Future Anterior, Special Issue: (Dis)Continuities

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Matthew Mullane, Radboud University

(Dis)Continuities: New Perspectives on Preservation in Japan.

Near the exit of Japan's national pavilion at Expo 2025, the popular cartoon character Doraemon appeared on the walls to educate visitors on the "circularity" of the country's traditional building techniques, including the periodic rebuilding of Ise Shrine (Shikinen sengū). The chatty time traveler explained that the complex has been rebuilt continuously for 1,300 years by craftspeople utilizing inherited woodworking techniques, and timber that has been responsibly sourced from self-sufficient forests. None of this is exactly true. Historian Jordan Sand has pointed out that neither the rebuilding techniques nor the meaning of Ise Shrine have been as continuous as some heritage specialists (and robotic cats) claim. In fact, as Sand argues, it is precisely the shrine's many discontinuities that give it metaphorical power, allowing interested parties to change its meaning to fit different political arrangements, from imperial nationalism to global sustainability.

The popular understanding of Ise Shrine rests on essentialist readings of Japanese architecture as uniquely appreciative of "impermanence" and "nature," obscuring the technical diversity and political ambivalence of preservation practices in the country. This special issue looks to reconsider architectural preservation in Japan in all its multiplicity as a struggle between the continuous and discontinuous. We borrow these concepts from architectural historian Nakatani Norihito, whose book Severalness describes the continuity of architecture as a constant negotiation between the stubbornness of material form and the tumult of political change. Examples in the book include the preservation and shifting meaning of Katsura Villa, and the symbiotic relationship between modern cities and protected ancient burial mounds (kofun). In such scenarios, preservation is mobilized to invent continuities of political lineage, national history, imperial control, and more.

Looking beyond Ise, we find that so-called "traditional" preservation practices achieve continuity in different ways. For example, historian Nakayama Rie has recently uncovered early modern methods of washing wooden architecture that produced faux-antiquated surfaces, granting new buildings the aesthetic and political power of the old. Following the restoration of the emperor in the late nineteenth century, the appearance of imperial continuity gained new political weight, leading to a boom in preservation projects. The results were full of discontinuities, however. Itō Chūta's 1895 reconstruction of Heian Shrine for example was only 5/8 the size of the original due to costs. The search for continuity has also inspired novel preservation research methods in Japan, including Kon Wajirō's assiduous study of traditional lifeways amidst modernization, and Fujimori Terunobu's photographic hunt for surviving pre-WWII architecture. More recently, scholars such as Aoi Akihito have turned their attention to understanding the continuity of villages and their

ecologies impacted by the 2011 triple disaster.

We welcome articles that examine preservation practices in Japan during any historical period through a critical lens, showing how the negotiation of continuity is shaped by political desires. The issue understands “Japan” in an expanded sense, including its former colonial territories, its fragmented pre-nineteenth-century regionalisms, and its relationship to Asian neighbors with whom the country has shared preservation techniques and competing political visions for centuries. We are particularly interested in the imperial and colonial contexts in which preservation practices have been experimented with and challenged. Additional possible topics include: the preservation of Buddhist architecture as connection to mainland Asia, indigenous practices of preservation, continuity of preservation techniques from wood to concrete, postwar preservation in a Cold War context, the role of organizations like JACAM and Docomomo Japan, the equally important role of grass-roots community preservation groups (machizukuri), preservation and reuse amidst population crisis, etc.

About Future Anterior
Future Anterior is a peer-reviewed (refereed) journal that approaches historic preservation from a position of critical inquiry, rigorous scholarship, and theoretical analysis. It is an important international forum for the critical examination of historic preservation, spurring challenges of its assumptions, goals, methods, and results. Future Anterior is a journal of Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture and Preservation that is published twice a year by the University of Minnesota Press.

Formatting Requirements

Articles should be no more than 4,000 words (excluding endnotes) with up to seven illustrations. References to the identity of the author must be removed from the manuscript before submission. It is the responsibility of the author to secure permissions for image use and pay any reproduction fees. A brief abstract (200 words) and author biography (around 100 words) must accompany the submission, but in a separate file to preserve the double-blind peer review process. Acceptance or rejection of submissions is at the discretion of the Editorial Staff. Please do not send original materials, as submissions will not be returned.

Formatting Text

All text files should be saved as Microsoft Word or RTF format. Text and citations must be formatted in accordance with the Chicago Manual of Style, 18th Edition. All articles must be submitted in English, and spelling should follow American convention.

Formatting Illustrations

Images should be sent as TIFF files with a resolution of at least 300 dpi at 8” by 9” print size. Figures should be numbered clearly in the text, after the paragraph in which they are referenced. Image captions and credits must be included with submissions.

Examples of manuscript and illustration formatting can be found in past issues of Future Anterior here and here.

Submission Checklist
Abstract (200 words)
Manuscript (4000 words, excluding footnotes)
Illustrations (maximum of 7)
Captions for Illustrations
Illustration Copyright information
Author biography (100 words)
Contact Information

All submissions and questions about the submission process must be submitted to Future.Anterior.Journal@gmail.com.

Questions about the Call for Papers: (Dis)Continuities can be sent to Matthew Mullane, matthew.mullane@ru.nl and copy

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