

The Nara Document at 30: Perspectives on Replication and Reconstruction in Architecture Conservation

• THE NARA DOCUMENT ON AUTHENTICITY • Preamble

We, the experts assembled in Nara (Japan), wish to acknowledge the generous spirit and intellectual courage of the Japanese authorities in providing a timely forum in which we could challenge conventional thinking in the conservation field, and debate ways and means of broadening our horizons to bring greater respect for cultural and heritage diversity to conservation practice. We also wish to acknowledge the value of the framework for discussion provided by the World Heritage Committee's desire to apply the test of authenticity in ways which accord full respect to the social and cultural values of all societies, in examining the outstanding universal value of cultural properties proposed for the World Heritage List. *The Nara Document on Authenticity* is conceived in the spirit of the Charter of Venice, 1964, and builds on it and extends it in response to the expanding scope of cultural heritage concerns and interests in our contemporary world. In a world that is increasingly subject to the forces of globalization and homogenization, and in a world in which the search for cultural identity is sometimes pursued through aggressive nationalism and the suppression of the cultures of minorities, the essential contribution made by the consideration of authenticity in conservation practice is to clarify and illuminate the collective memory of humanity.

In a world of constant flux, we face difficult questions: Can rebuilding or replacement be authentic? How do we balance preservation with change? Is authenticity a clash of values—substance, form, and context? Or is it a matter of analysis, judgment, and decision? We invite you to engage with these questions and reflect on the symposium's theme and intent through the book's form.

What is a book?

Is the original material form important?

Would you preserve the wrapped-back fold*, or alter it to uncover information and ideas?

Are you protecting or limiting by leaving things intact?

When you reveal the hidden content, do you lose something in the process?

The decision is yours.

- * Also known as French fold in the West, wrapped-back fold (包背裝) was widely used in China during the Southern Song and Ming dynasties, as well as other parts of East Asia. In a typical wrapped-back fold, each sheet of paper is printed on one side and folded to have the printed page on the outside of the leaf. The folded edges form the fore-edge of the book, while the cut edges make up the spine. Here, each sheet of paper is folded to have the printed page on the inside of the leaf. Unless one makes a conscious decision to make alterations to the book, the information and ideas inside remain inaccessible.

Typical of books from this period, the spine is normally bound using stab binding (線裝). The four staples utilised here are an interpretation of the four-stab binding technique (四眼式線裝) that remain in use in East Asia until the turn of the last century and continue to inspire book design to this day. The book's design stems from an intention to provoke thought and encourage critical reflection upon the theme of the symposium. The design developed organically, resulting in the product you now have in your hands. Its genesis drew inspiration from East Asian traditions, in much the same manner as how *The Nara Document* came to be. Our interpretation of the binding and what you choose to do with it will hopefully provide fodder for conversations on conservation.

Disclaimer: The wrapped-back fold and stab binding concept apply only to the physical publication and not the digital version.

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Content Page	3	Foreword
	5	Preface
	10	Ethical Understanding of Architectural Conservation using Contemporary Materials: A Primer
	25	《奈良真實性文件》30周年： 建築保護中複制與重建的視角 The 30 th Anniversary of <i>The Nara Authenticity Document</i> : Perspectives on Replication and Reconstruction in Architectural Conservation
	41	The 3D Restoration of the Dragons on the Great Pagoda at Kew, United Kingdom
	65	Memory in Aid of Materiality: Reconstructing the Dr Pio Valenzuela House

This is a year of important ICOMOS anniversaries. It was 60 years ago that a pioneering group of conservation professionals met in Venice for the Second International Congress of Architects and Specialists of Historic Buildings. Of the 13 resolutions passed by that Congress, the first two stand out: first, the adoption of *The Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites*, and second, the establishment of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in Warsaw the following year, culminating over three decades of work to protect the world's historical sites and monuments. Indeed, when the pioneers of 1964 met in Venice, they were continuing the work of their predecessors who drafted *The Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments* in 1931, as well as that of the First Congress of Architects and Specialists of Historic Buildings, held in Paris in 1957.

3

The second significant anniversary we celebrate in 2024 is the 30th anniversary of the drafting of *The Nara Document on Authenticity*. The Nara Conference on Authenticity was spearheaded by UNESCO, ICOMOS and ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property) with the strong support of the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs, Nara Prefecture and the governments of Norway and Canada. Again, this culminated more than two decades of discussion and debate on the meaning of 'authenticity' embodied in the Preamble to *The Venice Charter*, which mandates us to hand our historical monuments on to future generations 'in the full richness of their authenticity'.

Within ICOMOS, issues regarding the authenticity of potential heritage sites and monuments began surfacing in the late 1970s with the proposed inscription of Warsaw as a World Heritage Site. Like many European cities during the Second World War, most of Warsaw was destroyed. Indeed, almost the whole of its historic centre was destroyed. After the War, the Old Town and other historic areas were meticulously reconstructed based on pre-war documents, photographs and even paintings. Naturally, the question for conservationists and historians is: How authentic is the reconstructed

Warsaw? Despite these existential controversies, the Historic Centre of Warsaw was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1980 as it 'fully retained its authenticity as a finished concept of post-war reconstruction.' This broadened understanding of authenticity and the debates around what that might ultimately encompass further fueled the debate on authenticity. Would a monument or historic building retain its authenticity and universal value if it had been rebuilt with newer material? What if new technology was deployed to restore parts of an old building because the traditional craftsmanship required for this process no longer exists?

It is tempting to argue that when the 45 heritage and conservation experts from 28 countries met in Nara in November 1994, they hoped to establish a new, culturally inclusive definition of authenticity, but that does not appear to have been the case. Professor Herb Stovel, one of *The Nara Document*'s drafters, recalled that the delegates 'had more prosaic benefits in mind' and merely 'wished simply to extend the range of attributes through which authenticity might be recognised to accommodate within it, mainstream Japanese conservation practices – namely the periodic dismantling, repair and reassembly of wooden temples – so that Japan would feel more comfortable about submitting World Heritage nominations for international review'.

4

However, the resultant *Nara Document* – which offered a wider technical framework for the analysis of authenticity – has proven to be a much more enduring and pivotal instrument than its drafters might have imagined. The reasons are not hard to see, even after 30 years. *The Nara Document* is universal in its cultural inclusiveness, recognises the 'specific nature' of each society's 'heritage values', and warns against basing authenticity judgements 'within fixed criteria'. Instead, we are encouraged to consider heritage properties 'within the cultural contexts to which they belong' and heed 'the worth of a great variety of sources of information' in our knowledge base.

I am deeply honoured to be invited to pen the foreword to this excellent collection of essays that further the ongoing dialogue on authenticity 30 years after Nara. The concerns raised in the papers will resonate deeply with all those involved in the preservation, conservation and restoration of historic buildings and monuments – loss of available raw materials, death of expertise, impossible costs for restoration work, and the intangible ethical questions surrounding how we continue to safeguard and protect the world's historic buildings and sites for future generations.

The idea of a symposium and a publication critically examining *The Nara Document on Authenticity* was mooted during a discussion with Senior Venerable Sik Wai Yim (惟俨法師), abbot of Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery a few years ago. It is my honour to be part of the monastery's conservation committee, where issues on conservation, restoration, replication and reconstruction are debated. Issues on authenticity, or rather, how authenticity is defined, often took centre stage in our discussions.

When discussing the subject of authenticity, one must reference *The Nara Document on Authenticity* (1994). It builds upon *The Charter of Venice* (1964), which emphasises preserving original materials and maintaining their condition, and marks a significant development in cultural heritage management discourse, especially in its nuanced perspective on authenticity.

Looking back, the importance of diverse cultural contexts and the subjective nature of authenticity discussed in *The Nara Document* remain relevant after thirty years. Yet, this comprehensive and inclusive view of cultural heritage that goes beyond strict definitions and standards are now met with new challenges, such as the depletion of global resources and declining craftsmanship, as well as “wicked problems” that are increasingly complex and difficult to navigate. While the principles of *The Nara Document* and other international charters are useful, they now seem increasingly insufficient. How then should we interpret authenticity in such scenarios?

The organisation of the papers starts with the use of ethical discussions to aid our understanding of architectural conservation and its decision-making process in using contemporary materials. The second paper accentuates how interwoven and contextual environments, societies, and cultures are, through examples from East Asia, primarily those of Taiwan. This is followed by two case studies. The first of which is the use of novel technology. In this case study of the Great Pagoda in Kew, United Kingdom, 3D printing technology in conservation is discussed. This is followed by the examination of communal memory in the reconstruction of the Dr Pio Valenzuela House in the Philippines.

While we may not fully address the issues of contemporary materials in historic conservation, I would like to conclude this preface with a call for more open conversations on conservation as a social practice, where conservation issues are framed and evaluated, and be made more explicit or publicly justifiable in any responsible conservation practices.

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- Cultural Diversity and Heritage Diversity

The diversity of cultures and heritage in our world is an irreplaceable source of spiritual and intellectual richness for all humankind. The protection and enhancement of cultural and heritage diversity in our world should be actively promoted as an essential aspect of human development. Cultural heritage diversity exists in time and space, and demands respect for other cultures and all aspects of their belief systems. In cases where cultural values appear to be in conflict, respect for cultural diversity demands acknowledgment of the legitimacy of the cultural values of all parties. All cultures and societies are rooted in the particular forms and means of tangible and intangible expression which constitute their heritage, and these should be respected. It is important to underline a fundamental principle of UNESCO, to the effect that the cultural heritage of each is the cultural heritage of all. Responsibility for cultural heritage and the management of it belongs, in the first place, to the cultural community that has generated it, and subsequently to that which cares for it. However, in addition to these responsibilities, adherence to the international charters and conventions developed for conservation of cultural heritage also obliges consideration of the principles and responsibilities flowing from them. Balancing their own requirements with those of other cultural communities is, for each community, highly desirable, provided achieving this balance does not undermine their fundamental cultural values.

- Values and Authenticity

Conservation of cultural heritage in all its forms and historical periods is rooted in the values attributed to the heritage. Our ability to understand these values depends, in part, on the degree to which information sources about these values may be understood as credible or truthful. Knowledge and understanding of these sources of information, in relation to original and subsequent characteristics of the cultural heritage, and their meaning, is a requisite basis for assessing all aspects of authenticity. Authenticity, considered in this way and affirmed in *The Charter of Venice*, appears as the essential qualifying factor concerning values. The understanding of authenticity plays a fundamental role in all scientific studies of the cultural heritage, in conservation and restoration planning, as well as within the inscription procedures used for the World Heritage Convention and

other cultural heritage inventories. All judgements about values attributed to cultural properties as well as the credibility of related information sources may differ from culture to culture, and even within the same culture. It is thus not possible to base judgements of values and authenticity within fixed criteria. On the contrary, the respect due to all cultures requires that heritage properties must be considered and judged within the cultural contexts to which they belong. Therefore, it is of the highest importance and urgency that, within each culture, recognition be accorded to the specific nature of its heritage values and the credibility and truthfulness of related information sources. Depending on the nature of the cultural heritage, its cultural context, and its evolution through time, authenticity judgements may be linked to the worth of a great variety of sources of information. Aspects of the sources may include form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, and spirit and feeling, and other internal and external factors. The use of these sources permits elaboration of the specific artistic, historic, social, and scientific dimensions of the cultural heritage being examined.

- Appendix 1
Suggestions for follow-up
(Proposed by H. Stovel)

Respect for cultural and heritage diversity requires conscious efforts to avoid imposing mechanistic formulae or standardized procedures in attempting to define or determine authenticity of particular monuments and sites. Efforts to determine authenticity in a manner respectful of cultures and heritage diversity requires approaches which encourage cultures to develop analytical processes and tools specific to their nature and needs. Such approaches may have several aspects in common: efforts to ensure assessment of authenticity involve multidisciplinary collaboration and the appropriate utilisation of all available expertise and knowledge; efforts to ensure attributed values are truly representative of a culture and the diversity of its interests, in particular monuments and sites; efforts to document clearly the particular nature of authenticity for monuments and sites as a practical guide to future treatment and monitoring; efforts to update authenticity assessments in light of changing values and circumstances. Particularly important are efforts to ensure that attributed values are

respected, and that their determination included efforts to build, as far as possible, a multidisciplinary and community consensus concerning these values. Approaches should also build on and facilitate international co-operation among all those with an interest in conservation of cultural heritage, in order to improve global respect and understanding for the diverse expressions and values of each culture. Continuation and extension of this dialogue to the various regions and cultures of the world is a prerequisite to increasing the practical value of consideration of authenticity in the conservation of the common heritage of humankind. Increasing awareness within the public of this fundamental dimension of heritage is an absolute necessity in order to arrive at concrete measures for safeguarding the vestiges of the past. This means developing greater understanding of the values represented by the cultural properties themselves, as well as respecting the role such monuments and sites play in contemporary society.

- Appendix 2
Definitions

Conservation: all efforts designed to understand cultural heritage, know its history and meaning, ensure its material safeguard and, as required, its presentation, restoration and enhancement. (Cultural heritage is understood to include monuments, groups of buildings and sites of cultural value as defined in article one of the World Heritage Convention). Information sources: all material, written, oral and figurative sources which make it possible to know the nature, specifications, meaning and history of the cultural heritage.