenzo Tange and the Metabolist Movement: Urban Utopias of Modern Japan* (Routledge, 2010).

[44] Kawazoe Noboru, 'Ise bunkaron', in Tange Kenzō et al., *Ise: Nihon kenchiku no genkei* (Tokyo, 1962), 68.

[45] To offer one fulsome example: 'It is a thing for which to be extremely grateful not only that this greatest of state rituals is to be performed, but that it is becoming more and more a great ceremony for the nation [*kokumin*] as well. It has no comparison on earth. This is really the quintessence of our unique and unsurpassed *kokutai*.' Miyachi Naokazu and Sakamoto Kōtarō, *Jingū to shikinen sengū* (Tokyo, 1929), 116.

imperial shrine, however, but that ordinary people had originally created it. The farming folk of the Ise region, in Kawazoe's interpretation, built the shrine on the model of a rice storehouse, in response to emperor Tenmu's command but 'according to their own traditions and aesthetic sense'. Kawazoe thus made the shrine the pinnacle of Japanese folk architecture.[46]

On the world stage, however, impermanence as a Japanese cultural virtue had more cachet than claims for Ise's status as indigenous folk architecture. The trope of impermanence already had a long lineage in English-language writing on Japan and seemed only strengthened by Japan's wartime destruction and rapid recovery. In place of discussion of Ise's significance to the nation, the English text of Kawazoe's essay explained that Japanese people valued the spirit rather than the actual structures, and concluded that Ise Shrine, 'ever new, yet ever unchanging', reversed the Western dictum 'life is short, art eternal'. Kawazoe's Japanese text had no corresponding passage.[47]

The people's shrine and the abode of impermanence did not stand in opposition. Whether the passages on Ise renewal and impermanence in this English text accurately translated words from a different manuscript by Kawazoe or represented the interpolation of a translator, the two could easily have been the work of the same Japanese author. In fact, the 1962 revised edition of the standard Japanese textbook in architecture history, published in the same year as Kawazoe's original Japanese essay, began with a chapter on the 'Japanese view of architecture' that asserted an innate national feeling for impermanence in much the same language as the English text of Kawazoe's essay. The author also asserted that the Japanese people regarded themselves as a single 'organism'—the term *yūkitai*, meaning 'organism' or 'organic body', substituting neatly for *kokutai*, the now-taboo term for the national body.[48] The imperial versus the popular and the ancient versus the modern were two different axes of interpretation, not conflicting sets of claims. Interpretations of the shrine in the post-war, post-*kokutai*, intellectual environment could combine degrees of each. Ephemerality and anti-monumentality undergirded the philosophy of the Metabolist movement, which was the vanguard of Japanese architectural thought in the 1960s. Metabolism saw Japanese tradition as a model for a new modernism based on organic self-renewal rather than planned regularity. Flying back into

[46] Kawazoe, 'Ise bunkaron', 93.

[47] Kawazoe Noboru, *Ise: Prototype of Japanese Architecture,* 206.

[48] Ōta Hirotarō, *Nihon kenchikushi josetsu* (revised 2nd edn, 1962), 18. The first edition of this text, penned in 1939 and published in 1947, lacked this chapter, which Ōta first published elsewhere in 1954.

Tokyo after his visit to Ise, Kawazoe found in the chaotic cityscape of Tokyo below the 'fierce, primitive power' that he sensed in the architecture of Ise's Outer Shrine.[49] The idea of Ise as autochthonous, primordial, and self-renewing gave it special evocative power for Kawazoe and the Japanese architects of his generation.[50]

Phase 4: Pandora's Box, the globalization of the Ise metaphor (1990s–present)

In 1972, UNESCO's Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage launched the World Heritage List and a new era of global heritage. From this time on, not only were there shared international guidelines for determining what deserved conservation as heritage, there were powerful incentives to identify sites that could make 'the List', bringing prestige and potential tourism revenues to the listing country. Japan did not sign the Convention until 1992, but the country's conservation establishment showed an intense interest in UNESCO's guidelines. National institutions for architectural preservation had been in place in Japan since the enactment of the Law for the Preservation of Ancient Shrines and Temples in 1897, and a set of standards together with a complex code of practice had developed. The source of concern for Japanese preservationists—and one reason that Japan was late to sign the Convention—was UNESCO's language concerning authenticity. The UNESCO Venice Charter of 1964 had enshrined criteria for authentic restoration that prohibited moving any part of the monument and called for preservation of all possible original material and 'the valid contributions of all eras' in the life of the building or site. Since 1897, preservationists in Japan had made it a practice to completely dismantle state-designated architectural monuments, study the condition of wooden structural members, then reassemble them, usually restoring the building to its earliest documentable form. This practice of dismantling calls to mind the periodic renewal at Ise. The two were related in the broad sense that both belonged to systems of maintenance for Japanese post-and-lintel wood buildings, but they were ultimately distinct. Partial or complete dismantling had been used as a means to extend the longevity of structures, including Buddhist temples, palaces, and ordinary houses as well as Shinto shrines like Ise. The 1897 law, however, altered the significance of the practice by making revival of the original historical form rather than simply maintenance its motive, and

[49] Kawazoe Noboru, 'Dentōron no shuppatsu to shūketsu: Ise jingū no zōkei ni tsuite', *Bungaku*, 27:7 (July, 1959), 793.

[50] See the remarks of Kawazoe Noboru and Kurokawa Noriaki in Rem Koolhaas and Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Project Japan: Metabolism Talks* (Taschen, 2011).

making complete dismantling the sine qua non of proper restoration, based on a positivist faith in the possibility of determining the unique original state of a site through scientific analysis of structural members.[51] This modern practice of dismantling and restoration potentially conflicted with the standards suggested by the Venice Charter.

Debate about the language of the Venice Charter began before the birth of the World Heritage Committee and continued as a growing list of nations joined the convention during the 1970s. Eventually in 1977, a four-part test for world heritage authenticity was introduced, calling for authenticity of 'design, material, setting, and workmanship'.[52] Beginning the same year, UNESCO co-sponsored a series of international meetings held in Japan on issues of wood conservation. Led by architecture historian Sekino Masaru (son of Sekino Tadashi, mentioned earlier), the Japanese hosts used these meetings to voice their complaint that the institutions of world heritage and the list's terms of eligibility were Eurocentric. Sekino addressed the first of these gatherings with a plea for recognition that each country had its own history of preservation techniques. He defended Japan's restoration approach by claiming that it was necessary for wood buildings, but assured his audience that it was all done 'in accordance with the Venice Charter'.[53]

Since Japan was not at this time a signatory to the World Heritage Convention, Sekino and his colleagues were worrying in advance, or acting preemptively, so that when the time came, Japan's heritage practices would receive the international recognition they sought. In doing so, they played a role that had been played by Japanese experts in a variety of fields since the late nineteenth century, acting as a wedge in a Western dominated system of

[51] Shimizu Shigeatsu, 'Shikinen zōtai to kaitai shūri: Nihon no dentōtekina kenchiku keishō shuhō wa ika ni kindaika sareta ka', in *Savants and Batisseurs: Patrimoine and Architecture* (proceedings of a conference sponsored by the Institut Franco-Japonais du Kansai and the Japan Foundation, April 2005), 10-12. Shimizu notes that Itō and Sekino were probably influenced in their choice of an approach that emphasized the restoration of ancient forms rather than the conservation of existing ones in part by reading Viollet-le-Duc. Viollet-le-Duc himself had written in his *On Restoration* (1860s) of a custom of rebuilding temples and palaces in Asia, describing it in a manner that suggests he may have been influenced by some version of the story of Ise's renewal.

[52] Herb Stovel, 'Origins and Influence of the Nara Document on Authenticity', *APT Bulletin*, 39:2-3 (2008), 12.

[53] Sekino Masaru, 'Principles of Conservation and Restoration Regarding Wooden Buildings in Japan', in *International Symposium on Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Property: Conservation of Wood* (Tokyo, 1978), 128, 130-1. Sekino's position suggests the way that European masonry haunted late twentieth-century Japanese preservationists much as it had haunted late nineteenth-century Japanese architects.

knowledge—a Westernized but anti-Western cultural vanguard seeking exceptions and expanded interpretations within the terms of the Western field of discourse. In reality, they may have been fretting unnecessarily. Japan's first two listings were approved promptly after the country became a signatory in 1992. Comparatively broad notions of what should constitute material authenticity were already bruited about by European officials in the heritage field in the 1970s. UNESCO expert Michel Parent, who would become chair of the World Heritage Committee in 1981, wrote in a 1979 report that, 'a wooden temple in Kyoto which has been perfectly maintained, and whose timbers have been replaced regularly as and when they decayed—without any alteration of the architecture or of the look of the material over ten centuries—remains undeniably authentic'.[54] Parent's example here, like many examples given by non-Japanese observers of preservation practices in Japan, conflated the Japanese preservationists' logic of dismantling for repair with the ideal of perfect continuity of form that Ise's ritual renewal was imagined to embody. The fact that no Kyoto temple matching Parent's criteria actually existed was irrelevant: as in the past, Japan served the purpose of general antithesis to European conceptions of the monument.

The question of authenticity persisted, however. Eventually, the debate led to a major conference, again sponsored by UNESCO together with Japan's preservation agency and other institutions domestic and international, held in the Japanese city of Nara in 1994, and to the publication of a new set of UNESCO principles in the form of the 'Nara Document on Authenticity'. Although its effects were not immediate, the Nara conference is generally credited with opening up world heritage to a multicultural approach. Many writers—both advocates and critics—have also described it as a 'Pandora's box'. Once the experts at Nara had opened that box, a panoply of new claims to heritage status on the basis of more vaguely defined criteria would emerge.

Ise Shrine was an uneasy presence at the Nara Conference. Japan had been chosen as the conference venue because Japanese had led the campaign against Eurocentrism in the world heritage system, yet the Ise renewal, the Japanese conservationists' most powerful rhetorical tool against that Eurocentric system, which had been honed in an East-West dialogue that now extended over a century, undermined the scientific positivism of their

[54] Michel Parent, 'Item 6 of the Provisional Agenda: Principles and Criteria for Inclusion of Properties on World Heritage List', *Third Session of the World Heritage Committee* (Luxor, Arab Republic of Egypt, 23-27 October, 1979), 19. See also Christina Cameron, 'From Warsaw to Mostar: The World Heritage Committee and Authenticity', *APT Bulletin: Journal of Preservation Technology*, 39:2-3 (2008), 19-22.

own official conservation methods. Several Japanese participants laboured to convey to the assembly that Japanese architecture was not all Ise Shrine and that official practice of dismantling for study and restoration was distinct from the ritual of periodic renewal.[55] Nevertheless, Ise's power as a metaphor proved hard for both Japanese and non-Japanese participants to resist.

Architecture historian Itō Nobuo's keynote address derived a broad cultural message from Ise. In order to demonstrate the distinct conditions of Asian wood architecture and the difficulty of defining authenticity in an Asian context, Itō presented to the audience a theory of the origins of Japanese and other wet-rice cultivating Asian societies, which he claimed yielded distinct attitudes toward the sacred and a distinct conception of heritage, both exemplified by Ise. Following this story of cultural genesis, he described the country's contemporary restoration policy, stressing that wood members were preserved to the greatest degree possible, unlike at Ise. He thus implicitly presented modern Japanese preservation practice as out of sync with the essential character of the Asian building culture that he was seeking to defend.[56]

French architecture historian and theorist Françoise Choay spoke of Ise at the Nara Conference too, but refused to treat it as peculiarly Japanese or Asian. Instead she interpreted it as the best example of a particular paradigm of monumentality seen around the world, in which historical significance takes preeminence over material form. The force of the idea of periodic renewal seems to have permitted her to overlook the fact that Ise itself was anomalous within Japan, however, since in her *Invention of the Historical Monument*, published first in 1992 and reprinted several times after the Nara Conference, she referred to the Japanese habit of 'rebuilding their monuments every twenty years,' as if it were general.[57]

Ise Shrine thus remained off the official agenda at Nara yet present as a master metaphor, no longer peculiarly Japanese. After Nara, others less constrained by conservation science than Japan's preservation officials would

[55] See Masuda Kanefusa, 'Kaigi hōkoku: Sekai isan jōyaku to sekai bunka isan Nara konfarensu', *Kenchiku shigaku dai* 24 *gō* (1995), 49-51; Inagaki Eizō, 'Bunka isan no Ōsentishiti o meguru sobyō', *Kenchiku shigaku dai* 24 *gō* (1995), 84; also Stovel, 'Origins and Influence of the Nara Document'.

[56] Nobuo Ito, ' "Authenticity" Inherent in Cultural Heritage in Asia and Japan', in *Nara Conference on Authenticity (Proceedings)*, ed. Knut Einar Larsen (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 1995), 35-45.

[57] Françoise Choay, *The Invention of the Historic Monument*, trans. Lauren M. O'Connell (Cambridge, 2001).

take this metaphor and run with it. Reflecting the open, multicultural mood among participants in the Nara Conference, the Nara Document proposed a new conception of authenticity based on a 'great variety' of sources of meaning, including 'spirit and feelings'.[58] This reached far beyond the restoration issues that had been primary on the Japanese participants' agenda. The Nara Document was formally adopted by UNESCO in 1999. Although its practical results were not immediately evident, more than fifty UNESCO-sponsored workshops and other events followed in the 1990s and 2000s, pursuing the newly liberated conception of authenticity further.[59]

It became common in these years to claim Ise as representative of an 'Asian' attitude toward heritage.[60] It was equally common, even among scholars and heritage professionals, to make erroneous statements about the shrine, sometimes repeating previous misunderstandings, sometimes revealing new misunderstandings: for example, that it had been perfectly replicated every twenty years since its founding, that its rebuilding was typical of Japanese conservation practices generally, that it was denied world heritage status because it was rebuilt, or that it was located in the former imperial capital of Kyoto.[61] The frequency of these casual and often mistaken references to Ise

[58] 'Nara Document on Authenticity', in *Nara Conference on Authenticity (Proceedings)*, xxiii.

[59] Sophia Labadi has examined 106 nomination dossiers for sites nominated to the World Heritage List between 1994 and 2004 and found only a handful treated authenticity 'as a dynamic process'. See Labadi, 'World Heritage, Authenticity and Post-Authenticity' in *Heritage and Globalisation*, ed. Sophia Labadi and Colin Long (London, 2010), 72-81. It may still be too early to tell where the opening up of world heritage criteria will lead, however. The perception in the field seems to be that Nara's impact has indeed been substantial—as suggested by the frequent references to a Pandora's Box having been opened by the Conference. Stovel reports that in 2007, the Vice President of ICOMOS China announced that China was holding a conference in Beijing to do for China what Nara had done for Japan—although it was not in fact clear what the Nara Conference had done for Japan.

[60] See John H. Stubbs, *Time Honored: A Global View of Architectural Conservation* (Hoboken NJ, 2009), 263-7; Jennifer Ko, 'Regional Authenticity: An Argument for Reconstruction in Oceania', *APT Bulletin* 39:2-3 (2008), 55-61. David Lowenthal cites examples of Chinese claims that non-Western cultures value 'authenticity of thought', rather than material form. Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge, 1998), 20.

[61] Dawson Munjeri 'Tangible and Intangible Heritage: from Difference to Convergence', *Museum International*, 26:1-2 (2004); Choay, *The Invention of the Historic Monument*; Ralph Pettman, 'Anti-globalisation discourses in Asia', in *Critical Theories, International Relations, and the 'Anti-Globalisation' Movement*, ed. Catherine Eschle and Bice

reveals both the symbolic status of the shrine's ritual renewal and the versatility of the symbol. Using Ise as a metaphor required little actual knowledge of the history or contemporary situation of the shrine.

Authors citing the case of Ise Shrine in the heritage field seldom did so with the intent to undermine the edifice of world heritage itself. They called rather for opening it up. The conception of a more open type of 'authenticity' that accommodated Ise's ritual renewal (and the attitudes it was presumed to represent) made Ise more than a touchstone for claims of Asian difference: Ise became the universal property of the non-West. After 2000, UNESCO introduced a series of measures to protect cultural diversity, including the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003).[62] The category of 'intangible heritage' had served in Japanese and Korean national conservation policies for decades as a rubric for the protection of performance and craft traditions by official designation of the traditional practice or of the practitioners themselves. The 2003 convention translated this into the terms for a new international classification system. Dawson Munjeri, former representative for Zimbabwe on the World Heritage Committee, participated in the drafting and passage of the 2003 convention. He regarded the convention as a means to fuse the categories of tangible and intangible heritage. Toward this end, Ise offered a vital case, Munjeri claimed, since it was '100 percent original' in design, workmanship and setting, yet 'zero percent original' in materials. Ise had led the way to a rethinking of the categories, yet in Munjeri's eyes, the rethinking did not go far enough. Voodoo temples in Benin, for example, presented a case in which a tradition was not bounded by a stable site, and the buildings and implements used constantly changed. Preserving the 'intrinsic values' of traditions like this had impelled UNESCO forward from Nara to the embrace of intangible heritage.[63] The Ise Shrine metaphor thus contributed to a transformation of

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Maiguashca (London, 2004) 82; Jukka Jokilehto, 'Preservation Theory Unfolding', *Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation, History, Theory, and Criticism*, 3:1 (Summer, 2006), xii.

[62] For analysis of the significance of UNESCO's change of mission toward protecting cultural diversity, see Witkor Stoczkowski, 'UNESCO's Doctorine of Human Diversity: A Secular Soteriology?' *Anthropology Today*, 25:3 (June 2009), 7-11. UNESCO representatives and conservation experts returned to Nara in 2004 for a conference to discuss interpretations of 'intangible heritage'.

[63] Dawson Munjeri, 'Tangible and Intangible Heritage: from Difference to Convergence', 15-16.

world heritage that would come to encompass everything from coal mines to national cuisines.[64]

'Spirit and feelings' implied a new measure, a new type of authenticity that was both more difficult to define and more difficult to refute when claimed. This was a different spiritualism from the Eastern spiritualism of the Victorian era. It demanded no mystical system of belief, simply the specific claim that the keepers of a particular heritage object valued something invisible within it rather than its materiality. Turning one of the oldest of Western philosophical claims—of the superiority of spirit over matter—against the West itself, the demand from non-Western heritage advocates for recognition of the 'spirit of the place' challenged the UNESCO-centred preservation establishment to make explicit wherein lay the ultimate value of a monument. And in a multicultural age, who could deny the value of 'spirit' anywhere?[65] To espouse the alternative—that material form alone should be the criterion for heritage value—risked descent into fetishism, 'the brute worship of objects', which post-Enlightenment Western thought treated as the basest of human attachments.[66]

At the Nara Conference in 1994, German conservationist Michael Petzet had suggested that in the late twentieth century, the 'monument cult' might reflect a 'longing for survival' in the face of environmental crisis. In this sense, Ise Shrine offered a suitable monument for the era.[67] Several writers since the 1990s have reimagined Ise Shrine in ecological terms. In a popular English-language essay, Shinto ethicist Tokoro Isao presented the shrine's reconstruction as a model example of long-term forestry management.[68] More recently,

[64] This most recent phase in the history of Ise as metaphor is also treated in an effective analysis of the depoliticization of the shrine by Tze Loo, who covers some of the same material. See Loo, 'Escaping Its Past, Recasting the Grand Shrine of Ise', *InterAsian Cultural Studies*, 2010.

[65] For a rare opinion advocating a purely materialist approach to authenticity, see Wim Denslagen, 'Authenticity and Spirituality', in *Concepts of Authenticity in Architectural Heritage Preservation, an International Workshop of the Cluster of Excellence, Heidelberg University, 16 June 2008*, http://www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/en/news-events/events/archive/event-view/cal/event//tx_cal_phpicalendar////workshop_concepts_of_authenticity_in_architectural_heritage_preservation.html.

[66] See David Murray, 'Fetishism and the Hierarchies of Race and Religion', in *Conversions: Old Worlds and New*, ed. Kenneth Mills and Anthony Grafton (Rochester NY, 2003), 199-217.

[67] Michael Petzet, ' "In the Full Richness of their Authenticity": The Test of Authenticity and the New Cult of Monuments', *Nara Conference on Authenticity* (Proceedings), 97.

[68] Isao Tokoro, 'The Grand Shrine of Ise: Preservation by Removal and Renewal' in *Historic Cities and Sacred Sites: Cultural Roots for Urban Futures*, 22-9.

North American ecologist William Jordan III has cited Ise to prove the parochialism of Western thinking about what constitutes landscape restoration.[69] If indeed heritage philosophy since the late twentieth century reflects contemporary environmental concerns, the fascination with Ise Shrine may represent not only a longing for survival, but a longing for perpetual renewal: a wish that careful custodianship might allow humans to inhabit a self-sustaining ecosystem, despite the pervasive signs of irreversible damage.

In cultural terms, Ise also served the seductive idea that outside the fetishistic West, replicas were valued no differently from originals. Writing in the *New Yorker*, journalist Alexander Stille treated Ise's renewal as part of an Asian tradition of copying, which, considered together with the contemporary Chinese government's use of replicas in museum displays and archeological sites signified an alternative authenticity for a post-authentic age: the perfect replica. Stille's use of the Ise metaphor partook of a popular late twentieth-century stereotype of traditional Japan as post-modern *avant la lettre*.[70] Anti-preservationist architects, meanwhile, found in Ise's renewal a cultural rationale for questioning the preservation of built form generally: Rem Koolhaas, for example, spoke admiringly to an interviewer of the Japanese ability to maintain a national tradition in architecture paradoxically by *not* valuing heritage, mentioning Ise and claiming that the Japanese 'do not hang onto things'. Koolhaas' thinking, in turn, echoed that of the Metabolist group, whom he profiled in a volume of interviews published in 2012.[71]

Thus, in a protracted international dialogue, the metaphor of Ise Shrine has continued to grow and ramify, carrying it far from its origins as the ancestral shrine of Japan's imperial family. Yet what about the site itself? The term *heritage* implies a property relation. When UNESCO declares a site to be part of the 'common heritage of humanity', humanity acquires some form of controlling interest in it. States participating in the World Heritage Convention accept the responsibility to protect their heritage sites on behalf of the rest of us, who are the hypothetical inheritors. Here lies a further irony about Ise: while it has become the icon of a broad reconception of cultural heritage associated with Japan and embraced by countless conservationists worldwide, the shrine itself is neither listed as a world heritage site nor even protected by the Japanese government under the country's cultural

[69] William Jordan III, *Sunflower Forest: Ecological Restoration and the New Communion with Nature* (Berkeley, 2011), 117-22, 224 fn.

[70] Alexander Stille, 'Faking It', *New Yorker*, (15 June 1998), 36-7. See also Alexander Stille, *The Future of the Past* (Picador, 2003).

[71] 'Reinventing the City: An Interview with Architect Rem Koolhaas', *Christian Science Monitor*, (20 July 2012).

properties law. The shrine's custodians have vigorously defended it from the intervention of any branch of the secular state. They consider it sacrosanct, and perceive heritage designation as a compromise with outside institutions that might diminish the sacred imperial aura.[72] Although forgotten by most of the country, *kokutai* ideology—a vision of the polity embodied in an unbroken line of sacred emperors—is alive and well at Ise. Chief priests and priestesses come from among members of the imperial family. When Allied Occupation Forces compelled the Japanese government to separate church and state in 1946 by ending Shinto's official patronage, the shrine priesthood created the National Association of Shinto Shrines to preserve the vestiges of the old system, including a national hierarchy of shrines with Ise at its pinnacle. The association's regulations state explicitly (in apparent conflict with national law) that Ise Shrine is the property of the emperor, which the association maintains in custody temporarily.[73] Thus the persistence of pre-war imperial nationalism prevents Japan's culture bureaucrats from touching the country's most famous architectural monument, whose listing by UNESCO might be thought highly desirable in global heritage competition. Ise Shrine has been a political site for the duration of its long career. It remains a political site today, although the fact is seldom noted outside Japan.

Conclusion

Ise Shrine has come to play the role of master metaphor because it elegantly articulates paradoxes at the foundation of our attachments to the things of the past. Is the ethos of architectural preservation fundamentally spiritual? Is it material fetishism? Or is every invocation of a 'culture' to be protected itself a form of fetishism? Ise has lent itself to such questions—and more often than not in recent years, it has been treated as offering redemption for heritage discourse, but within an expanded definition of heritage.

This essay has traced the modern trajectory of Ise as a metaphor. In the course of roughly a century, the shrine passed through at least four different symbolic incarnations: from Japanese abode of impermanence, to ancient-yet-modern 'duck-rabbit', to people's shrine, to global master metaphor. One site, multiple readings: my mode of argumentation is a familiar one in cultural criticism. A seemingly simple singularity is shown to contain multiplicity. And with this, usually, an essentialist myth is debunked. I am not

[72] In this, Ise has taken a different strategy from the Vatican, which was listed as world heritage in 1984, the only state to be listed entire.

[73] *Sengo no jinja, Shintō: Rekishi to kadai*, ed. Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo (Jinja shinpōsha, 2010), 141. On the contemporary role of the National Association of Shinto Shrines, see John Breen and Mark Teeuwen, *A New History of Shinto* (Chichester, 2010), 199-220.

claiming, however, that Ise Shrine's unique tradition of periodic renewal is a myth. Nor do I mean to deny that it may offer lessons for the heritage conservation field. But with its closely tended historical relationship to a single dynasty and its protectors, Ise is probably not usefully understood as a general cultural archetype, either Japanese or Asian. Additionally, the anti-materialist meanings often attributed to it today find no support in texts pre-dating the end of the nineteenth century, when those meanings appeared in writing much of which was intended for foreign audiences.

If this narrative of changing interpretations had been confined only to the field of architectural history (or conceivably of Shinto theology), the multiplicity of meanings I have sketched might still be interesting in itself, but the true power of the Ise metaphor lies in its reach beyond any one field. In fact, architecture historians have played second fiddle through most of the metaphor's evolution. And the meanings at each stage resonated with events and issues far beyond the shrine's architectural form or religious significance. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the idea of a special Japanese love of impermanence helped win foreign sympathy for imperial Japan through aesthetic claims that were at the same time ethical ones; in the first half of the twentieth century, the Ise metaphor split, and the site became proof of both the empire's antiquity and architectural modernism's universal validity; in Japan after World War II, it took on a populist cast, representing native folk tradition; then finally, from the late twentieth century, in an era of global culture, it was taken in hand by conservationists, architects, ecologists, and others worldwide as the key to a Pandora's Box, from which would emerge a liberated, multicultural future for our conceptions of the past. From the first years of modern conservation practice in Japan to the present day, commentators both native and foreign, addressing different audiences with different emphases, yet often in dialogue with each other, have invented and reinvented the essential meaning of the shrine's renewal. Each reinvention injected the shrine into the politics of its time. And all the while, the shrine remained tightly bound to one family, whose members had nothing to say to the world at large about its meaning.