《*Session 2*》

The World Heritage Convention and the Convention for Intangible Cultural Heritage: Implications for Protection of Living Heritage at the Local Level

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(This is an edited version of a transcript prepared of the talk given by Herb STOVEL.)

Good afternoon, colleagues and fellow participants, members of the general public and my new friends from Taketomi Island.

In preparing for this meeting in Okinawa, I had been asked initially to think about the World Heritage Convention and the new Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, both of which have been described by Professor KONO this morning, and to talk about the relationship between them.

However, having visited the *Utaki* of Okinawa, and having now looked at the heritage and *Utaki* of Taketomi Island, it also appears important to look at the relationship between these two Conventions - both meant to work at the international level - and efforts to preserve this kind of local heritage in Okinawa and on Taketomi Island.

If one looks at the *Utaki* on Taketomi Island, it is clear that they are perceived as valuable by the community, and are well cared for. If one looks at the *Utaki* elsewhere in Okinawa Prefecture, a variety of situations may be found: some *Utaki* are well cared for; some *Utaki* have suffered, where the rituals have in some way been diminished by secular practices; and other *Utaki* have suffered where their physical reality has been compromised. But in all cases, we're looking at a local heritage. What is the link between this living local heritage and these two very abstract international Conventions, which function at the behest of governments?

As Professor KONO said this morning, the new Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage is meant very much to validate the local, and to support local expression. In fact, it requires visible demonstration of that support within the process of recognizing important intangible heritage expression. But more generally, in my view, both of these Conventions are meant not just to create lists of sites or places or objects or traditions, but in fact to provide examples of best practice, which we can refer to for guidance. It is perhaps in that sense that we can begin to look for some links between the two Conventions and what exists on the ground.

Now, I believe, in looking at the two Conventions, and with the benefit of hind sight, there should have been only one Convention to cover the ground now being covered by both. If we had been wise enough and able to look far enough forward in time, instead of having a Convention for tangible heritage (The World Heritage Convention) and a Convention for intangible heritage, we would have been able to anticipate and recognize the inseparable and necessary links between the two. However, at the end of the 1960s, when the World Heritage Convention was developed, although we were wise enough to put culture and nature together, we weren't wise enough to include the intangible, and we have only come to deal with this much later.

The logic supporting the idea of one Convention comes from more than efforts to assure bureaucratic efficiency, rather from recognition that a common goal lies behind both, if you go to a high-enough level. The common goal is in some way to preserve the human memory: the human memory as a support for fostering identity, the human memory as a support for fostering continuity in community life, and for sustaining community development. Both Conventions have more in common than may be initially apparent. If you look at the operations of the World Heritage Convention - the tangible Convention - you find that it acknowledges the importance of the intangible in many ways: criteria six has always been concerned uniquely with intangible associations, so much so, that the WH Committee has generally insisted that criteria six when used should be linked to at least one of the more tangible criteria which precede it. As well, the new definition of authenticity, emerging from the Nara document - the test of authenticity is an important part of trying to assess whether sites should go on the World Heritage List - has moved concern from the physical attributes of design, setting, workmanship and material to attributes such as use and tradition, spirit and feeling, and in so doing suggests that some sites placed on the World Heritage List - that is, a list of the world's tangible cultural and natural heritage - are most important because of their intangible attributes. This a change in focus which has been developing over the last ten years.

In parallel, and as we saw this morning in Professor KONO's presentation of the language of the new Convention on the Intangible, that Convention refers not only to practices and traditions and so on, but to the instruments, the objects, the artifacts and the cultural spaces which are directly associated with those traditions. So there's also an effort on the part of the framers of that Convention, having learned much from the operations of World Heritage Convention perhaps, to recognize the link between the tangible and intangible.

Thus one trusts that over time, it will be the goal of those responsible for the implementation of these two Conventions, to find ways to integrate their operations. That may be a goal for those who work inside UNESCO and those who work in organizations such as mine at ICCROM and those who work for ICOMOS and IUCN. But that is a goal far from here, far from what we have been witnessing on Taketomi Island.

The most important lesson we can gain - and that's what the chart (Figure 1; p.135) shown here is all about - and perhaps apply to the situation here, is the way in which these two Conventions think about protection. After all, both Conventions have been put in place not just to recognize or celebrate heritage, but to ensure the survival, the protection, the safeguarding of heritage. It's useful to ask, how is that actually done?

The World Heritage Convention itself gives little explicit guidance for protection. It's only in the subsequent interpretation of the Convention over time that how to protect has become clear. In fact, what the Operational Guidelines for the World Heritage Convention demand is proof of the authenticity, proof of the integrity of a site. These questions are part of an evaluation process which I won't go into in detail. But once the values which give significance to a site or a property are defined, then there is an effort to ensure that those values are credibly or genuinely expressed by the attributes which carry those values. That's what authenticity is all about. More recently, there have been efforts to talk about the completeness of the cultural heritage system which holds or contains those values, that is, to talk about integrity. Thus, these "qualifying conditions" of authenticity and integrity may be understood as filters through which decisions made about what goes on the World Heritage List are looked at. But once things are on the List, these qualifying conditions also become the conditions for protection, and therefore a necessary part of management. They can be used to define goals which those who have to think about the conservation of these places should keep in mind: "how to maintain authenticity as defined at the time of inscription? how to maintain integrity as understood at the time of inscription?"

This kind of apparatus does not yet exist for the Intangible Convention, but inevitably similar procedures and processes will be put in place where those involved with that Convention are led through a similar set of questions. They will be asking themselves, "What is the scope of the heritage that we're talking about? Are we talking about specific rituals or something larger, such as a belief system?" The choices will be different every time. But having established the focus or the scope, again, it will be necessary to say, "What are the conditions for the survival of that belief system?" or "What are the conditions for the survival of that practice, that ritual practice?" And so there will, in some sense, be a kind of parallelism in the way these two Conventions work, at the level of assessment processes allowing selection of important heritage, but also generating management conditions and prescriptions.

Now, what does all this have to do with Taketomi Island or the *Utaki* here in Okinawa? The first question asked by a visitor to Taketomi Island is: "Why or how has this special place survived? This is unique; this is marvelous; this is wonderful. And why is it still here? How did, through time, through circumstances, how did this special place survive?" My own intuition initially suggested to me that the special qualities of this place have survived because there is a sense of shared purpose among those who live and work on the island. There's a sense of belonging to something which gives individual efforts greater meaning and which sustains their interest, their commitment to support the survival and the meaningful use of the *Utaki*.

There's a Japanese word I've learned since coming to taketomi Island, "*utsugumi*", which, if I understand well, means "trying to combine into one." This is a word which I think summarizes very well the essence of what the community belief in Taketomi is all about.

This well-cared-for place is however, still threatened. In some ways, the community, as part of its own survival strategy for the future, as part of a means to generate income, has begun to externalize its heritage; that is, to define the heritage as something beyond itself, something to which visitors can have limited access. But nevertheless, by starting that process of giving visitors access, the heritage becomes a product, and certain dangers come with that. Catering to visitors can also bring positives. Consciousness of the nature of heritage can be a very useful tool in the face of external threats, and indeed, change is normal. The managers of this heritage are not trying to freeze these traditions or practices in time, but trying to manage the inevitable changes which they have to endure. So the question becomes how to manage.

If we look back to this international system for heritage, its Conventions and the abstractions, used to try and give overall coherence to decision-making, a couple of points can be drawn out which are important for Taketomi Island at least, and perhaps for other *Utaki* which are part of the system here in Okinawa Prefecture.

The first lesson is that, as with the two Conventions, we need to think of the tangible and the intangible together; we cannot afford to separate them. To not care for the physically tangible sensitively is to diminish the support necessary for the related intangible practices; equally, to not worry about the integrity, or the continuity of the ritual practices is to diminish the necessary support for the survival of the tangible heritage. These two concepts are inextricably linked and must be thought about at all times in this way. This is sometimes difficult for governments, as we've heard in other presentations. It seems much easier to manage the tangible than it is to manage the intangible. Nevertheless, conceptually, that's what the Utaki and the belief system is all about, a point where tangible and intangible exist together.

There's a second point that can be learned from this kind of analysis; "what, ultimately, are the conditions for protection necessary for the survival of the *Utaki*?" And in asking that question, we're not asking about the survival of what we see, or what we experience alone. We're asking about the essence of the place. We have to be able to say - and I can't answer this for Taketomi, because I'm not an expert on conditions here - but we have to be able to say, "What is the essence of life on this island which gives birth to the *Utaki* and the belief system?" Without that focus we're not going to go far enough in our protective measures. This essence has something to do with this idea of *utsugumi* and it has something to do also with what others have said today, that the *Utaki* and their use must be embedded in daily life. From the moment when the *Utaki* and the protection of the *Utaki* are separated from daily life, those practices will have lost all meaning. So, perhaps that's the real goal for protection: "How do we maintain the *Utaki* and their ritual practices as an integral part of daily life within this community?" This is not an easy challenge. But no matter how difficult, I think we have to aim at this lofty challenge if we hope to come back here in 30 or 40 years and find the same qualities present on the island.

I think that the *Utaki* certainly merit the highest-level international attention and support and respect and appreciation. I'm not sure that the Conventions are the best or the only means to offer that support, but I hope there will be an opportunity for these Conventions to support what the local people here already recognize to be of great significance. Their efforts deserve very, very strong support here locally, but also at the international level.

Thank you very much for your attention, and in particular, thanks to our hosts in the Japan Foundation and the organizing committee for their support, and to our hosts on Taketomi Island for their special generosity in sharing their heritage with us all.

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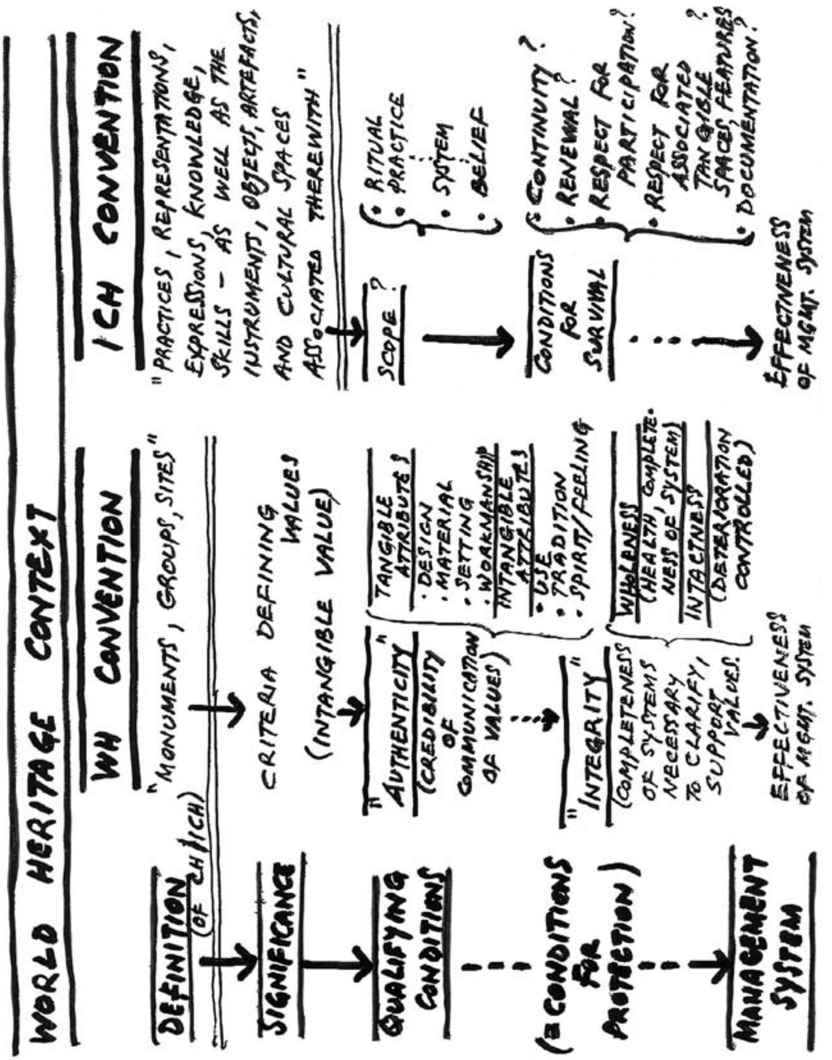
The figure 1 is an overhead transparency prepared and shown by Herb STOVEL during his talk, showing parallels between the needs of the two Conventions to improve conditions for long term conservation.

Figure 1


WORLD HERITAGE CONTEXT
WH CONVENTION
ICH CONVENTION
DEFINITION (OF WH/ICH)
"MONUMENTS, GROUPS, SITES"
"PRACTICES, REPRESENTATIONS, EXPRESSIONS, KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS – AS WELL AS THE INSTRUMENTS, OBJECTS, ARTEFACTS, AND CULTURAL SPACES ASSOCIATED THEREWITH"
SIGNIFICANCE
CRITERIA DEFINING VALUES
(INTANGIBLE VALUE)
SCOPE?
• RITUAL
• PRACTICE
• SYSTEM
• BELIEF
QUALIFYING CONDITIONS
"AUTHENTICITY" (CREDIBILITY OF COMMUNICATION OF VALUES)
TANGIBLE ATTRIBUTES
• DESIGN
• MATERIAL
• SETTING
• WORKMANSHIP
INTANGIBLE ATTRIBUTES
• USE
• TRADITION
• SPIRIT/FEELING
(= CONDITIONS FOR PROTECTION)
"INTEGRITY" (COMPLETENESS OF SYSTEMS NECESSARY TO CLARIFY, SUPPORT VALUES)
WHOLENESS (HEALTH, COMPLETENESS OF SYSTEM)
INTACTNESS (DETERIORATION CONTROLLED)
CONDITIONS FOR SURVIVAL
• CONTINUITY?
• RENEWAL?
• RESPECT FOR PARTICIPATION?
• RESPECT FOR ASSOCIATED TANGIBLE SPACES, FEATURES?
• DOCUMENTATION?
MANAGEMENT SYSTEM
EFFECTIVENESS OF MGMT. SYSTEM
EFFECTNENESS OF MGMT. SYSTEM