

Session 2 :

Safeguarding and Inventory-Making of ICH in Japan

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Outline

1. Inventories of intangible cultural heritages in Japan
2. Historical background and enactment of and amendments to the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties
3. Three types of inventory and the contents
4. Designation, recognition, and selection procedures
5. Key points for each inventory

1 . Inventories of intangible cultural heritages in Japan

Presently, there are three inventories of intangible cultural heritages in Japan: list of important intangible cultural properties, the list of important intangible folk-cultural properties, and the list of holders of selected preservation techniques. These lists are compiled and administered by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, a governmental organization.

2. Historical background and enactment of and amendments to the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties

In 1950, Japan enacted the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties, which covered tangible properties and intangible properties. Initially, the statute only provided for the protection of intangible cultural properties facing imminent danger of extinction. However, under amendments to this law enacted in 1954, a designation and recognition system for designating Japanese traditional performing arts and craft techniques with particularly high artistic or historic value as important intangible properties and recognizing persons embodying the arts as holders of such properties was established. This led to the creation of a dual structure of designation and recognition, such that arts are designated arts and persons who maintain these arts are recognized as holders. The concept of separately recognizing arts and holders can be described as one of the most salient features of the system of protecting intangible cultural properties in Japan.

Under further amendments to this law enacted in 1975, a system for designating intangible folk cultural properties and a system for selecting and recognizing techniques used to preserve cultural properties were newly established. These amendments sought to more proactively transmit intangible folk cultural properties by designating particularly important examples of typical customs representing features of basic lifestyles and folk performing arts illustrating the development of performing arts as intangible folk cultural properties.

In addition, repair techniques and other preservation techniques must be precise and should be regarded differently from intangible properties, for which the emphasis is on their value as performing arts. For these reasons, it was determined that proactive support for the transmission of traditional skills essential for the preservation of cultural properties and for which preservation measures must be implemented shall be provided by selecting such skills as selected preservation techniques.

Under the amendments to this law enacted in 2004, folk techniques were added to the category of intangible folk cultural properties, and provisions were stipulated to implement protective measures similar to those applicable to existing folk cultural properties in order to protect folk techniques that have been transmitted as techniques for the production of implements, supplies, and other such items pertaining to local lifestyles and industries as cultural properties. The Agency for Cultural Affairs designates and recognizes the intangible cultural properties pursuant to the Law for

the Protection of Cultural Properties and produces and administers the inventories.

3. Three types of inventory and the contents thereof

Inventory 1: list of important intangible cultural properties

Particularly important intangible cultural properties are designated important intangible cultural properties; at the same time, persons or organizations that embody or that have mastered such arts at an advanced level are recognized as holders or holder groups. Generally, this inventory also includes persons commonly known as living national treasures. As noted above, these persons are recognized as holders of designated techniques or skills, such that the death of such a person would result in the loss of recognition and the deletion of the person's name from the inventory. Furthermore, the designation of any field that loses all holders would also be nullified.

* Information included in this inventory:

Individual recognition:

Class, designation name, designation date, name of holder (real name, stage name or pen name), date of birth of holder, date on which holder was recognized, address of holder, comments (history of major awards, etc.)

General recognition, holder group recognition:

Name, designation requirements, name of the applicable holder or the representative thereof (performing arts) or the name of the applicable holder group or the representative thereof (craft techniques), the name and contact information of the applicable affiliated institution or group (performing arts) or the address of the offices of the holder group (craft techniques), designation date

* Numbers of cultural properties and holders (as of 6 January 2011)

Individual recognition

Number of cultural properties: 82

(Performing arts: 39; craft techniques: 43)

Number of holders: 115

(Performing arts: 56; craft techniques: 59)

General recognition, holder group recognition

Number of cultural properties: 26

(Performing arts: 12; craft techniques: 14)

Number of groups: 26

(Performing arts: 12; craft techniques: 14)

Inventory 2: list of important intangible folk-cultural properties

This inventory consists of customs (including production/vocation, life rituals, entertainment and games, social life (folk knowledge), annual events, festivals, and religion), folk performing arts (including kagura and dengaku ritual dances, secular performing arts, storytelling and votive arts, arts and rituals performed after religious gatherings, arts introduced from overseas, and stage arts), and folk techniques that are particularly important in terms of understanding changes in the lives of the Japanese people.

* Information included in this inventory:

Name of prefecture, designation name, address, name of protection organization, designation date

* Number of cultural properties: 266 (as of 6 January 2011)

Customs: 104

Folk performing arts: 152

Folk techniques: 10

Inventory 3: list of holders of selected preservation techniques

This inventory consists of traditional techniques and skills that are essential for the preservation of cultural properties and for which preservation measures need to be implemented.

* Information included in this inventory:

Recognition of holders:

Name of selected preservation technique, selection date, name of holder (real name, pen name), date of birth, recognition date, address

Recognition of preservation groups:

Name of selected preservation technique, selection date, name of preservation group, recognition date, name of representative, address of the offices of the preservation group

* Recognition of holders: (numbers are as of 1 June 2009)

Number of techniques: 46

Number of holders: 52

Recognition of preservation groups:

Number of techniques: 29

Number of preservation groups: 31

4. Procedures for designating, recognizing, and selecting

1) Preliminary surveys

The designation, selection of the intangible cultural heritage, and the recognition of holders and holder groups (among others) are predicated on the conducting of sufficient preliminary surveys.

As the numbers of applicable intangible cultural properties and techniques for preserving cultural properties are comparatively limited, these surveys are primarily conducted by investigators from the Agency for Cultural Affairs. In these cases, it is important to adequately ascertain research trends by relevant academic societies, the research results of researchers related to the applicable field, and other types of information.

At the same time, because there are numerous applicable intangible folk cultural properties in existence nationwide, it would be difficult to have sufficient basic surveys conducted by only investigators working for the Agency for Cultural Affairs (of which there are six in charge of intangible folk cultural properties). However, most intangible folk cultural properties have already been designated at the prefectural or municipal level prior to being designated at the national level, which means that surveys required for a certain degree of basic value assessments have already been made; in many cases, survey reports and video recordings are also available. Accordingly, surveys at a national level are conducted on the basis of these existing survey results.

2) Candidate selection

A candidate is chosen according to the following steps based on a preliminary survey.

Draft proposal produced by secretariat (Traditional Culture Division of the Agency for Cultural Affairs) → approved by the Agency for Cultural Affairs (division head, department head, councilor, deputy commissioner, commissioner) → approved by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (administrative vice-minister, parliamentary secretary, senior vice-minister, minister)

3) Final decision

The Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology submits the advisability of including the candidate in an inventory to the Culture Council. While the Culture Council then

investigates this submission through the Cultural Properties Subcommittee, a request to engage in deliberations is further issued to an expert panel comprising specialist researchers in the given field. Matters that have been carefully discussed by this panel of experts are reported to the Cultural Properties Subcommittee and the Culture Council. Finally, the results of this process are submitted to the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Based on these results, the government publicly announces the fact of designation, recognition or selection, as the case may be, and the candidate is then included in the applicable inventory.

5. Key points for each inventory

1) Important intangible cultural properties/ Selected preservation techniques

What is designated as important intangible cultural properties and selected as the selected preservation techniques is the “intangible technique” itself, such as performing arts, craft techniques, and preservation techniques of the cultural properties. However, it only theoretically declares the importance. It is essential to have technique holders who have mastered and embodied the techniques to a high degree in order to show it to the public in a visible way and to ensure that such techniques are passed on to future generations of experts. Therefore, when another technique is designated or selected, recognition of holders, holder groups, and preservation groups is required at the same time. What we must take notice of here, in particular, is the case when an individual person is designated as a holder.

In order to recognize a holder, a candidate list (reference data) is created after grasping the status according to the areas subject to designation or selection. The candidate list should be comprehensive and include candidates for the next occasion and persons in the succeeding generation, to say nothing of current and past holders who should be listed at the top.

For the next candidate, all daily information must be grasped; such as condition, award history, whether the person has a successor or not, and personality and wisdom. Such prior information must be as confidential as possible.

2) Important intangible folk-cultural properties

In the case of important intangible folk-cultural properties, only the national government has the resources to grasp the situation in detail since the objects range widely across Japan. The national government must build close relationships with prefectural and municipal governments that understand the status of local important intangible folk-cultural properties in greater detail.

As for the designation of important intangible folk-cultural properties by the nation, it is important to consider the intentions of each community with such properties. It requires enormous effort by the local community to inherit properties even after the nation designates them. Therefore, when designating, the nation should consider the thoughts of each community and assign academic value to the properties.