

From Cultural Heritage to Cultural Resource

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1. Cultural heritage and cultural property

Bunkaisan, cultural heritage, is the term used to denote the cultural artifacts commonly recognized in a certain country or region as being worth passing on to future generations due to their high historical, artistic or academic value. The term was originally a literal rendering of the original English, but it is now completely normalized, and is part of everyday speech. At Kanazawa University I even teach a course entitled “Cultural Heritage Studies”.

But what is the impression held toward the term *isan*, “heritage”? Looking at the Kojien Japanese dictionary, the definition given is: estate left after death; the property held by a person at the time of their death. The characters, 遺産, show the meaning: it refers to the property or estate (産) remaining (遺) after death. Therein we can perceive the nuance of that which is “left behind”.

There is a *senryu*, a type of humorous haiku, from the Edo period (1603-1868) that goes as follows:

House for sale
Writes the grandson
In fancy Chinese script

The grandfather, the first generation, toiled without rest to build up an estate, which the father, the second generation, has managed to maintain. But the grandson, the third generation, who knew nothing but wealth since his birth, has wasted his family fortune on arts and leisure (hence the fancy script). In Japanese, therefore, the term used for heritage, *isan*, seems to imply something that will eventually be lost.

By contrast, “heritage” in English has the same root as heir, inherit and heredity; it means something that is inherited from generation to generation. So the Japanese translation for heritage, *isan*, and the original English term, heritage, have slight differences in linguistic nuance.

Cultural heritage (*bunkaisan*) is often used synonymously with the term *bunkazai*, which is referred to as

cultural property in English. It is not known whether this latter term, *bunkazai*, was introduced into Japanese as a translation of the English term (or indeed a term from any other language). This was the term employed in the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties, enacted in 1950, and with the subsequent establishment of the National Research Institutes for Cultural Properties in Tokyo and Nara, it took root as a term used in legal and governmental contexts. The meaning of “property” in English is restricted to “physical assets”, and does not have the sense of something “left behind”, which makes it an appropriate term for that which should be handed down to future generations. In recent years, however, *bunkaisan* (cultural heritage) has come to be used more widely (for example, in China, the term *wénhuàyíchǎn* (文化遺產、cultural heritage) is becoming entrenched), so I will use this term in this chapter.

2. Legislative innovation in the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties

The Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties, formulated and enacted in 1950, integrated a number of edicts and decrees that had previously been in place into a single piece of legislation. The catalyst for the legislation had been the loss, through fire, of the Horyu-ji Kondo Wall Paintings in 1949.

The purpose of the legislation and the definition of cultural property are set out in Articles 1 and 2 as follows.

Article 1: Purpose of the Present law

The purpose of the present law is to preserve and utilize cultural property objects so that the cultural quality of the nation can be enhanced, thereby contributing to the evolution of world culture.

Article 2: Definition of Cultural Property

“An object of cultural property” in the present law shall be as follows:

(1) Buildings, pictures, sculptures, applied crafts, calligraphic works, classical books, ancient documents, and other tangible cultural products that are of significant historical or artistic value to Japan (including lands and other objects which are combined with these objects to create such value): archaeological and other historical resources of significant scientific value (hereinafter referred to as **“Tangible Cultural Property”**);

(2) Drama, music, applied art, and other intangible cultural products that are of a significant historical or artistic value to Japan (hereinafter referred to as **“Intangible Cultural Property”**);

(3) (i) Manners and customs related to food, clothing and housing, to occupations, to religious faiths, and to annual festivals, etc.; (ii) folk performing arts; (iii) folk skills; (iv) clothes, utensils, houses and other objects used therefore, which are indispensable to the understanding of changes in the mode of life of Japan (hereinafter referred to as **“Folk Cultural Property”**);

(4) (i) Shell mounds, tumuli, sites of fortified capitals, sites of forts, sites of castles, monument houses and other sites, which are of significant historical or scientific value to Japan; (ii) gardens, bridges, gorges, sea-shores, mountains, and other places of scenic beauty, which are of significant artistic or aesthetic value of Japan; (iii) animals (including their habitats, breeding areas and trails), plants (including their self-seeded areas), and geological features and minerals (including the areas where peculiar natural phenomena are recognizable), which are of significant scientific value to Japan (hereinafter referred to as **“Monuments”**);

(5) Landscapes that have been created by people’s lives or occupations in their community as well as by the climate prevailing in such community, and which are indispens-

able to the understand of the mode of life or occupation of Japan (hereinafter referred to as **“Cultural Landscapes”**);

(6) Groups of traditional buildings of a high value, which form a certain historic configuration in combination with their environments (hereinafter referred to as a **“Groups of Traditional Buildings”**)

Article 2-5 on Cultural Landscapes and Article 2-6 on Groups of Traditional Buildings were added later to the Law, but sections 1-4 were in place in the original 1950 law (subject to certain amendments and additions to the wording).

Firstly, of note is the wording of Article 1: “utilize cultural property objects so that the cultural quality of the nation can be enhanced, thereby contributing to the evolution of world culture.” The content referred to by the terms “utilize” and “contribute” is very close to the concept of “cultural resources” referred to later in the chapter.

Further, the part about “contributing to the evolution of world culture” is also of note. If we were to rephrase it in more modern terms, it would likely be more along the lines of: “thereby contributing to the creation of new human culture through the preservation of cultural diversity”.

Article 2 mentions “intangible cultural property” and “folk cultural property” (previously referred to as “folk materials”), and it is significant that these properties are referred to as holding the same value as “tangible cultural property” and “monuments”. This is something that did not conceptually exist before the Pacific War. The fact that from around 60 years ago, the value of that which had no form and that which was related to the day-to-day lives of ordinary people was formally acknowledged, and that legislation was established to protect and promote the value of such culture, was considered to be very innovative and was celebrated internationally.

Taking China as an example, the Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics, formulated and enacted in 1982, gives the following 5 categories for the cultural relics which the state should protect:

(1) Sites of ancient culture, ancient tombs, ancient architectural structures, cave temples, stone carving and murals that are of

historical, artistic or scientific value;

(2) Important modern and contemporary historic sites, material objects and typical buildings are related to major historical events, revolutionary movements or famous personalities and that are highly memorable or are of great significance for education or for the preservation of historical data;

(3) Valuable works of art and handicraft articles dating from various historical periods;

(4) Important documents dating from various historical periods and manuscripts, books and materials etc. that are of historical, artistic or scientific value; and

(5) Typical material objects reflecting the social system, social production or the life of various nationalities in different historical periods.

“Cultural property (*bunkazai*)” is often used as the translation for “cultural relics (*wénwù*)”. However, as a legal term, “cultural property” in Japanese includes tangible cultural property, intangible cultural property, folk cultural property, monuments, cultural landscapes, and groups of traditional buildings, while the scope of the Chinese term *wénwù* is limited to “tangible cultural property” and “monuments”.

According to recent reports, on February 25, 2011, China’s National People’s Congress Standing Committee approved a law on intangible cultural heritage, which was enacted on June 1 of the same year. In other words, 60 years after a similar law was enacted in Japan, China finally moved to set out the protection of intangible cultural property and folk cultural property in law.

It is not the case, however, that China alone has been particularly delayed in drawing up legislation. The World Heritage Convention, properly the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, was adopted at the 1972 UNESCO conference, but it was not until the 32nd UNESCO conference in 2003, 31 years later, that the Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention, properly the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, was adopted. The formulation of that convention was the result of the tireless efforts of Koichiro Matsuura, former Director-General of UNESCO,

and it is also well known that he received strong support from the Japanese government in his endeavours (Reference 1). In this sense, Japan carried out its duty as a pioneer in the conservation of intangible and folk cultural property.

3. The issue of universal value in the World Heritage Convention

The preamble to the World Heritage Convention, which aims to conserve cultural heritage and natural heritage, and its definition of cultural heritage stated in Article 1 are as follows:

The General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization meeting in Paris from 17 October to 21 November 1972, at its seventeenth session,

Noting that the cultural heritage and the natural heritage are increasingly threatened with destruction not only by the traditional causes of decay, but also by changing social and economic conditions which aggravate the situation with even more formidable phenomena of damage or destruction,

Considering that deterioration or disappearance of any item of the cultural or natural heritage constitutes a harmful impoverishment of **the heritage of all the nations of the world,**

Considering that protection of this heritage at the national level often remains incomplete because of the scale of the resources which it requires and of the insufficient economic, scientific, and technological resources of the country where the property to be protected is situated,

Recalling that the Constitution of the Organization provides that it will maintain, increase, and diffuse knowledge by assur-

ing the conservation and protection of the world's heritage, and recommending to the nations concerned the necessary international conventions,

Considering that the existing international conventions, recommendations and resolutions concerning cultural and natural property demonstrate the importance, **for all the peoples of the world**, of safeguarding this unique and irreplaceable property, to whatever people it may belong,

Considering that parts of the cultural or natural heritage are of outstanding interest and therefore need to be preserved as part of the **world heritage of mankind as a whole**,

Considering that, in view of the magnitude and gravity of the new dangers threatening them, it is incumbent on the international community as a whole to participate in the protection of the cultural and natural heritage of **outstanding universal value**, by the granting of collective assistance which, although not taking the place of action by the State concerned, will serve as an efficient complement thereto,

Considering that it is essential for this purpose to adopt new provisions in the form of a convention establishing an effective system of collective protection of the cultural and natural heritage of **outstanding universal value**, organized on a permanent basis and in accordance with modern scientific methods,

Having decided, at its sixteenth session, that this question should be made the subject of an international convention,

Adopts this sixteenth day of November 1972 this Convention.

Article 1: Definition of the Cultural Heritage

For the purpose of this Convention, the following shall be considered as “cultural heritage”:

monuments: architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science;

groups of buildings: groups of separate or connected buildings which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape, are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science;

sites: works of man or the combined works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view.

With regard to Article 1, the “cultural heritage” referred to is, much like that in the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics, focused on relics of tangible cultural property and monuments. So there is a strong likelihood that China's law on cultural relics is based on the World Heritage Convention.

But such investigations are not of the utmost relevance to this chapter, so we should focus on the real issue from here on in.

The most important part for consideration is to be found in the preamble, namely the emboldened parts and the concepts expressed therein: “the heritage of all the nations of the world”, “for all the peoples of the world”, “outstanding universal value”. The concept itself is simple, that there are many properties across the globe which are accepted by all of humankind as being of value and worthy of conservation into the future.

In a sense, this belief is an extremely optimistic one,

and indeed it has been betrayed over and over in the real world; this much we know. One of the most prominent examples of this kind of betrayal is the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan by the Taliban in 2001.

The Bamiyan Province was brought under Taliban rule in 1998. In February 2001, the Taliban announced that they intended to destroy the Buddhas of Bamiyan, which they stated represented a violation of Islam's commandment against the worship of idols. The reaction of the international community was immediate and pronounced; the Japanese government even sent an official delegation to try and negotiate with the Taliban.

One of the Taliban with whom the Japanese delegation negotiated was Abdul Salam Zaeef, then the Afghan ambassador to Pakistan. Zaeef was the "face" of the Taliban, and in his memoirs he talks about how the Japanese delegation suggested various methods to preserve the Buddhas of Bamiyan, such as dismantling and moving them to a different location, or covering them so that they might not be viewed by the general public (Reference 2).



Photo: The destroyed Buddhas of Bamiyan

Source: The Road to Restoring the Bamiyan Relics, destroyed by the Taliban. The giant Buddhas were draped in robes of crimson.

http://gigazine.net/news/20110228_barmiyian_buddhas/

Ultimately, none of these suggestions were accepted by the Taliban, and on March 12, 2001, both the East and West statues were destroyed by explosion. The video of the destruction was broadcast around the world. The video recording contained voices crying "Allahu Akbar" (God is the Greatest).

Of course it is not the case that all Muslims are as unforgiving as the Taliban. The Hazara people, who live in the region where the Buddhas were located, had seen the Buddhas as a proud symbol of their heritage, left to them by their ancestors. The destruction of the Buddhas may be seen as an act of propaganda, directed towards external parties.

It should be acknowledged, however, that frustration against the international community played a large role in the incident. At the time in the region, the turmoil of civil war was being compounded by drought, and many Afghans were becoming victims of starvation. The concerned reaction of the international community toward the conservation of two giant Buddhas, despite apparent indifference to the fate of the people living in the region, was clearly aggravating to that community (Reference 3).

The destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan shows just how paper-thin the "universal value" referred to in the World Heritage Convention is. It is only natural, perhaps, that a simple shift in position can change one's evaluation of cultural objects.

For example, the "polluter-pays principle" underpins the policy for buried cultural property. Where land containing buried cultural property is to be developed, the developer is required to conduct a preliminary excavation for the record and must meet all related costs. The position of the administration is that those relics which have a high value, either historical or academic, should be preserved, and that if such preservation is entirely impossible, records should be taken which can then be preserved. Again, the cost of such recording is to be met by the developer. In contrast, the position of the developer is that it is unfair to be expected to meet all additional costs—of the delay in starting working due to preliminary excavation, of the reduction in land value as a result of the buried relics and so on—under the "polluter pays" principle because of the discovery of randomly buried relics under land in their ownership.

The Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties and the World Heritage Convention mention "historical", "ar-

tistic” and “academic” value, but it is important to bear in mind that there may be friction between the people living in the area where the cultural property with value is located (or the bearers of that cultural property, in the case of an intangible item) and other groups and organizations.

- In a number of regions in America and Oceania, relics and human bones excavated by archaeologists and anthropologists have been obtained by opening up the ancestral graves of indigenous people. This has caused offence to the persons concerned and as a result the items have been returned and reburied.
- Attempts to register an Indian folk performing art as intangible cultural heritage (properly, Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity) were stalled by the opposition of the bearers of that heritage, who argued that since the performing art was directly linked to a particular caste, its registration would result in the exposure of something that would be discriminated against and would introduce the risk of the discrimination becoming entrenched.
- In 2005, the Gangneung Danoje Festival of the Republic of Korea was inscribed by UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage, prompting furious opposition from China on the basis that the roots of the festival lie in China.

These are just a number of examples; we could go on indefinitely. Reasons may be ideological, religious, social, economic or political, but it is an indication of how differences in situation lead to differences in perspective. Researchers and experts working with cultural heritage have previously been able simply to work within the framework of their own specialty. All they had to do was explain why a certain cultural asset had historical or artistic or academic value, and that asset would automatically be recognized and registered as cultural heritage, and protected as such. That marked the end of the decision-making process. It is clear, however, that the researchers and experts of today can no longer behave with such innocence.

4. The ‘Culture as Resource’ approach

One of the first things that spring to mind on hearing *bunkaisan*, “cultural heritage”, is the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt. There is more to these structures than their continued ability to amaze; they were included as one of the “Seven Wonders of the World” chosen by the Greek traveler and writer Philo of Byzantium in the third century B.C.E. The other six were: the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, the Statue of Zeus at Olympia, the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, the Colossus of Rhodes, and the Walls of Babylon (later replaced with the Lighthouse of Alexandria). All of these six have been lost; we will never be able to witness their magnitude.

In many cases, the “historical”, “artistic” and “academic” importance of a cultural property is not what makes people think of it as a piece of irreplaceable cultural heritage. Rather, it may be rooted in a simple wonder at something that has managed to remain in place for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years. It is similar to the way we instinctively want to congratulate someone who has lived passed a hundred. If there is any value universal to all humans, a value that goes beyond religious and ethnicity and nationality, then perhaps it is here, at the most primitive level of being impressed that something has lasted so long.

Those involved in research on cultural heritage obviously will not accept such an explanation as sufficient. They take it upon themselves to tear through this first layer of simple emotional reaction, and to gaze upon all of the very real problems that emerge one after another. The value of cultural heritage is not something that is pre-established, and in certain cases it may depend on a person’s position; it is important that we recognize this. What can be useful in such cases is taking an approach that positions cultural heritage as cultural resources.

There is nothing new in looking at culture as a resource. There are a number of ways of looking at culture as a resource, which differ from researcher to researcher (Reference 4), but we will not discuss the matter in detail here. My position here is that we should rename that which we have previously termed “cultural heritage” as “cultural resources” to wipe the slate clean of the value assessments previously held, and re-assess its value in the context of the society in which it is located. Taking such a perspective means the val-

ue of culture as a research resource to the researcher is made relative, which adds another dimension to the evaluation of culture from various perspectives . It also allows a number of other uses to be determined; cultural resources for the development of tourism, for example, or to revitalize the local community, or to function as a source of identity for the local or ethnic community, or as a place for social education, or indeed as a place to train and nurture researchers and skilled workers. Of course, it is not the case that such values will be harmonized. There will be frictions, even clashes. When it becomes possible to take a multi-faceted and comprehensive view—including negative values—then we will be able to establish Cultural Resource Studies as an independent academic field.

References

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