ICH CONTRIBUTING TO POST-DISASTER REHABILITATION

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Introduction

The discussions during the first day of the workshop were largely focused on the role of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in disaster risk management (DRM). Many participants seemed to agree in emphasizing the need to incorporate ICH in DRM, and notably the need to re-evaluate local knowledge. This perspective is undoubtedly very important.

However, looking at the reconstruction after the Great East Japan Earthquake, there were no examples of ICH playing a part in that reconstruction. As seen through the excursion to Onagawa in Miyagi prefecture, earthquake disaster restoration work consisted of large scale public works restorations. ICH had no part to play in that. In Japan, it is hard to include traditional ICH into DRM.

Does that mean that ICH has no value in disaster contexts? In this paper, I would like to look at this issue from the opposite perspective; instead of thinking of 'the role of ICH in DRM', I would like to focus on 'the role of DRM in ICH'. As an example, let us look at the lion dance (*shishimai* or *shishifuri*) of Onagawa that we visited during the excursion. In terms of disaster prevention, the lion dance had no part to play. However, for the disaster-stricken local community, it played an important role in the revival of the community. From an emotional aspect, ICH clearly has a role to play. For example, ICH can play a role in reducing the risk of young people moving away from the local community after a disaster. In other words, under normal circumstances, local communities are developed in a sustainable way, in conformity with the locality; however, when a disaster strikes, this sustainable development is disrupted. ICH can reduce such risk on local communities. In the case of Onagawa, the lion dance played that part. There are multitudes of ICH worldwide that can fulfil such a part. It is also possible that things other than ICH play such a part. By focusing on cases from Japan, I would like to initiate a discussion on what kind of ICH exists in different countries that can contribute to the post-disaster restoration.

Categories of ICH

Before starting the discussion it should be pointed out that there exists many different types of practices and traditions within the concept of ICH. Categorizing ICH is difficult, and within UNESCO the following five categories are used: (a) oral traditions and expressions; (b) performing arts; (c) social practices, rituals and festive events; (d)

knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and (e) traditional craftsmanship.

However, while this categorization takes into account the typological characteristics of ICH traditions and is based on an ethnological perspective, it cannot depict the full picture of ICH. For instance, performing arts that are constantly changing physical expressions, and traditional craftsmanship that is manifested in the creation of tangible objects, are quite different in their nature of practices. Furthermore, considering the cases of oral expressions and knowledge without any physical expression or a resulting tangible object, it is difficult to discuss all categories from the same point of view. Also, for example, an oral tradition performed in front of an audience can be recognized as performing arts. Such discrepancies may also depend on the domains of ICH, of which an element is a part – whether it is performing arts, religious traditions or customary practices. The concept of ICH covers many types of practices that differ greatly.

Given that the concept of ICH covers a wide range of practices and knowledge, it is necessary to build a framework where the categories are developed based on the topic of the discussion at hand. In this paper, where the topic is to contribute to disaster restoration, the following three categories are hypothesized:

1. Practices/traditions maintained by the local community; often related to religion and/or the spiritual world.

2. Practices/traditions requiring specialized skills or craft techniques, performed by certain individuals or dedicated associations; often related to occupation and livelihood.

3. Practices/traditions/knowledge upheld unconsciously as part of everyday life

Category 1 applies primarily to festivals and folk performing arts. During the Great East Japan Earthquake, this was the type of practice that demonstrated the largest effect in supporting the revival of the communities. In Japan, there is a large number of festivals and folk performing arts maintained by the local communities. I would like to raise the question of what kind of similar ICH practices, maintained by the local communities, exist in other countries.

Category 2 concerns ICH practiced not by the local communities, but by professionals. Primarily craft productions are applicable for this category. Performing arts practiced by professionals are also included in this category, while craft techniques upheld by local communities should be regarded as Category 1. In the context of natural disaster, the primary challenge in this category is how to revive these crafts and arts in case their practice is damaged, rather than these practices contributing to the restoration.

Category 3 concerns practices which are part of everyday life, and are not usually performed in front of strangers, such as annual events, day-to-day events, and

practices concerned with the basic necessities of everyday life such as clothing, food habits and housing. So-called local and traditional knowledge (*zairaichi*) also belong to this category. Especially from the perspective of ICH supporting disaster restoration, traditional knowledge (*senjin no chie*) useful for disaster prevention and mitigation has been highlighted.

For example, in the areas struck by the Great East Japan Earthquake, a traditional saying called '*Tsunami tendenko*' exists. It is a teaching telling people to think about their own safety first and flee, and not to get caught by the waves by looking for their family and loved ones. This is a local and traditional knowledge; on the other hand, it is also a tradition resulting in an action or behaviour.

Local knowledge such as disaster resilient lifestyles and traditional architectural techniques exist in various countries. While it is possible to think of them in terms of local knowledge, it is also possible to place traditional architectural techniques in Category 2. Furthermore, there is also local knowledge pertaining to natural phenomenon, such as reading signs indicating that an earthquake or tsunami will occur. Rather than being something performed, practiced or used to produce something, this type of ICH can be said to be pure knowledge. Local knowledge pertaining to disaster may be difficult to be recognized as ICH from the outside. Rather, it should be identified through the perspectives of disaster studies in the region.

To sum up the categories 1, 2, and 3, Category 1 involves, rather than the disaster itself, ICH that can support the revival of the disaster-stricken community. Category 2 concerns ICH that in itself can be damaged by disaster, and the point in question is how to revive or transmit its practice in the post-disaster context. Category 3 concerns ICH that should be identified from the point of view of DRM research. In the following section I examine examples of Category 1 from Japan.

The Revival of Performing Arts and Festivals after the Great East Japan Earthquake

In Japan there is a large number of performing arts and festivals practiced throughout the country. There are approximately 9,000 ICH practices that are designated by national and local government as 'intangible folk cultural properties', according to Japanese heritage legislation, and most of them are performing arts and festivals. Furthermore, although the actual number of ICH practices that are not designated as heritage properties is unknown, the number of such performing arts alone surely counts in tens of thousands. In fact, in the area struck by tsunamis in the Great East Japan Earthquake, there were approximately 1,000 elements of performing arts, of which only 10% were designated heritage properties.

However, it should be noted that the designation as an intangible folk cultural property does not guarantee financial support. In the Japanese system of intangible folk cultural properties, the civil societies/organizations preserving the practice do not receive any regular financial support. There are rare cases of monetary support for

example for the repairs of tools, but there is no regular funding. So how are the practices maintained? It is the practitioners and the local communities themselves that take care of upholding the practices.

For example, in the case of the lion dance in Onagawa, the lion dance procession goes around the district during the New Year, visiting house by house, performing the lion dance, and receiving money as reward. The money received is used as funding for the continued activity of the lion dance group. For example, if each household pays 10,000 yen (approximately 90 USD), a village of 100 households would gather 1 million yen (approximately 9,000 USD). However, that money is also used for other local festivals and assigned for costs related to the activities of the local children's organizations and senior citizens' assemblies. In other words, ICH is incorporated into the system of local economy.

Needless to say, not all performing arts gather money in this way. That being said, both festivals and performing arts are usually upheld and maintained by the local communities themselves, who pay for the expenses. Why is that? One answer could be religious reasons. Because of the religious (Shinto and Buddhist) context/ background of the practices, there is an urge/willingness to perform the events even if it involves paying for the expenses. However, that is surely not the only reason. The practices are perhaps primarily upheld because they are considered fun and because of a sense of societal duty, rather than religious reasons.

It is necessary to understand this background to explain why this ICH can play a role in post-disaster revival. In Onagawa, lost and damaged equipment and tools were finally replaced and restored two years after the earthquake disaster. After the lion dance had been revived, the following information was posted on the town's website: 'This year, the lion dance was performed in the remaining houses and in the assembly halls of the temporary housings, bringing such great joy that some people were moved to tears. Tradition is, for the people living in a local community, an undetachable part of their everyday life'.

The revival of the lion dance of Takenoura, a coastal village we visited during the excursion, is a symbolic example. Immediately following the earthquake disaster, when masses of people were taking refuge at a hotel, a lion dance was performed with a lion head made of a floor cushion and a pair of slippers, bringing comfort to the people seeking shelter. This episode shows how ICH can provide emotional support to people in times of disaster. Furthermore, the residents of Takenoura were living scattered in temporary housings for six to seven years before the town was restored. During those years, there were two occasions per year when the residents of the community could gather – the lion dance and the local festival (also featuring the lion dance). It was the lion dance that kept the hearts of the scattered villagers connected. It is hard to evaluate this type of emotional effect objectively, as it cannot easily be measured quantitatively. However, this is an important example demonstrating how ICH could contribute to disaster revival.

However, this example is not necessarily applicable to all countries. Local festivals and

folk performing arts are commonly occurring events throughout the regions of Japan, and it is against this cultural background that this example should be understood. The matter of identifying what ICH can contribute to community revival in the event of disaster must be considered carefully for each country or locality, with consideration to the concerned local communities.

There are also examples from Japan where regional post-disaster restoration has not been well linked with ICH. The people of Namie town in Fukushima prefecture were forced to evacuate due to the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant following the Great East Japan Earthquake. Many folk performing arts used to exist in this area. However, the entire town was forced to evacuate, and the community was dispersed as some members of the community were relocated to regions all over the country, while most of them sought their new home within the prefecture. Even now after eight years have passed since the accident, there are many people who cannot return, and some areas still remain restricted because of the risk of radiation.

In the Kariyado district, for example, there existed a deer dance (*shikamai*), a folk performing art similar to the lion dance. Now it is on the brink of disappearing. The primary reason for that is that the practitioners were separated by evacuating over a wide region. After the radioactivity decontamination work was finished, the district become liveable again in 2017. However, many former residents are anxious about radioactive contamination and are hesitant to return. That means that even for the people who want to practice the deer dance, it is difficult to gather since people are living spread out over a wide area, separated from each other. Then their motivation to perform the deer dance decreases, and it has become difficult to pass on this tradition. Furthermore, since there are few opportunities to train children and young people, the transmission of the tradition to the future is at risk. As a result, the deer dance has been performed only three times since the accident.

These types of problems do not only occur after nuclear accidents. All over the country, a great number of rural villages are being depopulated because people are moving to urban areas. The same problems are occurring in such depopulated rural areas. In other words, the disruption of local communities could be caused by various reasons, such as disasters, accidents, depopulation, as well as decreasing birth rates combined with an ageing population. The part that ICH can play in dealing with disasters is therefore also connected to the role that ICH can play to cope with various problems threatening the continuity of the local community.

The Value and Role of ICH

So far, I have focused on the perspective of ICH contributing to the revival of the local community. This type of ICH is easily linked to local identity, increasing the sense of belonging for the residents of the region. In a town such as Onagawa, where each district has its own lion dance, everyone thinks that their own lion dance is the best. When this type of local identity is heightened, quarrels sometimes break out between the districts. If such disputes are amplified, they can develop into political disputes and ethnic conflicts. We must not forget that ICH is potentially associated with this

type of risk.

However, as have been exemplified in this paper, ICH can also play a role of strengthening the bonds of a local community. Because of the Great East Japan Earthquake, such important roles of ICH started receiving recognition in Japan, and now there is a growing recognition that ICH should be included in the disaster rescue framework of cultural properties. However, for that purpose, it is important to first thoroughly inventory what ICH exists where. Then, the second task is to create networks to share information promptly when disaster strikes, on what has been damaged and what support exists. However, a methodology for doing this has not yet been established. Furthermore, even if the necessary tools are restored or recreated, it is not certain whether the tradition can be revived, and even if the tradition is revived, it is not certain whether it can be upheld. This means that it is also important to have a long-term perspective to fully understand matters relating to the continuation of the practice in question.

In this process, supporters who are able to have a long-term commitment and get familiar with the locality are necessary. This type of support can be carried out not only by national and local government bodies, but also by people in various positions, such as researchers, teachers and education specialists, journalists, as well as those in religious institutions. ICH enthusiasts could be involved as well. Ties among the practitioners who share the common challenges are also important. A sustainable network connecting these various actors and stakeholders would be necessary. This can become a countermeasure not just for safeguarding ICH from disasters, but also for safeguarding ICH that is disappearing for other reasons, such as globalization and urbanization, as well as depopulation and decreasing birth rates combined with an ageing population, issues that are pronounced in Japan.

Furthermore, in addition to safeguarding ICH, this should also become a means of protecting the local communities. Recently, opinions are emerging that having ICH makes communities more viable. ICH is receiving increased recognition not only from the perspective of supporting disaster recovery, but also from the point of view of social welfare. What can be said for certain, as mentioned earlier, is that ICH can become a means of reviving sustainable development of local communities after being damaged by disaster. Furthermore, ICH can also become a measure in coping with risks threatening a local community's sustainable development caused by other reasons than disaster. Therefore, safeguarding ICH is to safeguard the community.