

**OPONENTSKÝ POSUDEK NA DISERTAČNÍ PRÁCI ALEXANDRY ZIMT**  
**Colonial urban heritage and city images in East Asia: Case study of Kobe and Incheon**

The aim of the present study was to investigate the built remnants from the colonial period in the two cities – Kobe (Japan) and Incheon (South Korea), and their perceived images, among their inhabitants, particularly of „danger“ and „oldness“. The author focused on how these images coincide with the official branding of those cities or generally perpetuated stereotypical images of the cities.

The theme is embedded in the subdiscipline of social anthropology – namely urban anthropology. As research in urban anthropology is „heavy disciplinary“ (p. 4), and since the other aim is to discuss the relevance of post-colonial sensibilities for place image creation, the theoretical-methodological framework is enlarged by a whole host of relevant (sub)fields – anthropology of policy, urban planning, social geography, historical anthropology, anthropology of tourism and food, and/or collective memory studies. The author’s theoretical-methodological frame is ethnography of sense-scapes and post-colonial studies. The prime methodological tool the author chose is case study, actually two case studies. The reasons for this option are relevant and legitimate. Focusing on the two „ordinary cities“ seems to successfully fill up the gap within current research interest in social sciences.

The author carried out a 10-month stationary fieldwork in both the research sites, plus another two months of a renewed stay. The length of the empirical research is thus fully acceptable.

Research questions (*Is it possible to apply the settler urban legacy framework onto built forms in the open ports of Kobe and Incheon? How do the built remnants in contemporary Kobe and Incheon enter into the city images their inhabitants have about the city? What do the inhabitants of said cities think about these remnants, what signifiers they associate with them? What do the personal images and individual landscapes of a city contain? How is the “old” buildings and areas perceived in Kobe and Incheon? Do post-colonial sensibilities exist vis-à-vis the “heritage houses” and are they relevant to their general perception by the locals? What other elements influence the image of a city or an area?*) are as broad as is the interdisciplinary framework: It would probably work better (in terms of structuring and reaching a higher level of user friendliness) if there was one principal research question extended by a set of sub-questions. However, in general, I find the RQs well-thought and viable. Yet, once the first RQ is to be the most important, it is not a good choice in my mind as it invokes a deductive method, while the key argument is built on emic perceptions.

On the whole, the argument is clear and relevant. The depth of analysis/interpretation is more than adequate, embedded both in the author’s vast knowledge of secondary literature, her familiarity with the studied areas, and the empirical research. The structure of the text seems a bit confusing at first sight (14 sections consisting of many sub-sections – honestly, I sometimes got lost in the abundance of facts) but it makes perfect sense once the reading is over. The author might have made the reading more user-friendly if she explained the whole structure more in detail in Introduction, particularly *the connection* between the chapters.

I find this dissertation well-thought, well-written, well-researched, actually an excellent academic work. Below are some more detailed notes on the structure and formal aspects, containing some minor critical comments that should not be viewed as weaknesses and thus should not destroy my overwhelmingly positive impression.

Detailed review on structure:

The chapters could have been organised in such a way that the reader gets a step-by-step understanding of how the key arguments develop. Such comment that however lacks in Introduction would have seemed necessary.

In the historical section, Chapter 2, the author rightly points to the relevant aspects of history when it comes to the studied issue, such as the settler nature of colonialism in East Asia, and the subsequent postcolonial-sensitivities, that are instrumental in understanding the predicament of the social construction of “heritage”.

This particular chapter is strangely composed of historical and theoretical sections. The former is right in place while the latter is confusing, due to the announced interdisciplinarity, as it focuses theoretically just on one concept, namely heritage. I think a) it could have made a separate chapter, b) it could have been enlarged by other concepts used in the text.

Chapter 3 on Methodology and sources is well-thought and well written. The chosen method of a bricolage of archival study, public policy analysis, prolonged field observation and semi-structured interviews is right in place. Also, the literature review is satisfactory though the section on Anthropology of Tourism could have been presented in a more detailed form. As it is in the dissertation paper, it reminds rather of a list of recommended literature.

I really appreciate the way the author deals with the sensitive issues related to her fieldwork, be that her positionality, reflexivity, temporality or power asymmetries. Through this, the author critically challenges the alleged universality of the methodological-advice textbooks.

Chapter 4 dealing with the spatial arrangements and built environments of Kobe and Chemulpo and its legacies within A. King’s concept of settler urban legacy, is clear and concise, yielding a good deal of understanding of the studied phenomena. I appreciated the author’s critical perspective of the concept of settler urban legacy as an analytical tool that is apparently of lesser use in the present study. Besides pointing out the multiplicity of the „first cultures“ in the research sites, the author could have equally thematized it within the culturalist turn, that is the shift from the concept of culture as a bounded unit – first, second, third culture - to the discourse of culture as collective identity.

Though the chapter is generally packed with information, the author never uses simplistic argumentation. On the contrary, she is capable of explaining in an intelligible way the complex situation of the seemingly simple terms such as „native town“, „heritage houses“, and the like. The subchapter 4.3 is rich in the information input, sometimes I got lost in the flow of geographical names of the objects I have no knowledge of, as well as in an extremely detailed account (see for example the description of a Chinatown in Incheon, p. 71). Really difficult to read. A map of illustrations might have eased the reader’s orientation, except for the existing summary (maps are part of Appendix but it will be more user-friendly when some of them were shifted to the core text, for a better orientation in geography).

Chapter 5 looks into the places and areas through urban ethnography, perceived by the informants. The “city landscapes” they created is complex and varied, as the author convincingly shows in the text. What is however disturbing is a recurring statement of hers that this and this aspect will be expanded on in next chapters. It contributes to an “unfinished business”, when it comes to the data processing.

Chapter 6 explores commemorative events, city festivals and their role in the city imagery, while Chapter 7 examines sensescapes. The emic perceptions of the senses, often complex and conflicting, are well-presented and interpreted, through the author’s deep knowledge of the studied locality.

Chapter 8 is devoted to conflicting images of „old“. The author persuasively argues that multiple narratives coexist and intertwine in the studied areas.

Chapter 9 examining the colonial discourse and the city images convincingly argues how on personal levels, the images and memory can starkly differ from the general (political) discourse. Moreover, her statement that the “decolonization” as a concept is an intellectual construct that was not very relevant to everyday feeling and city-image-creation of her informants, is fully supported by empirical findings. However, recent politicization of the colonial-era “heritage houses” shows the volatility of such a statement.

Chapter 10, dealing with leisure activities (pop culture and eating out) as constituents of city images might seem detached from the core text at first sight but finally it is well integrated in the argument/dilemma.

Discussion (chapter 11) expands on the concept of decolonization and post-colonial sensibilities the author did (not) encounter during her fieldwork. She admits that unlike her preconceptions (in the Korean case at least), post-colonial sensibilities and narratives were not a relevant topic for most of her informants, at least for those who could be labelled as „non-engaged citizens“. The way she challenges the universal relevance of post-colonial sensibilities is perhaps one of the strongest arguments of the work. In other words, the current trend in social sciences, and anthropology in particular, in revealing contention and contestation literary in every corner of social reality, is juxtaposed, even confronted with an equally significant perspective into the „what is not contested“ (p. 221). She rightly reflects her scholarly background valuing engagement and intellectualism to see the limits which may severely impact on the research design and its outputs, namely the tendency to pay attention to the *engaged* informants, while neglecting the non-engaged.

Conclusion summarizes the main arguments and findings based on vast empirical research. However, the author could have got back to her research questions more explicitly and with a critical eye on them. On the positive note, once again, she mentions the absence of the post-colonial sensibilities among her informants, in relation to the „heritage houses“ and subsequently the relevance of non-engaged informants for ethnographies of conflict and contention (p. 224). Thus, the work seems to be a huge contribution to all three levels of scientific inquiry – ontological, epistemological and methodological.

The work is enriched with a glossary of native terms and place names which shows a high proficiency in the author’s geographical and linguistic knowledge on Korea(n)/Japan(ese), as well as her sensitivities to make the reading more accessible to the less knowledgeable readership.

Bibliography is both vast and relevant. The appendix contains lots of relevant photos and maps.

#### Formal aspects

In general, the language and style are on a very high level. The text reads well. There are just some minor typos, like Austria/Austrians, instead of Australia/Australians, p. 7., or Salemnik (Salemnink), p. 10, and minor grammatical mistakes (e.g., ...”their rents has been abolished...”, p. 10). Sometimes the references to literature are misplaced, e.g., Kobe and Incheon were on one hand not crowded but perceived as sufficient for one’s city routines (Frantál and Maryáš 2012). Introduction should stay without numbering, thus Chapter 2 is actually Chapter 1 (and the like).

### Conclusion

In sum, I find this dissertation work a valuable addition to the corpus of writing on colonial urban heritage and city images. One of the strong points of this thesis is its critical attitude; the concepts are not taken for granted but closely questioned. By adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the author succeeded in providing a complex and nuanced interpretation of the studied phenomena. When published, it seems to attract a wider readership than a strictly anthropological audience.

Therefore, **I fully recommend this dissertation thesis to be successfully defended.**

Hana Horáková

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