

## **Development and Conservation of Cultural Resources in Central America: Japanese International Cooperation for World Heritage Sites of Maya Civilization**

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The main theme of my presentation is to ascertain that the concepts of development and conservation are equally important in the management of cultural resources. For that purpose I will introduce you some cases in Latin America, especially in Central America where I have been investigating for more than 25 years.

I am going to divide today's conference into three parts.

In the first section, I would introduce you briefly about my specialization, the Maya Civilization. What is this ancient civilization? When and where did it flourish? and what kind of differences are there among the most representative ancient civilizations in the American Continent.

In the second part, I will introduce you about the actual development policy of archaeological resources in Mexico and Guatemala. Among the five countries that compose the Maya area, these two countries have more cultural resources than any of the other three countries which are Belize, Honduras and El Salvador. Here the national policy of enhancement of the usability and value of the Cultural Heritage is explicitly observed, particularly in relationship with tourism.

And finally, in the third section, I am going to talk about some examples of the Japanese International Cooperation to the World Heritage Sites in two countries of Central America, Honduras and Guatemala. In Honduras, Japanese official cooperation goes from the creation of local job opportunities and training of local staffs, until high technology application to the digital archive of cultural resources. On the other hand, in Guatemala, an ambitious project is in progress which seeks the balance of preservation and investigation of the most impressive Maya archaeological site called Tikal with an official Grant Aid for cultural affairs.

### **Part 1 Maya Civilization and its World Heritage Sites**

From Mexico to Central America, the counties are located next to each other. The Maya area is composed from the south of Mexico to the west of Honduras and El Salvador.

As it is understood from figure 1, the Aztec and Inca are relatively late civilizations in history. Of course, there were many other civilizations in this area before the Aztec and Inca. For example, in



Fig.1

Period	Representative Archaeological Sites
Preclassic 1600 B.C.~ 250 A.D.	El Mirador San Bartolo Kaminaljuyú
Classic 250~ 900 A.D.	Tikal Copán
Postclassic 900~ ca. 1550 A.D.	Chichen-Itzá Mayapán

Fig.2

the central highland of Mexico Teotihuacan flourished from 1 century B.C. to 7th century A.D. and the Toltec civilization from 10th to 13th century. Also in Peru before the Inca civilization, other pre-Inca Andean civilization flourished there. But in spite of all this, the Maya are the most consistent having a history of civilized society for more than two thousand years.

The Maya were never unified politically. So there were many ancient kingdoms, each of them had its own dynasty and they interacted with each other.

The history of Maya civilization is usually divided into three periods, centered in Classic, before Classic, Preclassic period, and after Classic, Post classic period. This division of periods was clearly influenced by the 19th century Greek and Roman Archaeology (Fig.2).

Until now, 8 archaeological sites have been registered as World Heritage in the UNESCO list. Among them only Tikal is of mixed property (Fig.3).



Fig.3



**Fig.4**

Joya de Ceren, in English it means Jewelry of Ceren and is the small agricultural hamlet buried by the ashes caused by the sudden eruption of nearby volcano. It is because of this that sometimes local people call this site as the Pompey of the New World.

Tikal National Park in Guatemala (Fig.4) is located in an amazing natural setting, tropical and subtropical rain forests cover completely the most spectacular archaeological ruins of the Maya. The landscape of tall, more than 50 or 60 meters high, stone temple pyramids as modern sky scrapers, are simply amazing. There are more than 3000 discovered archaeological mounds in the rain forest, that still remain unexcavated to this day.

### **Unique characteristics of Maya Civilization**

1. There was not a unified dynasty (ancient state)
2. They did not have instruments made of metal
3. Neither domestic animals nor wheels for practical use
4. There were not big rivers near huge ancient cities

### **The Intangible Cultural Heritage The Rabinal Achí Dance Drama Tradition.**

The Rabinal Achí is a dynastic Maya drama, which developed in the fifteenth century and is a rare example of preserved pre-Hispanic traditions. It comprises myths of origin and addresses popular and political subjects concerning the inhabitants of the region of Rabinal, expressed through masked dance, theatre and music.

Since colonization in the sixteenth century, the Rabinal Achí dance has been performed on Saint Paul's day on January 25 of each year.

### **Importance of Rabinal Achí**

1. The only existing pre-columbian drama whose narrative exist and it was written in the post-classic Achí Maya language (Achí is a dialect of K'iche Maya).
2. The Rabinal Achí is the only genuine pre-colombian testimony that was not affected during 800 years by the intromission of ideas and phrases of European origin, not even the modern Achí language.
3. Many suggestive symbols can be observed to understand the aspects of ancient Maya culture (ancient political organization, war and sacrifice, numbers, calendar, world tree, ancestors, etc.).



**Fig.5(Photo:Courtesy of Guatemalan Ministry of Culture and Sport)**

Today, it is threatened by the precarious economic state of the custodians and the community as a whole. It is also confronted by folklorization, which seriously threatens the transmission of knowledge and values associated to the performance of this traditional drama.

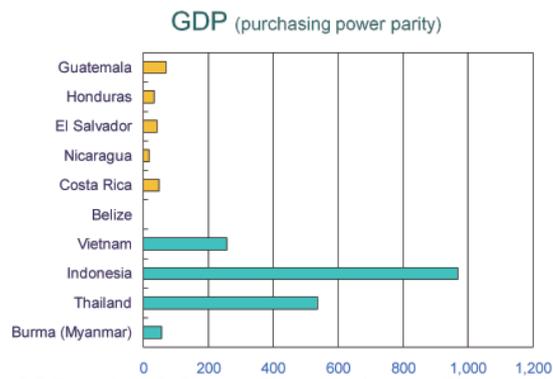
## **Part 2 Development Policy of Archaeological Resources in Mexico and Guatemala**

In Latinamerican countries, nowadays there is explicit recognition that those cultural heritage resources are an economic asset and can be made into instruments of progress.

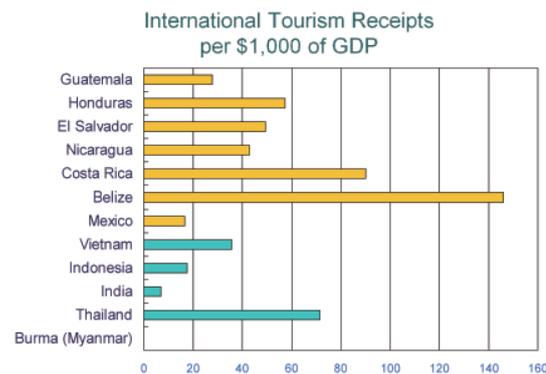
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OAS proclaimed that the archaeological, historic and artistic monuments are economic resources in the same sense as the natural wealth of the country. Consequently, measures conducive to their preservation and proper utilization not only relate to development plans, but constitute or should constitute a component of such plans. In this sense, OAS recommended to extend inter-american cooperation to the preservation and use of the archaeological, historic, and artistic monuments. OAS also recommended the extension of technical assistance and financial aid to he cultural patrimony of the member states will be carried out as part of their economic and tourist travel development.

They depend a lot on international tourism. DEFINITION: International tourism receipts are expenditures by international inbound visitors, including payments to national carriers for international transport. These receipts should include any other prepayment made for goods or services received in the destination country. They also may include receipts from same-day visitors,



**Fig.6** CIA The World Factbook <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/> (Accessed 18 Feb 2010)



**Fig.7** NationMaster.com [http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/eco\\_int\\_tou\\_rec\\_cur\\_us\\_pergdp-receipts-current-us-per-gdp](http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/eco_int_tou_rec_cur_us_pergdp-receipts-current-us-per-gdp) (Accessed 18 Feb 2010)

except in cases where these are so important as to justify a separate classification. Data are in current U.S. dollars. Per \$ GDP figures expressed per 1,000 \$ gross domestic product (Fig.6,7).

The project Mundo Maya is a project in which the five countries from Mexico to Honduras of the Maya area not only investigate but also restore their archaeological sites by fixing the infrastructure surrounding them, constructing new paved roads, connecting it to each other giving the simpler way for tourists. The objective of this project is to pursue a socioeconomic development centered in regional tourism by using the Maya cultural heritages that each country possesses (Fig.8).

### Tikal as Touristic Center

1. Tikal is one of the most popular cultural and natural touristic attraction, visited by more than 200 thousand tourists.
2. Great touristic income has been achieved.
3. Contribution to the development of Petén.

### Tikal as a Guatemalan National Identity (Fig.9)

1. Re-affirmation of Tikal as a Guatemalan Symbol
2. A focus on national identity



Fig.8



Fig.9

### Part 3 Examples of the Japanese International Cooperation to the World Heritage Sites in Honduras and Guatemala

It can be said that the Japanese official cultural archaeological cooperation in Latin America began in Honduras during the 1980s through a volunteer program of the Japan International Cooperation Agency JICA. I was one of the first dispatched members of this cooperation program for archaeology. It was in 1983. I was sent to Honduras to assist the Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History engaged in investigating, excavating and restoring archaeological sites in the periphery of World Cultural Heritage “Maya site of Copan”. 15 years later in 1999, I was assigned by the Honduran government as Director of the conservation program for Copan. Since then I have continued my project in Copan.

It is important that the World Bank financed these activities at Copan because it demonstrates the notion that the enhancement of usability and value of cultural resources is commonly accepted at the time by the International funding entities for economic development.

In the bilateral cooperation scheme between Japan and each country of the Maya area, grants economic aid for the socio/economic development of these countries have become gradually used.

Since 2005, I included Guatemala to my investigation, especially Tikal. Tikal National Park is a World Mixed Heritage as it was explained; it was the first World Mixed property registered in UNESCO therefore its importance is outstanding.

### **Planning (2010)**

1. Construction of the Center of Conservation and Investigation in Tikal with equipments  
- Exchange of Note, Agreement, Start of Construction (November, 2010)
2. Formation of the project of conservation Japan Trust Fund (UNESCO)
3. Recruitment of voluntary technicians (JICA)
4. Search for other possibilities of development : Combine various plans of cooperation