

## Adoption of “Okinawa Declaration on Intangible and Tangible Cultural Heritage”

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The “Okinawa Declaration on Intangible and Tangible Cultural Heritage” (hereinafter “the Declaration”) was adopted at the close of the International Okinawa Forum 2004 “*Utaki* in Okinawa and Sacred Spaces in Asia: Community Development and Cultural Heritage” (hereafter “the Forum”) with all participants present. Below we trace the process through which this Declaration was adopted.

Many of the Forum’s foreign participants, including researchers from Western European countries, had never seen Okinawa’s *Utaki*. However, during the three-day tour of the *Utaki* sites, starting March 24, they developed an appreciation for *Utaki*’ appeal as places of worship in harmony with nature. On the other hand, they also came to share with their Japanese counterparts an understanding of the universal threat that development poses to indigenous sacred spaces in Asia and the rest of the world.

On the main island of Okinawa, the participants toured various *Utaki*, including the *Utaki* associated with Shuri Castle, which is historically linked to the Kingdom of Ryukyu, and Sefa *Utaki*. Both *Utaki* are protected as cultural properties. The participants also visited *Utaki* in rural areas whose appearance has been mercilessly altered by, among other things, public works projects undertaken for the sake of rural development and *Utaki* in the Tsuboya district of Naha city, which, despite its inner-city location, is protected by the local community. While the inhabitants of Taketomi Island are striving to preserve the cultural heritage of the island including the beautiful red tile rooftops of houses in their traditional settlements, various kinds of *Utaki* are helping to protect the island’s lush forests. Even today, in every parish, an *Utaki* is carefully protected as a place of worship. Thanks to the cooperation of the local residents, the participants had a chance to witness for themselves the essence of *Utaki*, which is demonstrated when splendid performances and traditional shrine festivals are held.

In particular, the participants were moved by the high quality of the cultural heritage on Taketomi Island, which is on par with the quality of cultural properties designated as world heritage, and thus developed an awareness of the importance of *Utaki* in Okinawa as places where tangible and intangible cultural heritage converge. The participants also deepened their mutual understanding of the importance of utilizing *Utaki* in implementing town development projects. These eye-opening experiences came to fruition with the adoption of the Declaration on the last day of the Forum.

Nevertheless, the Declaration was not something that came about spontaneously during the three-day tour of the *Utaki* sites, for the drafting of the proposed Declaration had already started several months earlier. A small working group of core members of the Forum frequently exchanged e-mail with each other to determine the key issues and discussed the wording to be used in the Declaration. The progress of those discussions and e-mail exchanges is outlined in the postscript to the Declaration, but it was at the planning stage that the organizers recognized the need to let the world know about the Forum.

I began conducting scientific surveys of *Utaki* in Okinawa five years ago. After confirming their value as cultural heritage in East Asia, I began studying ways to protect and revitalize them more effectively in the future. The Forum itself, with its strong message to the world, was an important means of rather ethical exerting pressure on Japan itself and Okinawa to do more to preserve the *Utaki*. In the meantime, for UNESCO, ICCROM and ICOMOS, the adoption of the Declaration after the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was adopted in October of the previous year could not have come at a more opportune time, for it was the first international declaration to address the overlap between tangible and intangible heritage.

Drafting the Declaration was by no means an easy task. The unsparing encouragement by Ms. YAMAMOTO Masako of the Japan Foundation, who approved of its aims, supported us throughout the drafting process. Also, we were supported by the enthusiasm of Okinawa's Ms. BISE Hiroko, who had persuaded Ms. YAMAMOTO to get the Japan Foundation to sponsor the Okinawa International Forum 2004. From the outset, there were a number of hurdles that had to be cleared, such as the distrust that experts of tangible heritage and those of intangible heritage harbored toward each other and the procedural argument as to whether all members of the working group should be invited to take part in the drafting process from the start. Despite these differences, all members were allowed to take part in the discussion on the elements to be included in the

Declaration. The discussion continued until late in the evening prior to the final day of the Forum. What tipped the scale in favor of allowing all members to participate was the respect each participant exhibited for the tremendous efforts that the inhabitants of Taketomi Island had made and were still making to preserve the island's heritage and the enthusiasm of Mr. UESEDO Yoshinori and others of the preservation committee, which deeply moved all of the participants.

At the Forum, the original English text of the Declaration was translated into Japanese, which was then projected onto the giant screen a few lines at a time. A coordinator slowly read the lines aloud. The Forum was brought to a close with the endorsement and adoption of the Declaration amid a rousing round of applause from the participants and all others in attendance.