



Conservation or economization? Industrial heritage conservation in Incheon, Korea



Mihye Cho^{a,*}, Sunghee Shin^b

^a Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS), Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD), 20 Dover Drive, 138682 Singapore

^b International Design Center (IDC), Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD), 20 Dover Drive, 138682 Singapore

A B S T R A C T

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Industrial heritage conservation advocates cultural, historical and economic significance of obsolete spaces and transforms them into viable places. Thus, it is often adopted in urban regeneration projects, which seek historic, esthetic and economic elevation of degenerated areas. Its policy domain has become multi-disciplinary. In this respect, to enrich a multi-disciplinary dialogue on conservation, this paper examines how a cultural policy project in Incheon, Korea, has dealt with industrial heritage. Specifically, it examines first, the processes through old spaces were rediscovered and institutionalized as heritage sites. Second, it investigates how the project has endeavored to keep balance between achieving cultural valorization and economic viability of obsolete spaces. The paper emphasizes that industrial heritage conservation involves not only adaptive re-use but also the creation of cultural values of obsolete spaces. The latter, especially, is a prerequisite to establishing and retaining heritage values and sites. If cultural initiatives that aim to create cultural values are operated as a tool for redevelopment and financial revenue-making, they might not play their best role in conservation. The paper concludes that conceptual consistency and shared values should guide public participation and conservation objectives and methods.

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Introduction: industrial heritage conservation as walking a tightrope

This paper examines an industrial heritage conservation effort in which a cultural policy pursued creating cultural values of obsolete spaces and making value-added heritage sites concurrently. In general, the conservation of historic environments requires maintaining a balance between preserving the past for its intrinsic value and accommodating new demands (Ashworth, 2000; Fahmi & Sutton, 2010). Yet, industrial heritage is a relatively new concept compared to other established heritage objects.¹

Accordingly, the intrinsic value of industrial built forms as heritage objects is not taken for granted. In this respect, industrial heritage conservation requires more than maintaining balance between preservation and adaptive re-use. It requires cultural valorization of obsolete spaces as heritage sites. In other words, it entails creating and legitimizing a new set of cultural meanings. Thus, industrial heritage conservation involves generating institutional rationales and schemes to create new cultural objects. On the other hand, it often encompasses the process of creating new functions for obsolete spaces. These aspects are essential in deciding appropriate conservation methods to preserve heritage values.

While industrial heritage is a relatively new concept, its policy domain has become multi-disciplinary² and it is fast adopted in urban projects, especially in the form of adaptive re-use for urban regeneration. In general, industrial heritage conservation is concerned with advocating cultural significance of obsolescent industrial spaces and transforming them into both culturally and

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +65 6303 6671.

E-mail addresses: mihyecho@sutd.edu.sg (M. Cho), sunghee_shin@sutd.edu.sg (S. Shin).

¹ Since the Venice Charter in 1964, the scope of heritage has broadened to include environments and intangible elements (Ahmad, 2006; Janssen, Luiten, Renes, & Rouwendal, 2012; Landorf, 2009; Rössler, 2006). Yet, in terms of industrial heritage, cultural elites used to define heritage as grand and aesthetically worthy of adoration and thus, everyday life and labor within industrial heritage discourses were given relatively less attention than technological and architectural significance (Shackel, Smith, & Campbell, 2011; Smith, 2006). Also, academic research that evaluates industrial heritage valorization began to gain some currency in the 1990s (Leung & Soye, 2009).

² Heritage policies communicate with other public policies due to common interests in social inclusion, urban regeneration and economic revitalization (Rautenberg, 2012; Rössler, 2006; Turnpenny, 2004). Thus, in order to link heritage conservation with such broader spatial and socio-economic issues, multi-disciplinary approaches toward conservation have been proposed.

economically viable places. This makes it possible to connect it with urban regeneration, which seeks historic, esthetic and economic elevation of degenerated areas. Thus, industrial heritage conservation can be imagined as one of the urban development models. It should be asked, however, whether one of the two elements of industrial heritage conservation (i.e. attaining cultural values and economic viability of obsolete spaces) might be over-emphasized and what consequences might result.

The close relationship between heritage sites and local communities has led conservation to address cultural, spatial and economic concerns. Because conservation efforts encompass this broad range of concerns, a collaborative planning system becomes necessary to coordinate the efforts of stakeholders and diverse planning agencies. This paper acknowledges the importance of collaboration and the establishment of institutional networks and collaboration for heritage conservation. Thus, the paper addresses the possible difficulty in industrial heritage conservation that might arise from creating cultural values of obsolete spaces and economic viability of heritage sites simultaneously. Thereby, it aims to enrich a dialogue for heritage conservation between diverse policy domains.

As a case study, it examines the processes by which old spaces were rediscovered, institutionalized and administered as heritage sites in a deteriorated old town in Incheon, Korea, where urban regeneration efforts have sought economic and cultural revitalization concurrently. Second, it investigates how this project has endeavored to keep balance between achieving cultural values and economic viability of obsolete spaces under the contour of integrated urban regeneration. Thereby, this research aims to discuss how to contribute to multi-disciplinary industrial heritage conservation policies. For that, the paper elucidates the process of implementing the Treaty Port Cultural District (CD), which began in the mid 2000s as part of the local initiatives to conserve the old town. In order to analyze the frames of governmental intervention and public participation (Obuljen, 2006; Van Dijk, Noelle, & De Wit, 2011), it examines policy and planning documents concerning the old town conservation and regeneration in Incheon, which have been produced in the last 10 years. It also analyzes interview content, surveys and the minutes of public hearings and seminars, which were collected during the policy preparation period in 2010.

The old town: becoming the 'modern' town in the 'post-modern' period

Incheon is located at the west side of Seoul facing the Yellow Sea. It is the third largest city in South Korea with almost 2.9 million and the site of the third largest harbor and the biggest international airport. Yet, it used to be a small fishing port until 1883 when it became an open treaty port, where Japan, China, Russia, Britain and the US created their own concessions and settlements (Fig. 1).

From a 'modern' town in the 19th century to an 'industrial' city in the 20th century

The port area in Incheon soon became one of the most international and modernized places in Korea. In 1905, Japan won the Russo-Japanese war and colonized Korea. Consequently, Incheon became one of the Japanese colonial ports (Fig. 2).

Then, the port, the concession area and the neighboring areas, now collectively known as the old town, became the center of the municipal administration, education and commerce during the Japanese colonization period (1905–1945). Later during the Korean War between 1950 and 1953, it served as a crucial battlefield, where the UN troops landed in order to counter-attack the North

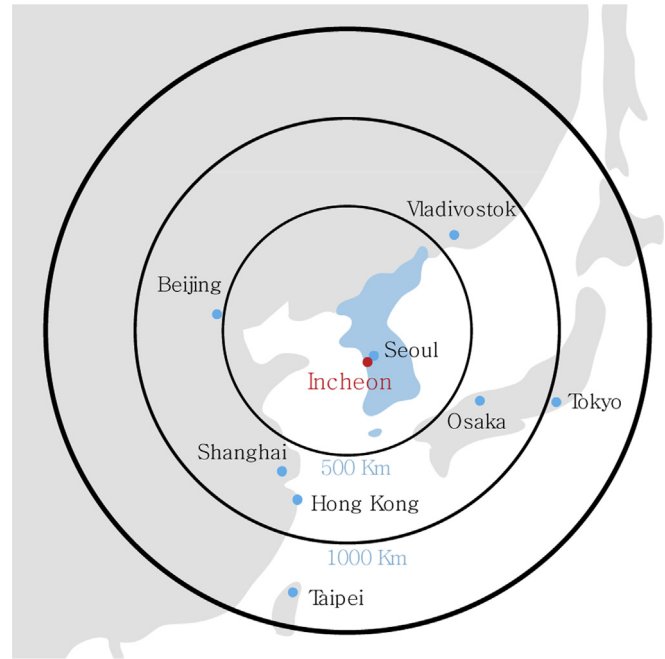


Fig. 1. The location of Incheon.

Korean and Chinese troops and consequently the city was heavily damaged.

After the war, the city became an outer harbor city of the Great Seoul Metropolitan Industrial Complex and mainly facilitated the manufacturing industries. Since the mid 1980s, the development of new towns and the degenerating manufacturing industries have made the old town the most de-industrializing area in the city. Facing the transition of the national economy toward the

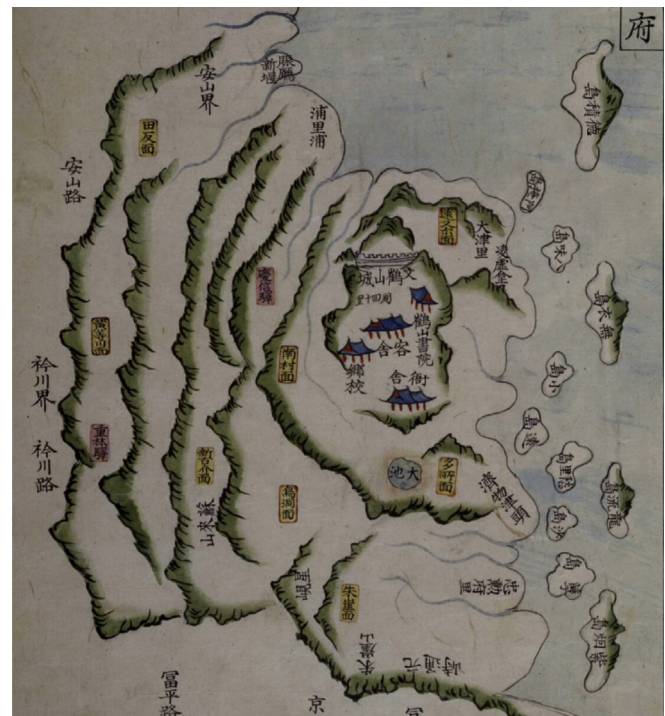


Fig. 2. The Port area in Incheon in an old map of Chosun Dynasty (Jin & Shin, 2006: 2).

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