

Introduction: The Aim and Scope of Cultural Resource Studies Asian Linkage Building Seminar 2010

Haruya Kagami (Project Coordinator)



This Spring 2010 seminar aims to set up the Asian linkages of scholars studying human culture from various disciplinary bases and to build a platform to develop studies on culture as our human common resources. Asian countries are quite rich in cultural diversity and Asian peoples' behavioral as well as thinking orientation are still based on their own cultural tradition in these modern days. The Asian traditional culture is not just the object of philosophical, historical, archaeological, or anthropological studies but also the invaluable collection of our predecessors' knowledge and experiences which should always be referred to when we plan our future life. Cultural Resource Studies see our cultural tradition as our common resources and try to find out the creative way of their use for the future.

Scope of Cultural Resource Studies

Culture is one of the most fundamental human products. It offers us the splendid varieties of models of, and also the futile ground for, our future creative activities. 'Culture' here does not need to be defined so narrowly, and enough to be supposed to cover the whole human activities and their products, including rules and ways of living, systems and contents of human relationship, ideas of supernatural beings, self-entertaining activities such as music, dance and visual expressions, as well as tools and products of these activities.

Culture is not merely the set of rules which binds people's way of living, nor the dead objects produced by our previous generations. It plays a crucial role in our planning and conducting future life. In this sense, it can be approached as one of the highly precious 'resources' for our future life. Mentioning 'culture' as one of our 'resources', one may easily imagine the case of various historical heritages utilized in tourism. This case exactly shows the cultural products used (or, in some cases, exploited) as available resources for some people in certain situations, but this is the case the 'culture as resources' are being viewed only from the economic point. Culture as resources contains not only economic but also social, cognitive, religious, and artistic perspectives. The purposes of use of cultural resources are not necessarily limited within economic domain but should be found in a wider, wholesale domain of hu-

man activities.

To make the concept of 'culture as resources' more clear and accurate, let me compare it with natural resources. In the modern era, nature has tended to be viewed and treated only as the useful resources for human beings. If we can get out of this modern economically-oriented scope of nature as resources, we soon recognize that nature plays a greater role in binding peoples' way of life and offers the futile grounds for human activities. Nature should not be viewed only as the object of economic exploitation but as a living whole within which human beings should find a field of their lives. The recent world-wide ecology movements explicitly raise this kind of scope for nature.

The concept of culture as resources, thus, does not mean to stress the possibility of economic exploitation of cultural resources. On the contrary, it views culture as a rich storehouse full of accumulated human knowledge and experiences as well as a futile field for future creative human activities. In other words, culture can be approached as a kind of resources in so far as it is treated not as the object of economic exploitation but as inherited whole of human knowledge and experiences within which we plan to create our future life.

Another point we can extract from the comparison of nature and culture as resources is the importance of diversity. As the natural diversity is the key phenomena of nature life, so the cultural diversity is for human life. As the diversity of species ensure the resilience of the environmental whole, so the cultural diversity offers the more futile grounds for human creativity.

For the concept of culture as resources, the issue of ownership cannot be passed-by. On this matter, too, the comparison with natural resources gives us a hint to treat it. In the environmental issues the concept of 'commons' plays the central role. In considering the ownership of cultural resources, 'collective ownership' would be the key concept to avoid the conflicts over the ownership or authorship of cultural products. The idea of personally exclusive ownership itself is one of the most powerful and influential concepts which has been driving the modernization of the world. This concept of personal ownership is firmly combined with the exploitative process of natural resources. The idea of commons serves as a guarding fortress against the exploitative power of personal ownership concept. Nevertheless, the idea of commons or of collective ownership could not solve the issue of ownership entirely, for there may still remain the conflicts over the possible host of ownership, such as whether the host of collective ownership may be a local community, an ethnic group, a nation or universal human beings.

Accessibility is the key point to handle the problems caused by the idea of ownership. The idea of personal ownership is used to assert the right of exclusive access by the owner to his own resources. The limits of access are set to secure the owners' economic profits. On the contrary, the idea of commons allows the open access to the common resources, and profits

from resources are thought to be shared collectively. The idea of personal ownership is ill-fitted to cultural resources, because their basic elements such as languages, characters, sounds, rhythms, body postures etc. are our common human resources. Nobody would claim that a certain language be owned exclusively by a certain nation or an ethnic group. At most a certain expressive style composed of these elements could be claimed as the products of, hence those owned by, a certain nation or an ethnic group. But in such a case, too, open access to such products would not cause significant loss for their owners. To stimulate further creative composition, it seems wiser not to limit the access to these cultural products.

While some natural resources such as oil and other minerals would be exhausted by over-exploitation, cultural resources such as knowledge and experiences, or literature, music and performances, would never be. But they may extinguish when the socio-cultural environment sustaining these activities and their products is destroyed. The existence of cultural resources fully depends on their socio-cultural background from which these were originated. The vast and abrupt changes of peoples' way of living, especially those caused by modernization, would threaten the existence of diverse local cultures in the world. Although it may not be true that the modernization homogenize the world in its cultural domain, it surely weakens the locally oriented cultural activities.

When we approach to diverse cultures in the world as our common resources, the most crucial point is their rich diversity itself. By referring to vast knowledge and experiences stored in diverse local cultures, and through borrowing various cultural products inherited from past generations as a model or a source of inspiration, we could more freely plan and create our future life. For that purpose, it is indispensable to establish the way for mutual open access, too.

Thus, the aim of the cultural resource studies is to be set to record the diverse cultural activities and their products in the world, to understand their contents and meanings in the original cultural setting, and to offer them for other peoples as a source of further inspiration.

The expected points of discussion

The main aim of this Spring 2010 program is to exchange opinions and share the information from several countries in order to reach the common view of culture as our resources. During this three weeks seminar program, we hope to discuss not only on the general concept of cultural resource studies but also on the particular cultural condition in each participant's own country, government policies and social movements concerning traditional culture, the impact of the modernization and globalization, and the confronting problems to explore the creative use of cultural tradition. We will discuss the matters from several disciplinary points of view including anthropology, archaeology, architectural history, philology, ethnobotany and

environmental studies based on the participants' as well as Kanazawa University staffs' own academic background.

The expected points of discussion during the seminar are as follows:

How to discover, recognize and record the cultural resources in a given setting?

the way of social and academic recognition

the way of research method

the way of management of the records

How to preserve given cultural resources?

in the case of tangible objects : monuments, sites, tools

in the case of intangible objects : performances, rituals, customs, knowledge, believes

How to socialize cultural resources for common use?

to the community itself : cooperating with community development group

to the outer world : academically, politically, economically

These are just the tentative guideline and we hope our seminar discussion may bear fruitful basement for cultural resource studies sustained by our Asian scholars linkages.