

## Looking East: urban morphology in China, Japan and Korea

Prescient thinkers were long ago foretelling the twenty-first century as the century of the East, as Choong-Ryeol Kim has reminded us.<sup>1</sup> Few would now question that foresight, at least in so far as it referred to the world of affairs and the central role therein of economic development. In the world of research and scholarship the great contribution of Eastern Asia in the past is widely acknowledged, though not well understood in the West.

Emerging late in the twentieth century, ISUF and this journal immediately adopted a world view, rather than just a Western one. Eastern research was represented in both the first issue of *Urban Morphology* and the first major conference of ISUF, and ISUF's International Urban Form Study sprang out of a Korean initiative. Nevertheless, contributions to the journal from, or about, the East have hitherto been relatively few in number.

The reasons for this are much the same as those for the sparsity of contributions from and about the East in a wide range of journals in the English language. Prominent among these are powerful language divides between Eastern Asia and the West, especially between China and the West, and the problems of access by researchers in the East to Western sources of information, and vice versa. Western publications, especially academic journals, are generally very expensive to Eastern universities relative to their other library costs.

Among many Westerners such problems are scarcely separable from circumspection about, if not antipathy to, crossing cultural divides, especially of the magnitude of those between East and West. As in so many fields, especially among the humanities and social sciences, in urban morphology there is little evidence of the general body of Western researchers extending their compass beyond the familiar worlds of Euro-America. A major part of the problem across a wide range of humanities and social sciences is the domination by Western-run, Western-orientated 'international' journals and bibliographies, the large majority of which are actually international only within the anglophone world, or at best the Euro- American world.<sup>2</sup>

In the case of *Urban Morphology*, a journal predisposed towards a truly international coverage, there is no gainsaying the problems of rectifying this narrowness of perspective. For both authors and editors, practical problems loom large. Not least, there is the major difficulty of effective communication by authors for whom English is not their first language, especially when their language is as different from English as Chinese, Japanese and Korean. Indeed, well before attempting to produce a polished English-language version of an article there are other obstacles to be overcome. Inevitably referees are from time to time faced with the difficult task of advising on articles in a language other than their own. At all stages, from research through to published article, there are problems relating to differences between cultures. These include not only those inherent in the subject matter of articles but also those relating to the very nature of the way in which research and scholarship are undertaken and the results communicated. All of these issues need to be satisfactorily addressed if the articles eventually published are to do justice to the research that they report.

Within urban morphology, there is still a considerable way to go before there is a substantial flow of articles that communicate East Asian research. However, the contents of this issue of the journal suggest that progress is being made towards bringing those working in the Far East into a wider network of urban morphological researchers.

Following two contributions on China in the previous issue of *Urban Morphology*, Japan is the subject of three contributions in this issue. Shigeru Satoh explores further (pp. 5-10) the theme of Japanese castle towns that he discussed in the very first issue of *Urban Morphology*; Junichi Hasegawa discusses (pp. 11-24) the reconstruction of bombed cities in Japan after the Second World War; and Estelle Ducom (pp. 53-4) draws attention to the neglected subject of urban contraction in Japan. There are also reports on two recent conferences, one in Beijing (with Chinese and Korean sponsors) and the other in London (with British sponsors), that have addressed the growing role of the East on the world stage (pp. 35-6). Looking ahead, information is also provided in this issue about ISUF's first conference in China, in 2009 (pp. 51-2).

Improvements in East-West intercommunication, whether in conferences, journals or some other form, such as research collaboration, are a cause for celebration. However, there is an urgent need to look beyond the process of interactions between East and West to their substance. As China follows Japan and South Korea in explosive

economic development, keenly aware of Western precedents, it is crucial for both East and West that cultural issues are addressed. Borrowing from the West is one thing: the sublimation of Eastern culture to Western culture is another.

Urban morphologists have a major role to play in elucidating Eastern urban forms as embodiments of culture and in communicating their findings to an international readership. This relates to both the intrinsic importance of their findings and to the basis they provide for urban landscape conservation. Though the study of urban landscapes is particularly an aid to learning about the past and how urban forms can be maintained and adapted within existing urban areas, it is also an important source of experience from which the creation of new landscapes can benefit.<sup>3</sup> In an era and in a part of the world in which economic needs are overwhelmingly powerful influences on the nature and speed of change, it is especially important that societies remain conscious of their roots. Research on the nature, historical development and future roles of inherited cultural landscapes has an important place in maintaining and enhancing this consciousness.

#### Notes

1. Kim, C-R. (2007) 'Is the 21st century an era of the East?', *Beijing Forum Newsletter* 2(2), 45.
2. See, for example, Gutiérrez, J. and López-Nieva, P. (2001) 'Are international journals of human geography really international?', *Progress in Human Geography* 25, 53-69.
3. See, for example, McGlynn, S. and Samuels, I. (2000) 'The funnel, the sieve and the template: towards an operational urban morphology', *Urban Morphology* 4, 79-89.

*J.W.R. Whitehand*