



## **Deciphering Historicity in the Landscape of an Ordinary Town with the Aid of Old Poems**

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Much has been lost in the modern age. Japanese cities lost their beauty, which was rooted in traditional culture and beliefs. This is the very issue that Alex Kerr discussed in "Lost Japan." Although such a loss is commonly believed to be a result of lack of a conservation framework within the society, the evolution of a conservation system actually developed simultaneously with that of an urban planning system during the process of urbanization. In Japan now, quite many places are conserved; for example, 85 districts have been selected as national Important Preservation Districts for Groups of Traditional Buildings, 1,650 as Historic Sites, 355 as Places of Scenic Beauty, and fifteen Cultural Landscapes are designated under the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties (Nov. 1, 2009). These spatial heritage sites symbolically represent Japanese traditional environment and cultural beauty. Yet, areas which have not been designated and conserved as "historic" show a mixture of historical and modern elements with urban transformation obscuring their traditional identity. Even in such a case, which is commonly referred to as "an ordinary town with nothing special," it is important to realize that we can find historical aspects and utilize them for improving the town's environment. However, planners often neglect such areas instead, simply because it is difficult to find adequate planning treatment since neither conservation nor development is suitable in such cases. One remarkable example is shown in this paper in order to consider how to detect and decipher historicity in ordinary areas. This is a place which was the subject of poems written by intellectual residents in the Edo era. Influenced by Wang Wei, a great Chinese poet of the Tang Dynasty, a man named Haryo Kumasaka and his family wrote Chinese-style poems celebrating twenty regional places in the manner of intellectual people in the pre-modern era in Japan. In the urbanizing period, especially after World War II, such cultural heritage has been lost because these celebrated places had been forgotten and one hill estimated to include three of the celebrated landmarks was destroyed. Another area near a railroad station was developed as housing estates, but land-use control successfully protected an agricultural zone from sprawl development. Modern traffic facilities have changed the regional space and scenery. Despite such development and change, an interest in the poets and old poems persisted while one citizens' group was organized for promoting the environment. Based on information from those who had studied the poems and places, and data from old poems and field survey, the landscape structure of this region and meanings of the places were examined and planning issues were proposed.

It is concluded that elements of ordinary scenery can be reorganized and can regain significance which we had not previously been aware of by means of understanding the perspective of ancient poets and by appreciating the seemingly ordinary around us through the eyes of the local citizenry with the passing of time. This case also shows the importance of the synthetic function of design which is similar to that of poetry, that is, gathering and integrating fragments of historicity.

**KEY WORDS:** Historical environment, ordinary town, landscape, amenity.