

Negotiating Japanese Nationalism After Achieving World Heritage Inscription

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In this paper, I examine the meaning of *gochisou* – in recent World Heritage nomination in Japan, and the possible detachment of culture from the newly inscribed heritage properties. Behind the inscription of Nagasaki’s Hidden Christian Sites into UNESCO’s World Heritage list in 2018, the local residents and the government officials have had lengthy discussions on the ways to legally meet with UNESCO’s requirements. Along with Nagasaki’s Christian history which is the main focus of the inscription, food has also been another core component. The Japanese national government makes it mandatory to secure wider geographic spaces – cultural landscapes – around World Heritage properties as national heritage properties which usually consist of farmland and fisheries. In the process of drafting a preservation plan, the local official and residents discuss the possible and realistic ways to continue farming and fishing practices. In this process, officials and residents sometimes have a



hard time finding the middle point because a scenic heritage landscape often consists of crops and fish with high commercial value, and the local residents have consumed those on primarily limited special occasions.

Making a Heritage Narrative

In June 2018, approximately one year ago, UNESCO's World Heritage Committee officially inscribed Nagasaki's Hidden Christian Heritage Sites as the World Cultural Heritage properties. This inscription was not a smooth but rather a turbulent process. It took over ten years since the Japanese national government announced their intent to nominate Nagasaki's Christian historic sites to UNESCO's World Heritage Committee back in 2007. Over the past ten years, municipal and prefectural agencies involved drafted various narratives on the heritage properties in their jurisdictions prior to national government's official nomination to UNESCO's World Heritage Committee.

In order to make a place a World Heritage site, the officials of UNESCO's member states need to work to meet with two key criteria

Making a Heritage Narrative

Two key criteria:

- 1) a narrative on the value of the heritage properties
- 2) proof of legal protection over the properties

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- Japan's National Heritage Preservation Law
- UNESCO's expectation

before officially nominating their heritage sites to UNESCO's World Heritage Committee: 1) a narrative on the value of the heritage properties, and 2) proof of legal protection over the properties. UNESCO expects the presence of the appropriate legal securities over the prospective heritage properties under each member state's legal system.

In Japan's cases, the national government interpret this legal requirement by limiting their prospective World Heritage properties to those registered under the national Act on the Protection of Cultural Properties (*bunkazai hogo hō*). While most of the prospective World Heritage properties in Nagasaki were not registered under the national preservation law, the local municipal officials across Nagasaki worked with residents, advisors, and the officials from different governmental layers in order to make them national heritage properties. They also drafted the narrative on the value of the heritage properties that can meet with the standard of Japan's national heritage policy as they concurrently prepare their narratives to UNESCO's World Heritage Committees. In Nagasaki's case, the national government officials suggested registering some of the prospective World Heritage properties with the surrounding landscapes as a national cultural heritage sites by protecting the areas under the category of cultural landscape in the national heritage preservation law.

In legal sense, the definition of cultural landscape is consisted of a classic academic definition and each nation's legal enforcement measure. In terms of its general

Cultural Landscape as a cultural heritage

In Japan:
 Cultural landscapes are "landscape areas that have developed in association with the modes of life or livelihoods of the people and the natural features of the region, which are indispensable for the understanding of our people's modes of life and livelihoods"
 (Article 2, para 1 Item 5: 2004).
"the people" / "our people"
 = kokumin (the Japanese nationals)

definition, it can date back to the statement of a geographer, Carl O. Sauer, who stated back in the 1920s that:

The cultural landscape is fashioned from a natural landscape by a cultural group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape is the result. (Sauer CO (1925) The morphology of landscape. Publ Geogr (Berkeley: Univ Calif) 2:19–53)

Sauer's concept is rather a description and the framework to analyze the living environment of human beings. UNESCO's definition clearly inherits Sauer's statement. However, at the same time, it is a category of the World Heritage, and UNESCO adds a value judgement – which is a heritage value – on top of Sauer's concept of cultural landscape.

Inevitably, the range of *culture* or *a cultural group* in cultural landscape

can be restricted as it is up to each national government to decide the boundaries of a culture or cultures in the World Heritage nomination process. In Japan, cultural landscape became a category of national heritage in 2004, and the law states – in the English translated version – that cultural landscapes are “landscape areas that have developed in association with the modes of life or livelihoods of the people and the natural features of the region, which are indispensable for the understanding of our people’s modes of life and livelihoods” (Article 2, p 1 Item 5). What “the people” and “our people” in the English translated version indicates is the Japanese nationals in the Japanese original version, *kokumin*. In other words, Japan’s national heritage landscapes are those that represent the life and livelihoods of the Japanese nationals such as agricultural terraces, livestock ranches, forests, fisheries, and settlement patterns.

During the World Heritage nomination process, the Japanese national government added eight cultural landscapes from Nagasaki as national heritage cultural landscapes. The value narratives of those heritage landscapes are similar as most of the places are surrounded by the ocean and valleys, and are located either in an islands or peninsulas. The emphasis of heritage value of

these cultural landscapes are
 how they can represent the
 outstanding knowledge on the
 use of land and ocean by
 focusing on the catches and
 the produces from the



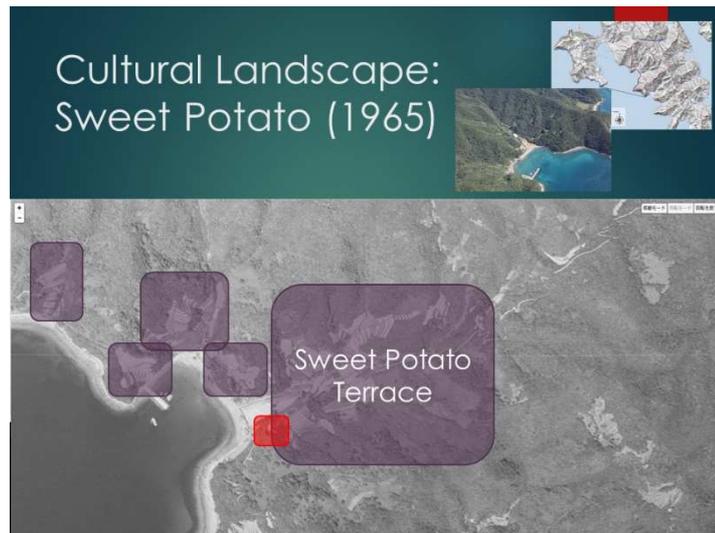
landscape such as rice, sweet potato, and different kinds of fishes from the
 ocean. In heritage narrative, the catches and produces can often be those which
 local residents perceive as special or treat – *gochisou* in Japanese.

Focusing on Sweet Potato

Since the time of the nomination process, the government officials of one of
 Nagasaki's island municipalities have been working to draft the heritage narrative of the
 cultural landscape around one of the inscribed World Heritage churches. As of 2019,
 they are still working on polishing the heritage narratives, and their focus has been on
 sweet potatoes, one of the core income sources of the island residents. For example, the
 aerial photograph on the screen was taken in 1965 by Japan's Geospatial Information

Authority which is responsible for mapping in Japan.

According to documented records and the narratives of local residents, they grew sweet potato in the terrace.



They consumed them as their staple, and also exported them outside of the island. In this island and neighboring islands, they call the fine grade of sweet potato as *kankoro*,

and they consumed them on special occasions as treats for use in pastries. As of 2019, sweet potato-based products are still considered one of the delicacies of the island even



though they do not produce it as much as they used to as you can see in the next aerial photograph which was taken in 2014. As you can see in this photograph, most – or the all – of the terrace has reforested over the last 50 years partially due to depopulation.

However, the municipal officials and the advisors have viewed sweet potato as

one of the distinctive products
of the island communities as it
is embedded in islanders'
collective memory, and they
have drafted their heritage
narratives of the cultural



landscape by focusing on the sweet potato in the island. They draft their preservation
and restoration plans of the landscape by focusing on the official narratives of sweet
potatoes in the island.

Culturally detached Sweet Potato

However, as is clear in this aerial photograph from 2014, the terrace has already
been reforested. There are no sweet potato farms that are visible enough for community
level consumption or cash income sources. Yet, still, sweet potato can be a major type of
produce that the islanders can identify as their local special and unique characteristic.
Therefore, it is understandable to see it as a potential component of national heritage
preservation.

Concurrently, islanders also state conflicting narratives on the sweet potato. As

finer grades of sweet potato are exported as income sources of the islanders, some of the islanders view it as treat. They would rather export it as a commercial crop than consume it except for during special community functions. Some islanders stated that they consumed *shochu* – sweet potato based alcohol – without mentioning the grade of the sweet potato. They also stated that they usually ate less tasty and cheaper parts of sweet potato on a daily basis.

Sweet potato was one of the major commercial crops of this island, and its finer grade was perceived as a treat among the islanders. Therefore, in a commercial sense and in the discourse of so-called *high culture*, finer grade sweet potato – *kankoro* – can be the representation of a local culture. However, as the finer grade sweet potato was rather consumed in limited special occasions, it does not fully represent local culture but rather does so in a limited capacity. Therefore, it is an attempted invention of tradition if the officials and advisors emphasize the value of finer grade sweet potato in the landscape of the island. Rather, in Sauer's sense, the current reforestation is the representation of the culture in the landscape, and it is the indication of depopulation and the change of the “modes of livelihood.” The challenge of a heritage landscape preservation is in the constant shifts in local residents' “modes of livelihood,” and it is for the preservation planners to find the balance with the picturesque-culture.