

Challenges of the ACCU's Community-based Project for the Promotion of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage – Some practices of Asia's communities' safeguarding approaches

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I. Background

The Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO I belong to, is a NGO and a non-profit organisation established in 1971 in line with UNESCO's basic principles through the cooperation of private and government sectors in Japan in order to contribute to mutual understanding and cultural cooperation in Asia and the Pacific. In the field of Intangible Cultural Heritage, ACCU has been implementing, a number of regional activities for 37 years including production of educational, promotional audio-visual materials on folk dances, folk festivals, folk songs and musical instruments, training personnel by sending mobile team of experts on documentation in close cooperation with UNESCO.

On the basis of the outcomes for those 37 years expertise, since the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in October 2003, ties between UNESCO and ACCU became more and more strengthened. In 2006 and 2007 ACCU and UNESCO coorganized two Expert Meetings for the preparation of Operational Directives of the 2003 Convention and adopted recommendations. This recommendations include the specific roles of ACCU in this filed to strengthen its interregional contacts and cooperation with institutions and experts in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.²

For more information about our organization and its activities on ICH, I should like to have your kind attention to the documents I have prepared for you today.

Community, groups and also individuals are described in consideration six of the Convention's Preamble and in articles 1,2,11,13,14 and 15 of the body of the Convention. In particular, Article 15 says "Within the framework of its safeguarding

¹ <http://www.accu.or.jp/ich/en/index.html>

² "Taking into account the significant and wide-ranging expertise of ACCU in the promotion and protection of intangible cultural heritage in Asia and the Pacific, which makes ACCU an appropriate institution for furthering capacity-building and cooperation in the field of ICH safeguarding in general, and in that of inventory-making in particular", and "call upon ACCU to strengthen its interregional contacts and cooperation with institutions and experts in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond" (Conclusions and Recommendations adopted on 15 March 2006 at the UNESCO-ACCU Expert Meeting on Community Involvement in Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage, Tokyo)

activities of the intangible cultural heritage, each State Party shall endeavour to ensure the widest possible participation of communities, groups, and where appropriate, individuals that create, maintain and transmit such heritage, and to involve them actively in its management.” However, if we look into the actual situation of the local communities we found out them too complex and diverse to capture in a single point of view.

Many of the communities in Asia, Pacific, Africa and Latin America faces serious problem of transmitting their traditional cultural expressions, due to dwindling birth-rate and aging population, aging masters and very few successors, absence of representational system, of divergent visions within communities, or between community experts and academic outsiders, lack of interest and capacities of policy makers to identify ICH-relevant communities, lack of researchers and experts on documentation, lack of know-how on school curriculum for awareness-raising, lack of information on out-sourcing of successors from other communities in safeguarding activities, lack of self-esteem/pride among communities, appropriation by authorities of ICH elements and so on and so on.

Furthermore, I would assume that economic development, eradication of poverty, conflict resolution (peace building) and disaster-resistant community development are the first and most important priorities for many of the State Parties in Asia and Africa. How, therefore, can countries be persuaded to get involved in safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage as promoted in the Convention, while the current generation can hardly survive?

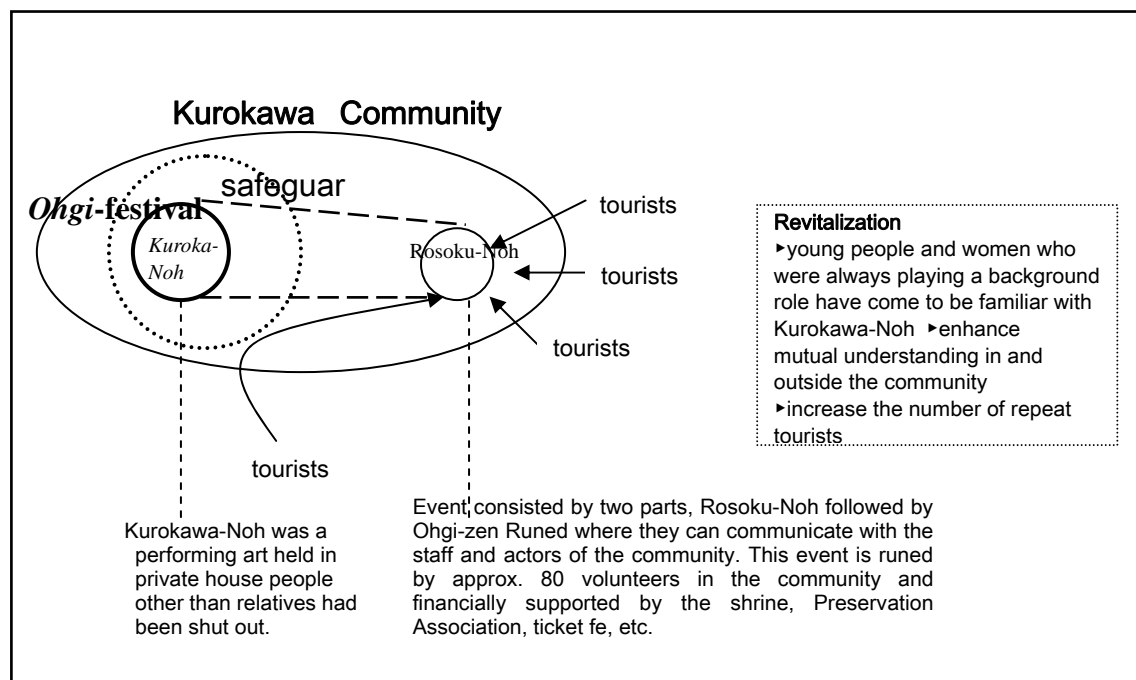
In order to further look into the actual safeguarding situation of community-level, and to find out as many case studies as possible, ACCU organized in 2007 a new community-based project, “Contest for Better Practices in Communities’ Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) revitalization”, in order to identify, document, and render visible, as well as accessible, past and current practices that have proven to be successful in safeguarding or revitalizing intangible cultural heritage, and to collect case studies. The first Contest was organized last year, focused on the field of “performing arts” and communities, especially those under the threat of disappearing. Today, my presentation will focus on outcomes of this contest, by sharing a few practices and approaches initiated by the local communities to overcome their difficulties in transmitting their traditional cultural expressions mentioned below;

- Revitalization of ICH while safeguarding sacred aspects from tourists- case of Kurokawa-Noh
- Empowerment of community through sustainable town policy making – case of Owara Kazenobon performing arts
- Transmission of performing arts by young people moved from their homelands

II. Kurokawa Noh – a practice to safeguard sacred aspects from the tourists

There is a case study interesting to us applied to the Contest, a measure to safeguard the sacred aspects of the performing arts from the tourist through the different approach.

Kurokawa-Noh is a noh performance given as a Shinto ritual of Kasuga Shrine, which is located in the Kurokawa area of Tsuruoka city, Yamagata Prefecture in Japan and has been safeguarded and transmitted by its parishioners for more than 500 years. Kurokawa-noh is originally an event held in a closed community, and people other than relatives had been shut out. One of the highlighting festival in a year is “Ohgi Festival” organized in February 1st and 2nd, conducted in a private house, and many people from outside the community often came into the houses without permission, which was quite a problem. Therefore Kurokawa-Noh Hozon Kai has let outside people participate as well by restricting admission, requiring proper contributions and distributing them to two of the troupes, etc. While university professors, researchers of other performing arts, famous people, etc. try to join the event using their notoriety, the Kurokawa-Noh Ohgi Festival rejects such attempts and considers such individuals to be a nuisance.



Many of the practitioners of Kurokawa Noh were farmers but due to the social changes of the life of people, many of them changed into salary man of private local companies. Therefore, the more Kurokawa Noh becomes popular, the more invitations they received to perform outside the community for presentation of the local

performing arts. Year by year, they felt it was quite a burden to take time off from work to do so. Moreover, while many people want to see Kurokawa-Noh at its best at the Ohgi Festival held in February 1 and 2, many people are not chosen by the draw as the performers is conducted in a private home.

After all, the community people questioned to themselves, “To whom the Kurokawa-Noh belongs?”: “Is it to the community?” Or, “to the parishioners?”

One of the women of the community, Ms. Tan Emiko, while she was discussing with local men and women, thought of an idea of providing an ‘event’ of performance of Kurokawa Noh, planned and produced by volunteers of Kurokawa community people, for tourists and people who want to see Kurokawa-Noh. She also takes use of this opportunity to communicate with practitioners and visitors, and expects some economic returns from the tourists as well. The event was named ‘Rosoku-Noh’ (Rosoku means candle in Japanese). Thus, the original performing art has been safeguarded while providing different opportunity for the tourists.

As a result, young people planned the first Rosoku-Noh for those who can’t join the traditional festival and it had more than 400 applicants for the 350 available seats, and the community people were quite surprised that there were many people wanted to view Kurokawa Noh.

The community people reported to us that, although there was a thorough discussion among masters on whether or not to allow someone who is not a successor of Kurokawa-Noh participate in Shinto rituals or ceremonies during Rosoku-Noh, the best result of all was that community’s young people who had never visited the shrine or *Denshukan* and women who were always playing a background role have come to be familiar with Kurokawa-Noh.

III. ICH management through Town Policy Making – a practice of Owara Kazenobon

There is another practice we found it interesting, Owara Kazenobon is a festival held in Yatsuo Town of Toyama Prefecture in Japan on September 1-3 every year, and has a long history from the Genroku Period (1688-1703). Men and women of all ages, dressed through the streets while singing and dancing along to the tunes of shamisen and kokyū. Owara Kazenobon is now an event to which a great number of tourists visit, but it is originally a culture itself in the life of the people. As the festival becoming popular in the 20th century, it faced a serious problem in having a large number of tourists, over 200000 people during that time while the town’s population is less than 3000. The temporary concentration of population into the town during the festival caused too much heavy crowding and an enormous amount of trash, without producing benefits to the site. Thus people in the town definitely felt tourism equalled

trouble, and a festival held only once a year is not fun. The community, at the same time, facing rapid aging of the population resulting from the decline in the birthrate and excessively declining population, made the future of the festival uncertain.

So the chairman of the Toyama Prefectural Folk Song Owara Preservation Society and the Ecchu Yatsuo Tourism Association thought that it is a shortcut as well as the most effective way for revitalizing the central area and economy of Yatsuo Town and safeguarding the performing art to press ahead with the “promotion by tourism” and establishment of “local brands” by making use of performing art as one of the “town policy”.

In that context they made a resolution to press ahead with “Town Policy” based on Tourism Making Use of Traditional Performing Arts on the belief that showing their intangible cultural heritage to tourists is indispensable to improve the skills of the performing art and the safeguarding and promotion of it. One of them is that establishment of “Owara Kazenobon Support System” by Tourism Association. This is a system where the Association asks restaurants, accommodations, souvenir shops, manufacturers and others in and around the town that may benefit from the festival to register for the system a fee to receive a certificate for membership in the system. They pay a membership fee after the registration which amount becomes the funds for safeguarding of it.

There were many CDs and DVDs of Owara Kazenobon that have been already released by major music labels, however, no royalties or returns had been paid to the community. Therefore, the Tourism Association self-produced and test marketed the CD “Instrumental Owara Kazenobon Music” in 2001 and made a public commitment to return 10% of the total sales to the Society to cover a part of the budget of the festival.

The other problem is that similar events have emerged nationwide as Owara Kazenobon, the Society applied to the Patent Office for a trademark of the performing art, which successfully being accepted as an event received trademark.

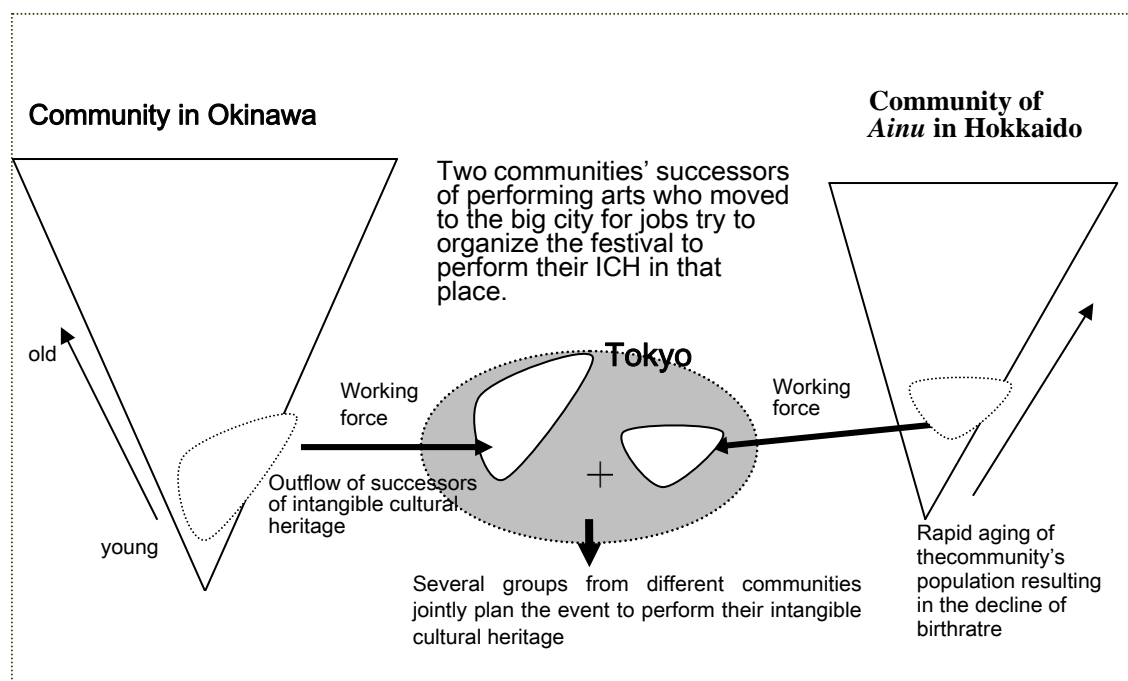
IV. Transmission of performing arts by young people moved from their homelands to the metropolitan

There were some entries needed discussion how we would deal with, one of which is the performing art having been transmitted separately in different region by young people moved from the homeland of the ICH. The other one was the performing arts transmitted by people from other communities due to lack of successors.

Charanke Festival, jointly organized by young people from two regions,

Okinawa and Ainu from Hokkaido, is one example. Due to the outflow of rural population to the big cities, people who had been trained their traditional performing arts in childhood, try to find out opportunity to perform it in the place where they moved to, due to various reasons such as mental fallback resources for their survival. In case of Ainu people, the number of living in metropolitan area around Tokyo is one tenth of the Ainu people in Hokkaido and it is reported that chances to perform these preserved traditional performing arts were extremely limited. So does the case of Okinawa traditional performing arts. So this festival helps the Ainu of Hokkaido and those from Okinawa who moved to metropolitan area transmit their traditional performing arts (Ainu traditional dances and traditional Ryukyu performing arts) that they have succeeded in their original hometowns, and to encourage the participation of young people who have grown-up in metropolitan areas, and also as a promotional/educational activity to enhance understanding of minority cultures through such activities.

Also in recent years, they have been inviting traditional dance preservation association in Hokkaido to the event and the festival has come to occupy an important place as an opportunity to strengthen mutual communication between groups in both of the areas that are separately conducting safeguarding activities.



These are some of the practices participated in our community-based project organized in 2007. There are many grassroots level approaches in Asia, and therefore I would like to encourage the direct participation of communities to the contest to

identify, document and render visible as well as accessible past and current find good practices that have proven to be successful in revitalizing ICH.

As you may know, many of the Intangible Cultural Heritage exists in developing countries, which means, financial and technical assistance means one of the fundamental tools to safeguard them on verge of extinction. If communities simply relied on the original inheritance system, the explosive social changes of the present day would put it in an extremely precarious situation, and it would only be a matter of time before ICH faced the risk of disappearing. It is vital for communities to immediately conceive and implement measures that make it possible to transmit the traditional performing arts, and convert the inheritance into a sustainable system. As one of the tools, I think that further discussion is necessary in regard to how far the relationship between ICH and tourism should be recognized. A particularly complicated point that may arise in this case would be to figure out the extent to which it would be possible to preserve ICH while embracing tourism. Because there is such a diverse array of communities, it is necessary to collect the successful case studies within each of the communities and carry out discussions. These discussions will be effective in thinking about how the communities themselves can safeguard and utilize ICH while learning about other cases. In this regard, international cooperation takes on significant meaning, and I therefore, thought of planning this project.