History of the Pedicab

Beginnings

The modern day pedicab evolved from the Jinrikisha (literally: "man powered car") introduced in Yokohama Japan by Baptist Missionary Jonathan Goble in 1871 (1). The explosion of the Jinrikisha or "rickshaw", as a means of economical transportation is credited to Akiha Daisuke who made several improvements upon the original model. While there are vague references (illustrations and art) to a similar human drawn vehicle operating in France in the mid-seventeenth century, the concept never really took hold in Europe. It is thought that a combination of poor timing and a lack of technology were principal reasons for it's absence. (2)

The Jinrikisha replaced the Kago, a litter carried on poles on the shoulders of two men, as a more efficient and convenient form of transportation. By 1874 the human pulled rickshaw was exported throughout Asia and their numbers were growing every year. At the height of their popularity near the end of the nineteenth century, there were close to 200,000 rickshaws in Japan. (3) The first cycle rickshaws began to appear in Singapore in the late 1920's (4) and Thailand in the early 1930's (5), these were called "Trishaws" based on their tricycle design. The trishaws became most popular during WW II as a means of providing efficient transportation while dealing with fuel shortages during the war.

Just as the Jinrikisha replaced the Kago, the cycle-rickshaw began to replace it's human-pulled counterpart. By the mid-twentieth century, most of the traditional Jinrikisha had been forced out of business either by government bans, competition from the cycle-rickshaws or other more modern forms of rapid transportation.

A Rose is a Rose...

The cycle-rickshaw can be found in many countries with some basic consistency of design features. Known by many different names, they are all variations of the modern day Pedicab. Tony Wheeler and Richard l'Anson provide an excellent history of the rickshaw in text and pictures in their book "Chasing Rickshaws". From the jacket notes: "Whether it's called a trishaw, sidecar, pedicab, cyclo or becak, it's the true Asian taxicab"

Arrested Development

Little has changed in the design and construction of the cycle-rickshaw over the last 50 years, Wheeler addresses this in his text and points to the following factors: (6)

Colonialism. Little pre-WW II trade between locales where cycle-rickshaws were popular and the isolation of individual countries that occurred during the war forced each country to rely upon their own design interpretations.

No large scale production. Production was very localized and generally consisted of assembling an array of available parts. No one manufacturer ever made enough to really push for improved design features.
Design Compromise. In many instances, cycle-rickshaws were built using standard bicycle parts that were ill suited for the rigors of the cycle-rickshaw.

In recent years, design issues have been addressed as we have seen the introduction of rigid one-piece frames, rear differentials, front and rear brakes, the use of hydraulic disk brakes and electronic assist. But these advances come at a cost and the modern day pedicab manufactured in the West complete with all these features can cost 10 times that of a new traditional cycle-rickshaw made in the East.

Perhaps the high cost of these newer pedicabs is a driving force in the alternative designs that are available and in use by modern day cabbies, too, it may be a primary reason the industry is structured the way it is. The similarities between the current pedicab industry and that of the Jinrikisha, are remarkable. Many drivers lease or rent their cabs from a fleet owner, paying a flat fee or a percentage of daily profits (or both) because they cannot afford to own their own cab outright, a structure common among Jinrikisha pullers of old. Likewise, many of the current issues surrounding pedicab regulation, licensing, creating traffic congestion and overall driver behavior are no different than the essential complaints local administrations had with Jinrikishas and their pullers at the turn of the century.

References Cited


ref.: http://www.popsedicabs.com/Pedicab%20Information/historyofthepedi.html

Philippines

The Padyak or pedicab (Bisaya: traysikad or sikad) is a manually-powered form of transportation in the Philippines, usually for short distances. It is made up of a bicycle attached to a sidecar and has a capacity of two to three passengers. Pedicabs commonly operate in subdivisions or urban communities.

"Padyak" and "sikad" literally mean "to pedal".


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