INTRODUCTION

The National Heritage North Gate in Taipei came into being along with the establishment of Taipei Walled City of Chinese Ching Dynasty in 1884 and served as its northern entrance. Taiwan was soon ceded to Japan in 1895 for defeated compensation after the Sino-Japanese War of the previous year. Soon after, the city wall was disastrously removed and turned into a three-lane boulevard on the basis of the Plan of Urban Correction of 1904 and only four of the five gates, including the North Gate, luckily remained. After WWII, the Chinese Nationalist Government took over Taiwan and in 1966 it remodeled the features of three of the four gates for tourism. The North Gate was spared and kept its authenticity as it was then due to be removed for traffic relief. Fortunately it survived owing to the appeal from conservation enthusiasts but it was then trapped in the network of automobile causeways and was almost mistreated, though its cultural significance was recognized and it was designated as national heritage in 1983. In 2015 the Taipei City Government promoted the Portal Project of the Western District, which analogized the importance of the North Gate to Taipei to that of the Arc de Triomphe to Paris. Accordingly, the North Gate was finally released from the causeway network in February 2016 and was fully endowed with the pride of cultural significance.

THE TAIPEI WALLED CITY AND THE NORTH GATE

At the beginning of rule on Taiwan, the emperors of Ching China used to overlook this frontier island as dispensable and had never thought it necessary to build any walled city to protect governance. They even supposed that a walled city would run risk of providing a firm fort for rebels and had turned down appeals from local officers and people. For safety, local people and officers often raised fund by themselves to build some expedient versions of fortified enclosure, made of wood, bamboo or earth. The situation had not changed until the occurrence of Mudan Incident, the Japanese punitive expedition to Taiwan, in 1874. The Ching imperial court finally realized the importance of building solid walled city for defense. In 1875 the Taipei Prefecture was established to administer the three counties in northern Taiwan and a firm walled city was allowed to construct to accommodate the administration. The Taipei walled City was started in 1882 and completed in 1884 and was one of the only few made of brick-stone, which was more solid like a citadel and more permanent. The stone was mostly derived from local quarry and the master craftsmen were recruited from Canton.

SURVIVAL FROM DEMOLITION THREATS

Taiwan was receded to Japan after the Sino-Japanese War (1894), and the Taipei city wall was removed soon after (1904). Originally the five gates were scheduled to remove but only one of them, the West Gate, actually disappeared in 1905. The rest were spared as a result of the appeal from Japanese intellectuals, which was approved by the first Head of Civilian Affairs of Taiwan Gotō Shinkéi (1857-1929). The gates were even designated as historic monuments in 1935. It was admirable that the colonizers were willing to acknowledge the cultural significance of the establishment by the colonized and spare its demolition. The Japanese colonization was over after WWII and the four gates were then in the hand of Chinese Republican government. The Taipei Walled City was constructed in the style of southern China. Under the scheme of city embellishment, three of the four gates were remodeled in the palace style of the Northern China in 1966. (Fig.1) The palace style was considered more prestigious and noble and reflected the authority of the central government of the Republican Chinese. The North Gate luckily remained its original features by coincidence. At that time, an elevated road, called the Chungsiao Bridge Causeway, was planned, though actually built in 1982, which would cross exactly where the North Gate stands. So, the North Gate was left not to remodel because it was scheduled to demolish. After the appeal for remain by conservation enthusiastic scholars and citizens, the causeway was shifted to spare the gate. Despite the survival, the gate was trapped in a three-dimensional traffic network and the nearest distance between the gate and the causeway was just 60 cm. Since then, the gate and the causeway have co-existed for 34 years. (Fig.2)

RETURN TO PAST AND LEAD TO FUTURE

It was not until 2016 when one of the urban renewal plans of Taipei City, the Portal Project of the Western District, was put into practice that the North Gate got the chance to resume its free standing. (Fig.3) The causeway, more than 750 meters long, was finally removed within seven days in the lunar new year season of 2016. The gate was carefully shielded to prevent from damage caused by the removal work. For this time, the North Gate was ultimately released from a three-dimensional traffic jungle. Even more, its importance was expected to be equivalent to the Arc de Triomphe of Paris. Following the realization of the Portal Project of the Western District, it was located at the core of an irregular plaza enclosed by traffic roads, officially named the North Gate Plaza. The plaza was installed with intellectual attractions associated with the gate, which mainly narrated the history of the Taipei Walled City and the North Gate, illustrated with carved words and pictures. Beyond the enclosed roads, the plaza was overlooked by or was easily accessible to several important heritage buildings. (Fig.4) The Portal Project of the Western District aimed to reorganize the ground road system around the Taipei Main Station. It would also integrate high rise commercial towers with heritage buildings. Thus, it would not only regain its past glory, but also play new roles which establish a new front door for Taipei and will lead the city to head toward the future.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

For the past 130 years, the North Gate had survived several crises of removal. It came to existence along with the Taipei Walled City. It has gone through three political eras: the Ching, the Japanese and the Chinese Republican, revealing ideology of governance of poles apart. After a long period of political and social change, it is the only remain of the original walled city. This paper aims to elucidate how the North Gate came into being, how it was threatened to vanish in face of several convincingly critical moments due to regime transfer and unwise urban development, and how it survived crises as a result of coincidence and of good luck out of the timely appeal for reservation from key figures with a vision. On the whole, it is an example and shed light on the issue of survival from disaster for a building of cultural significance.

CONTACT

Bor-Shuenn Chiu
Taipei National University of the Arts, Taiwan
Email: papiershiou@gmail.com
Phone: 886-952-415731
Website: http://ach.tnua.edu.tw/