

# Rebuild to Preserve—renewal of the historical buildings along the alleyways in Kyoto (Japan)

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“Do you want your neighborhood to become like the Horyuji Temple or Ise Grand Shrine?” This was a real question asked by an architect to the residents of the Gion South District in Kyoto, Japan. The question of material authenticity is of a grave importance when talking about preserving historical buildings. In Japan, the idea of preserving the historical heritage varies from case to case. Horyuji Temple mentioned by the architect is a 1300-year-old temple, which is preserved in the way it was built back in the early 8th Century. On the other hand, Ise Grand Shrine is a shrine which is dismantled and build a new every 20-years since 690 AD. So the authenticity is a hundred percent in terms of technique and design (Munjeri D 2004), but it is assembled with new timber (with newest one dating back only to 2013) so the material authenticity is zero percent. Timber structures do last more than one would expect. In the case of residential buildings, they could easily last over 100 years provided that they are maintained. In historical cities like Kyoto there is a great number of residential buildings that were built well more than 100 years ago, and they now needs renewing. As seen in the example of Ise Grand Shrine, it is not in the culture of people in Japan to keep the old structure until it starts to fall apart. Gion South District choose to become the Ise Shrine by re-building and refurbishing using new timbers while keeping the same old style. In order to re-build an old building in any part of Japan, there is one major problem one must face. The 1950 amendment of the Building Standard Act (1995) states that all roads must have effective width of 4 meters, which means they have to have a setback in order to rebuild. This has been preventing them from renewing the buildings, mainly because they cannot afford to make the building area smaller than it already is. It is not favorable from preservation point of view either, as it will lead to discontinuity of the façades. Majority of the buildings in Gion South District is build along alleyways and therefore they had to deal with this situation promptly in negotiation with the local government. This paper will first introduce the key idea behind the strategy to preserve historical townscape in Japan, and then will introduce the case of Gion South District and how they dealt with every problem they had encountered. By doing so, it hopes for the strategy introduced here to become a point of reference for the preservation of other historic cities in Japan (and possibly other countries).

*Keywords : Kyoto, alleyways, streetscape, participation, preservation*

## References

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