

《Session 2》

***Utaki* as Treasure for Okinawa and World: Toward Community Development Based on Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage**

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1. Awareness of the Issues

In the Second Session of the International Okinawa Forum 2004 “*Utaki* in Okinawa and Sacred Spaces in Asia: Community Development and Cultural Heritage,” presentations were focused mainly on community development that made use of cultural heritage. As was pointed out in the First Session, although *Utaki* constitute cultural heritage indispensable to any consideration of the culture and history of Okinawa, today they are in an extremely precarious condition. In particular, in the more urbanized central and southern regions of the main island, as a result of a sharp increase in the number and variety of public works projects implemented in recent years, forests that housed *Utaki* have been lost in a short period of time without even a survey being conducted to ascertain their value as cultural heritage. Plastic play equipment, reinforced steel-frame buildings, and the like have replaced *Utaki*. This consequence of development is repeated year after year. Part of the blame for this can be placed on the regional communities that have been transformed as a result of urbanization and modernization, causing festivals traditionally held in *Utaki* to decline and leaving *Utaki* ill managed and unsightly. Also, while *Utaki*'s value as cultural heritage remains unappreciated, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and other government agencies responsible for community development seem to lack the incentive to conduct preliminary surveys.

As in the case of the Tsuboya district in Naha City, however, regional communities where community center activities are popular with the local residents, many *Utaki* are maintained and preserved. In such communities, *Utaki* have become major attractions. As many analysts have pointed out, *Utaki* will prove invaluable in implementing projects for “community development that capitalize

on history,” which will become increasingly important for Okinawa in the years to come. How are *Utaki* in Okinawa being viewed in regions that are spearheading the efforts to protect Okinawa’s traditional culture, or in the government agencies responsible for community development and preservation of cultural properties?

In considering the importance of *Utaki* as tangible and intangible cultural heritage, which function to provide support for regional communities, it is not enough to study them within the context of Okinawa but it is also important to consider them from a broader international perspective. What roles do indigenous sacred spaces based on animism found in communities of minority tribes in nearby Taiwan and Indochina, which seem to resemble *Utaki* in their character, play in enabling regional communities to survive despite the harsh living conditions that minority tribes in these countries? Also, how are Okinawa’s *Utaki* regarded in the 21st century when viewed from a broader perspective of international community?

Based on such an awareness and perspective, the panelists of the Okinawa International Forum 2004 made a tour of *Utaki* sites in various parts of Okinawa. On Taketomi Island, among other things, the residents performed traditional ritual and dance for us in one of the local *Utaki*. The tour helped the panelists develop a shared awareness of the issues, which was reflected in their presentations in the Second Session. At the start of the session, a seven-minute long DVD was shown to help the attendees understand the present state of Okinawa’s *Utaki* and the problems besetting efforts to preserve them. The DVD clip, titled “How can we now protect *Utaki* in Okinawa?,” is an excerpt from “*Utaki* praying place and harvest festival in Takitomi Island, Okinawa.” The latter was produced with the grant allocated for “A study on indigenous sacred spaces along the eastern border of Asia” (headed by the author).

2. Issues the Panelists Addressed

Seven presentations were made in the Second Session. They represent the following four standpoints:

2.1 The Standpoint of Minority Tribes in East Asia: Survival of Regional Communities and Indigenous Sacred Places

Ms. HIGASHIDE Noriko read a paper based on her field study of, among other things, the minority Akha tribe in Thailand, while Dr. CHEN Yong-Long read his based on his study of Taiwan’s indigenous Thao people. Akha and Thao are highland peoples living under very harsh conditions. From these two reports,

we can see that, although they are unjustly treated by their respective central governments, their own cultural traditions, particularly their animistic tradition, provide both tribes with the will they need to keep their regional communities viable. The two studies opened my eyes to the fact that, their relative proximity notwithstanding, preservation of regional communities and cultural heritage in Thailand and Taiwan have quite a different meaning from what they mean in Japan proper and Okinawa.

2.2 Community Development Sites in Okinawa: Utaki, Regional Community, Town Development for Enriching Life

Ms. UESEDO Tomoko, who administers Kihoin Shushukan on Taketomi Island (the southernmost temple of the Jodo Shinshu sect of Buddhism), discussed, among other things, the large part religious festivals play in maintaining the *utsugumi* or cohesion of the island's regional community. Ms. BISE Hiroko, the president of the Okinawa Prefectural Association of Professional Engineers, has helped preserve the townscapes in Okinawa including Taketomi Island. Drawing on her vast experience in urban planning, Ms. BISE discussed, among other things, the preservation of cultural heritage in Okinawa and the issues facing efforts to implement town development projects. No doubt the two presentations drove home the impression that women actually hold the power to protect and nurture Okinawa's tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

2.3 The Standpoint of Government Agencies Involved in Community Development that Utilizes History: From Confrontation to Harmony

Mr. FUJIOKA Keitaro reported on the type of communication development that makes use of history undertaken throughout Japan centering on the "Historical Road Project." Mr. FUJIOKA presented ideas much more malleable than one might expect from an official of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transportation. Mr. HAGIO Toshiaki mainly discussed the present state of *Utaki* preservation and the relevant issues from the standpoint of preserving cultural properties in Okinawa Prefecture. A common element threading the two reports is the shift that has been taking place over the past decade from a confrontational scheme pitting development against preservation toward an age of harmony when the will of the local community is respected.

2.4 From the Standpoint of International Organizations: The Issue of Preserving Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage and Utaki

Dr. Herb STOVEL, who conducts surveys and manages tangible world her-

itage at International Center for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), evaluates the *Utaki* on Okinawa's Taketomi Island as excellent examples of preservation of tangible heritage being effectively integrated with preservation of intangible heritage. According to Dr. STOVEL in the early 1970s the World Heritage Convention adopted a point of view that stressed the importance of integrating nature and culture. Then after a review in 1994 of the concept of authenticity, which is the basic principle on which preservation of cultural heritage rests, in 2003 the Tangible Cultural Heritage Convention came very close to adopting the position that supports the integration of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

3. Exchange of Opinions

In the Second Session, there was little time for discussion among the panelists because they took more time to give their presentations than they were allotted. However, during the rest period that followed the presentations, those attending the session submitted many questions. Some of the important ones were selected and the panelists to whom the questions were directed answered them. This took about 30 minutes. Every question selected addressed an essential aspect of the issue of *Utaki* preservation. The 30-minute Q&A period provided an opportunity for exchange of opinions between the panelists and the people of Okinawa who, in their questions demonstrated a deep understanding of the content of the Okinawa International Forum 2004. Below are the main points of the Q&A period.

3.1 *What are Utaki in Okinawa? Are they where ancestors are enshrined?*

Are they the same as the grove of a village shrine found in Japan?

Answer: ASATO Susumu

The *Utaki* I took up in my presentation are mostly found in the main island of Okinawa. *Utaki* on Sakishima region are slightly different; in fact, there are various kinds of *Utaki*. Those in the main island region resemble the grove of a village shrine found in Japan proper, but they are not identical. That from which the grove of a village shrine evolved was transmitted to Okinawa and underwent further transformation around the time the first *Gusuku* appeared in Okinawa as the island came under the influence of Japan's medieval culture. Thus, while it has similarities with the grove of a village shrine found in Japan, the *Utaki* in Okinawa, influenced by a different set of regional characteristics, evolved differ-

ently and became something distinct from *Gusuku*. The official village *Utaki* mentioned in “*Ryukyukoku Yuraiki*” (Origin of the Ryukyu Nation) are named after deities, but they generally refer to ancestral deities from the village’s distant past. As such, there is no way to know their gender, and they are not necessarily associated with any particular ancestor.

3.2 What can we do to transmit Okinawa’s traditional performing arts to children? How will the traditional performing arts evolve in the future?

Answer: OSHIRO Manabu

As I see it, children in Okinawa are more eager to take part in local festivals and traditional performing arts than those in the rest of Japan. In Okinawa, people of different ages take part in different kinds of programs. Thus, as members of the local community, those in early childhood, those in primary school, those in junior high school, and adults take part in different programs. Through this natural process, children in Okinawa inherit the folk performing arts of the regional community they live in. In urban areas, although people aren’t able to participate in community festivals, they have a chance to take part in activities offered at community centers. As a way of getting children to take more interest in traditional performing arts, “*Kumiodori* Appreciation” is performed every year at anywhere from 13 to 15 schools (primary and secondary) If enough children develop a taste for *Kumiodori*, some of them may prove to be potential heirs to this traditional theater form unique to Okinawa.

For the time being, the National Theater Okinawa will concentrate on promoting *Kumiodori*, but it plans to train young people to be able to perform other traditional performing arts. How should traditional performing arts evolve in the future? Rather than adhering stubbornly to the classics, we should endeavor to instill a new spirit into the performing arts so that the sense of beauty and musical sense will be brought to life within the traditional forms of performing arts. The old and the new are both necessary, for they are like the two wheels of a vehicle. The belief that learning performing arts will enrich one’s life is what energizes the spirit that dwells in them, so a tremendous amount of energy is required not only to preserve what is traditional but also to nurture what is new.

3.3 What sort of financial assistance is provided to preserve living national treasures and folklore culture?

Answer: KAMINO Yoshiharu

Since I am not in charge of financial assistance, I will limit my response to

the current situation regarding question raised. Under the provisions set forth in the Cultural Properties Protection Law, when designated a holder of important intangible cultural property (living national treasure), one receives a special subsidy each year worth two million yen to hone one's skills or to train successors. However, this money is in no way granted to lessen the importance of self-help efforts. Financial support is also given to cover the cost of repairing tangible tools and musical instruments deemed necessary for maintaining intangible skills. Similarly, assistance is provided to preserve the skills needed for producing, say, the special strings used in *koto* (Japanese harp) indispensable for preserving and repairing this tangible cultural property. In the case of folklore cultural property, the local group that carries on the tradition is designated as the holder of that property. The guardian of a shrine who plays a leading role in a festival is not designated as an individual holder of this cultural property. Is his subsidy sufficient? Probably not, but it seems useful to some extent.

3.4 Was it right or wrong that the traditional ritual and performance were held out of their regular schedule and context in Taketomi Island for this forum?

Answer: MASUDA Kanefusa

That's a tough question. True, when the panelists toured Taketomi Island, a part of the ritual and performance of the *Tanadui* were held in Seimei Utaki, the village *Utaki* located in a settlement that is a preservation zone. (The *Tanadui* is an important intangible folklore cultural property that has been handed down to the island.) For about an hour the panelists observed the ritual and the dance that was performed to welcome the deities. The thrust of the question is: Since the *Tanadui* is now held around November at Yomochi Utaki, which is located a short distance from Seimei Utaki, was it really proper to hold the festival at a place and time it is no longer held, even though the local residents agreed to the changes. In light of the theme of this forum - confirmation of the importance of integrating *Utaki*, a tangible cultural property, and a traditional festival like the *Tanadui*, which is an intangible cultural property - it would have better to have the panelists see the festival at the usual time and place so that they would gain a proper understanding of these cultural properties. But there were no festivals for them to see at the end of March. The decision to welcome the tour by the panelists was adopted in a meeting held at the community center, which is a self-governing body of the island. It is my understanding that the *kamitsukasa* who serves in the *Utaki* asked the deities for permission to accept the panelists, and the deities gave a ready consent. We were able to carry out such a tour for the first time ever thanks to the understand-

ing and cooperation of the people of Taketomi Island. Thank you very much.

The *Tanadui* was held in Seimei Utaki until the Meiji period. The forest, the place of worship, and the open space - the elements that, properly speaking, make up an *Utaki* - are well preserved. The tour of the panelist, I believe, played a decisive role in promoting mutual understanding among the panelists at the Forum regarding the value of Okinawa's *Utaki* as a cultural property. In the past, when a television company requested permission to cover a similar oblation event, they asked the deities for guidance five times. Each time, the deities advised not to accept the request. That's what I heard. *Utaki* have the power to form the collective will of the island. The people of this island therefore must have given their consent out of their curiosity to know what kind of evaluation the panelists of the International Forum would give to the rich accumulation of the island's tangible and intangible cultural properties and through that evaluation hoped to foresee what the island would look like in the coming years and to confirm their future happiness. As was noted in one of the panelists, people like Dr. SMEETS, the chief of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage section, and ICCROM's Dr. STOVEL, who is responsible for the surveys that are conducted under the provisions of the World Heritage Convention, give Taketomi Island very high overall mark. So I believe we must now boldly tackle the issues that have to be dealt with successfully if the island hopes to realize its full potential.

3.5 Utaki are sacred spaces where a multitude of gods and deities reside. Is the war between the gods the source of the conflicts flaring all over the world?

Answer: UESEDO Tomoko

Utaki are the source of people's faith, spirit and mind. Is the war between the gods the source of conflicts between people and the source of wars between countries? This question is very hard to answer. What is the questioner's definition of god? In Japan, the object of worship in a shrine is often a mirror. The Japanese word for mirror is "*kagami*." When you remove the "*ga* (selfness)", you get "*kami* (god)", the Japanese word for god. There are different types of war: religious wars, wars waged by terrorists, and wars of revenge. Wars are caused by human beings insisting on getting their own way as in "*Watashi ga* (I am)" and "*Kuni ga* (My country is)". Peace will be restored if human beings removed this "*ga* (selfness)" from their daily vocabulary, and the gods would become true "*kami* (gods)" if and when this "*ga*" is removed. From birth, we possess the mind and heart to respect and be grateful. It is the gods (or God or Buddha) who teach us the joy of living. The word "justice" is anathema to religion; instead, religion

preaches compassion. So there can never be a war pitting one god against another.

3.6 *There are two criteria for designating something as an intangible cultural property: its high value and importance. Why is that?*

Answer: KONO Toshiyuki

The Director-General of the Agency for Cultural Affairs' Cultural Properties Department is in attendance today. I'm afraid I might be in violation of the no trespassing sign, but in a word, the law governing this matter is badly conceived. The criteria for designating something as important intangible cultural heritage essentially do not distinguish what is valuable and what is not. Instead, the criteria only evaluate things in terms of their importance. Since there are many things that resemble each other, those that are not considered very important are merely recorded. This approach is not so far-fetched. By contrast, original thinking behind the important cultural properties (human national treasures) regime is the notion that the person concerned is of high value and is in such danger of perishing that he needs to be protected. But subsequently, the criterion of imminent peril was dropped and replaced by the importance criterion, thus adding to the confusion. Consequently, a person being considered for designation of "human national treasure" might be valuable but not important. This means the criteria for designating something or some person as important intangible ethnic cultural property cannot be brought in line with the criteria for human national treasures. The law is poorly conceived.

3.7 *How should regional communities approach the issue of balancing the effects of modernization, urbanization, globalization, authenticity, and totality in the days to come?*

Answer: Herb STOVEL

Here I would like to address the conflict between two processes: the violence perpetuated by of modernization (read development) and the wish to protect authenticity (cultural heritage as something authentic). I think it's a mistake to regard "modernization" itself as evil. In fact, we have ourselves constantly pursued modernization. What we now call cultural properties are the fruits of past modernization. Today we find modernization so disagreeable because the pace of modernization and the pace of the changes modernization brings about have become extremely fast over the past one hundred years.

Those of us on the side of preservation are apt to regard modernization as dark clouds that loom over our heads, as if modernization was our destiny. But it

is more reasonable to try to solve one problem at a time. Take the case where we undertake a project to protect some cultural heritage. Now let us consider the conflict between the benefits that would be gained from modernization and our wish to protect what is “authentic” by comparing the pros and cons at every stage of the issue we are addressing. For what group are we trying to protect what is “authentic,” and what is the nature of that which we are trying to protect? For whose benefit are we advocating “modernization”? We need to consider the issue at hand in these concrete terms. Those on the side that wishes to protect what is “authentic” will clash with those on the side that promotes modernization when society as a whole is still not aware of the situation. So once everything is revealed, such a clash could be avoided. However, preservation of cultural heritage does not entail stopping all forms of modernization (development). Rather than rejecting change, the important thing is for the traditional side that wants to protect what is “authentic” and the side that wants to promote modernization” to look for some other ways of resolving the difference or somehow come up with a solution.

The most respected preservation experts are patiently asking the question: “Is there any other way of resolving the conflict that would least damage the authenticity of cultural heritage and at the same time meet the needs of its modernization?” These experts are working hard to prevent the preservation side from becoming the villain or the two sides from clashing with each other. The question you pose is a very difficult one, so I cannot give you a simple answer. Still, I don’t think your question is as hard to answer as the one about “wars and *Utaki*.”