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Community, Connection and Conservation: Intangible Cultural Values in Natural Heritage—the Case of Shirakami-sanchi World Heritage Area

Kumi Kato

Intangible cultural heritage, according to a UNESCO definition, is ‘the practices, representations, expressions as well as the knowledge and skills that communities, groups and in some cases individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage’. Using a case study of Shirakami-sanchi World Heritage Area, this paper illustrates how the local community’s conservation commitment was formed through their long-term everyday interactions with nature. Such connectivity is vital to maintaining the authentic integrity of a place that does not exclude humans. An examination of the formation of the community’s conservation commitment for Shirakami reveals that it is the community’s spiritual connection and place-based identity that have supported conservation, leading to the World Heritage nomination, and it is argued that the recognition of such intangible cultural heritage is vital in conservation. The challenge, then, is how to communicate such spiritual heritage today. Forms of community involvement are discussed in an attempt to answer this question.

Keywords: Community; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Conservation; Commitment; Spiritual Connection

Intangible cultural heritage, according to the definition given by the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2005),¹ is ‘the practices, representations, expressions as well as the knowledge and skills that communities,

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groups and in some cases individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage'. Such cultural heritage may be articulated as oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and traditional craftsmanship. Intangible cultural heritage is interactive, dynamic and cohesive in that it is 'transmitted from generation to generation, and is constantly recreated by communities and groups, in response to their environment, their interaction with nature, and their historical conditions of existence. It provides people with a sense of identity and continuity and its safeguarding promotes, sustains, and develops cultural diversity and human creativity'.

Cultural meanings associated with protected natural areas such as World Heritage Sites tend to refer to archaeological and evolutionary significance; spiritual significance does not necessarily carry contemporary social meaning. In this rhetoric, natural heritage tends to be situated in a contrast of nature–culture, nature–contemporary human, essentially excluding human presence, including local communities who live with their place.² The notion of intangible cultural heritage, however, acknowledges communities' knowledge and practices concerning nature and interactions with nature transmitted over generations that provide people with a sense of identity and continuity. This paper argues that such intangible cultural heritage plays a vital role in nature conservation, as conservation commitment is in essence a local community's sense of connection with their surrounding nature and their commitment to maintain the integrity of a place of which they are part. With reference to the example of Shirakami-sanchi,³ a natural World Heritage Site in Japan, this paper examines what underlies the local community's conservation commitment, formed through long connection with a place and which is in essence a spirituality that makes an ordinary life-place sacred. The paper also questions how spiritual connection may be maintained and communicated today. Before turning to the detail of the Shirakami case, a brief discussion of the community's connection with a place is presented.

Formation of Environmental Ethics

Place and Connectivity

In recent years, a sense of connection with the 'more than human' world has been actively discussed in human–nature relationship. Such connectivity may be articulated by such terms as *to live in place*, *reinhabiting*, *insideness* and *sense of place*.⁴ Achieving connectivity is to be 'a plain member and citizen of land community'⁵ 'and to maintain *genius loci*' (spirit of place)⁶—an authenticity of place, an integrity sustained over time, which may only be generated through ordinary and ongoing human–nature interactions rather than simply nominating a place as sacred. Plumwood warns that '(nominating a sacred place) may do little by itself to counter the devaluation, degradation and instrumentalization of ordinary land'.⁷ Connectivity achieved through ongoing interaction has been described as *experiential bonds*, *topophilia* or *intimacy*⁸ expressed in forms such as 'care, sentiment, concern, warmth, love and sacredness'⁹ and may be seen as a place-based spirituality.

Spirituality, in Plumwood's terms, should result in better environmental ethics which should contain 'a certain kind of communicative capacity that recognizes the elements that support our lives'¹⁰ and the kind of relationship generated is dialogical and communicative: 'two-way and two-place, in which you belong to the land as much as the land belongs to you'.¹¹ The communicative paradigm suggested is to make 'ownership out in the essentially narrative terms of naming and interpreting the land, of telling its story in ways that show a deep and loving acquaintance with it and its history of dialogical interaction'.¹²

Sensitivity and Community

How such connectivity may be regained remains largely unanswered and is increasingly difficult today when many urban dwellers are far removed from the rest of the biosphere.¹³ The remark made by Said more than 20 years ago about the 'generalized condition of homelessness'¹⁴ has even clearer resonance today for human–nature relationships. In response to this challenge, two directions are suggested here: to recover and cultivate our own sensitivity to surroundings—to be sensitively in tune with nature's state and its flow, and to build a community, both conceptual and geographical, which recognises distinct features of place with which they interact in their ordinary everyday life and generate shared meaning.¹⁵ Such a community may be defined as a *terrain of consciousness*,¹⁶ where the meaning of place is continuously constructed through interactions of human and non-human worlds.

With an emphasis on sensitivity and community, this reciprocal relationship also becomes collective. As Relph suggests, place and people in their mutuality develop a common identity—a deep relationship with place, which is 'as necessary and perhaps as unavoidable as close relationship with people: without such relationships human existence is bereft of much of its significance'.¹⁷ As Relph suggests, the stability of the character of a place is related to 'continuity in communal experience, a collectively conditioned place consciousness'¹⁸ and also to the way the community 'experiences and reacts to changes to place'.¹⁹ Cohen refers to such a relationship as the ethnography of locality which is 'an account of how people experience and express their difference from others and the ways in which people express their attachment to a locality',²⁰ focusing on the social relationships between people. Rodman also suggests locality as the sense of place gained through social relations between humans and non-humans rather than the passive setting for a relational matrix among people.²¹

The meaning of place evolves through collective experience as a community generates common symbols and meanings. One way of resolving the human–nature separation may be ritual and custom—the constructions of stylised meaning devised and adopted by cohesive communities, as they strengthen 'attachment to place by reaffirming not only the sanctity and unchanging significance of it, but also the enduring relationship between a people and their place'.²² Land-based knowledge of a community, which has sustained interaction with the environment, rituals and customs, their sensitivity, emotive expressions, and narratives, all inform how we may reconstruct the relationship. By recognising connectivity and commitment as intangible cultural heritage and

an essential ingredient for conservation, the conservation of cultural and natural heritage starts to merge, addressing the inseparable and mutually dependence of each. Such a notion also enables positive orientation towards more sustainable human–nature relationships rather than the purist orientation of human exclusion. The following section examines the local community’s conservation commitment that underlies Shirakami natural heritage areas.

Shirakami-sanchi as Natural Heritage

Shirakami is a mountain range extending over 50 km (approx. 130,000 ha), with seven peaks above 1,000m²³ at the north-west end of Honshu facing the Sea of Japan. Approximately 13% of the entire range was inscribed on the World Heritage List as a natural property in 1993²⁴ along with another natural site (*Yakushima Island*) and two cultural properties (*Horyuji Temple* and *Himeji Castle*). Japan’s World Heritage Sites are predominantly cultural (10 cultural, 3 natural), which is in contrast to countries such as Australia (15 natural, 1 cultural, 2004). Currently 812 sites in 137 countries are listed as World Heritage Sites, of which 628 are cultural, 160 natural and 24 mixed properties. Shirakami as a natural property fulfils one of the *Natural ii* natural criteria: an outstanding example representing significant ongoing ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals.²⁵

The nominated area, divided into 60% core and 40% buffer zone, is located between two prefectures, namely the *Aomori* and *Akita* prefectures, whose names in characters—*green forests* and *autumn rice fields*—represent the local landscape precisely. With the nomination, Shirakami has come to be known for its beech forest (*Fagus crenata*), *buna* in Japanese, considered to be a relatively new example in East Asia and one of the largest intact forest systems in Japan. Although northern parts of Honshu were extensively logged and replaced with fast-growing cedar and cypress plantations in the 1950s–1970s, Shirakami was left mostly intact, since the remoteness and steepness of the area made the commercial timber industry unviable, and also beech was regarded as a lesser quality timber because of its high moisture content and poorer durability, also represented in its character (‘tree’ and ‘no’). The beech forests in Shirakami are recognised as a habitat for a diverse flora and fauna, including 44 mammals (80% of all mainland endemic species) and 68 avifauna species (94% of all mainland endemic species), including endangered birds of prey (golden eagles, Hodgson’s hawk-eagle) and Japan’s largest woodpecker, the black woodpecker (*kumagera*). As well as having World Heritage status, Shirakami has six other titles: *Nature Conservation Area—Wildlife Protection Zone* (under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Environment); *Quasi-National Park*, and each prefecture’s *Natural Park* and *Forest Ecosystem Reserve* as well as designated *Natural Monuments*.²⁶ Words such as untouched (*tetsukazuno*), pristine forests (*genseirin*), and unknown/hidden areas (*hikyo*) are often used to describe Shirakami. In Japanese the word mountain (*yama*) can also refer to forests, nature and wild places. Although a word equivalent to pristine virgin forests (*gensirin*) does exist, the forests are generally either ‘naturally

formed' (*tennenrin*) or artificially formed (i.e. plantation—*jinko-rin*); the *tennenrin* may include planted trees.

Cultural Meaning of Natural Heritage

World Heritage criteria constitute one of many examples of defining *nature* and *culture*, yet they provide a framework for the debate. As seen under the World Heritage definitions, although some natural properties also fulfil one or more of the cultural criteria, Shirakami fulfils none, nor do the other natural sites of Yakushima and Shiretoko. Just as a comparison, four of the Australian natural sites have mixed properties, including Tasmania *Wilderness* World Heritage Area,²⁷ Kakadu National Park, Willandra Lakes and Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, which was one of the first sites to be re-nominated as a cultural landscape.²⁸

Cultural meanings associated with natural properties in the World Heritage context refer primarily to archaeological and evolutionary significance and the 'spiritual significance' does not necessarily carry contemporary social meaning. In this rhetoric, Shirakami as a natural property tends to be situated in contrast to nature–culture and nature–contemporary human, and the contrast seems even more distinct when listed against clearly recognised cultural properties and monuments.

One concept that merges this nature–culture divide and relates it today in the World Heritage context is an idea of cultural landscape that has emerged since 1993,²⁹ defined as 'the landscapes that are representative of combined works of nature and humankind that express a long and intimate relationship between peoples and their natural environment'. This may include 'landuse techniques that sustain biological diversity, communities' beliefs and artistic and traditional customs that embody an exceptional spiritual relationship of people with nature, which is also part of their collective identity'.³⁰ What is noted in these definitions is that the word 'people and community', rather than human, is used—people who express and seek identity, with the orientation towards a collaborative relationship rather than human dominance—management, stewardship or even protection.

Such a community–nature relationship recognises intangible cultural heritage, which is examined in the next section and is what underlies the Shirakami community's commitment to conservation.

The Shirakami Community

The Shirakami community referred to in this paper is a conceptual rather than simply a geographical entity, including a broad range of people who continue to maintain a close association with Shirakami in various forms. Geographically, however, the community here centres on a small town, *Ajigasawa*,³¹ located approximately 30 km inland from the north coast and immediately adjacent to the north-east edge of the site in Aomori prefecture. The town is in the region called *Tsugaru Plain*, extending to the north coast. The word *Tsugaru* is typically associated with apples and the three-string instrument known as *shamisen*, which is often played against the backdrop of rugged

barren land and the roaring winter sea. The far end of the town leading to one of the eleven trailheads is Hitotsumori village (one forest), whose association with Shirakami has been the strongest because of its proximity.

The community members referred to here include the local residents (geographical/subsistence and conceptual community) as well as conservation volunteers, town office administrators and facilitators of a volunteer group, researchers, journalists and photographers (a non-geographical/non-subsistence and conceptual community), some of whom even commute to participate in the community or visit when conservation activities such as tree planting take place. The geographical (subsistence) and conceptual community's main livelihood consists of rice farming and apple growing. Traditionally, they also engaged in river fishing, harvesting edible wild plants (*sansai*) and fungi, small-scale logging for firewood, charcoal burning and collecting leaves/weeds for fertiliser and cattle feed. These traditional practices are referred to as *Yamazumi* (mountain inhabitation). The hunting of black crescent bears and other small animals has been practised by hunters called *matagi*,³² who also engaged in traditional activities all year round.

The area is rich in history,³³ natural beauty, good rice (i.e. *sake*) and abundant local products from mountain, river and ocean. The local residents agree, but are always quick to quote a national census that showed that 'Aomori is the second from last in terms of economic ranking in Japan'.³⁴ Remoteness and isolation, and a declining economy and population clearly underlie the Shirakami people's commitment to the place and the community itself. But, most importantly, what underlies this community's commitment is the history of environmentalism that started in relation to the rise of development in the 1970s.

History of Environmentalism—Reviving Economy

The origin of this Shirakami community can be traced back to its earlier history of environmentalism, triggered by the need to revitalise this remote area's declining economy. The first instance was an unsuccessful dispute over the construction of a forestry road (*Kosai Road*) completed in 1972 (1962–1972), and now known as *Shirakami Line*, that runs along the northern edge of the World Heritage Area. Another landmark incident was a protest against a plan for another forestry road (*Seishu Rindo*) proposed in 1982. The proposed road was to go through the centre of Shirakami, connecting the two prefectures, which would, according to the coalition of local councils,³⁵ 'revitalize the declining economy, the decline of the timber industry and agriculture by facilitating cooperation of the two prefectures and tourism development that would generate employment for younger generations'.

Just to put 1993 (the nomination year) in context, the 1980s onwards in Japan is often referred to as the second environmental era following the first of the 1960s and 1970s. The first environmental era was the time when a series of environmental regulations were issued in response to pollution and poisoning incidents such as Minamata and Yokkaichi³⁶ (1955–late 1960s). The Environment Agency was established in 1971. Writers such as Ariyoshi drew attention to the environmental health risks in her

newspaper column and later a book, *Complex Pollution* (1974–1975), which is comparable to Rachael Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) and the more recent *Our Stolen Future* by Theo Colborn (1996). It was a time of rising awareness and fear of the consequences of excessive consumerism (termed the 3Cs—cooler/air conditioner, car, colour TV) and *tsukaisute-shakai* (throw-away society) and the two oil crises (1973 and 1979). The late 1970s and 1980s also saw mass development such as the 23 *Super Forestry Roads*³⁷ constructed nationally from 1975 and the promotion of resort development after the collapse of the timber industry (1970s–1980s). During 1950–1970s, in response to housing demand, many of the forests (*gensei-rin*) were clear felled and replaced with fast-growing cypress and cedar plantations. However, in the period 1970–1980 the domestic industry was severely affected by cheaper imports.³⁸

With this as a background, the second environmental era is characterised by rising awareness about ecosystems, biodiversity and habitat protection, seen, for example, with the Forest Ecosystem Conservation Act (1990) that nominated 26 sites, including Shirakami (360,000 ha in total). Following the Rio Summit (UNCED³⁹), the Basic Environment Law was issued in 1993, and the Environment Agency became the Ministry of the Environment (1999).

A more holistic view of the conservation (*hozen*) of biodiversity emerged following protection (*hogo*) of habitats and species. Even earlier was the concept of preservation (*hozon*) that originated with the preservation of cultural properties, and which later included natural monuments of academic value⁴⁰—fauna, flora and geological minerals, and landscapes. Currently, 981 are nominated as national natural monuments, including 191 fauna (21 special), 536 flora (30), 221 (20) geography or minerals and 23 landscapes. Examples include the now-extinct Toki (1934, 1952 special), the Akita dog (1931), and such natural monuments are part of the cultural and natural heritage that include intangible cultural properties.⁴¹

This concept of conservation supported the Shirakami community in their protest against forestry roads. The leading figures, including *matagi* hunters, journalists and civil volunteers, argued for the importance of the beech forests for the catchment as well as habitats for diverse species described above, giving a new value to the beech trees once labelled useless. Over 13,000 signatures were collected nationally, which was, according to one of the leaders, 'a new concept introduced by the Japan Nature Conservation Society (1950)'. The construction plan was stopped temporarily when Shirakami was recommended as a Forest Ecosystem Conservation Area⁴² and was abolished on its formal nomination in 1990, leading to the 1993 inscription.

Mutuality and Reciprocity—the Spirituality and Sacredness of a Place

This small rural community's act of protest is regarded as one of the landmark cases in Japan's environmental history, and triggered the author's interest in locating the essence of community commitment in order to understand the origin of the strength of the current community.

Through protest documents as well as views expressed by today's community members, one strong sentiment carried through was a sense of mutuality and reciprocity

with Shirakami as nature, which also relates to community integrity. Cooperation and exchange of favours, goods and labour is a necessity of isolated rural life and one that has been observed widely. Shirakami residents also cooperate in their subsistence activities as well as construction, restoration of roads, canals and trails after snow, and structural reinforcement for winter.

Traditional activities in Shirakami also required cooperation based on unwritten but strict rules. It was also a *matagi* tradition that they went onto the mountain as a group of eight or so. Work required cooperation and an equal share of all harvests. Unwritten regulations applied to all traditional practices in relation to the use of tools (hand/knife), location, harvesting seasons, amounts and methods, and species and amounts to ensure future harvests and respect for the mountain rather than simply observing their common territory. One *matagi* said they would know exactly where and when rare fungi were ready for harvest,⁴³ and would never disturb the mountain unnecessarily. It took any *matagi* at least four years to learn all these practices as well as related rituals, languages, taboos and language.⁴⁴

Many of the activities carried out in Shirakami may be defined as minor subsistence⁴⁵ activities, as originally coined by Matsui, a Japanese environmental scholar. Minor subsistence activities are defined as ‘activities that have been carried out by a group with commitment and passion although its loss would not directly affect the economic state of the group or others who share their livelihood’. It is argued that since minor subsistence activities have less economic importance, they tend to remain technically primitive, requiring greater skills, knowledge and experience and also cooperation as a group.⁴⁶ These activities, although less serious or even fun, are in fact much more critical than main subsistence activities in forming human–nature relationships. These activities are maintained through a common-use system such as *Iriai*,⁴⁷ which has an internal self-regulatory system rather than externally imposed regulations and is loosely related to Hardin’s tight local commons.⁴⁸

A *matagi* said that they ‘are blessed with⁴⁹ rather than take harvest from the mountain. If the mountain god allows us to be blessed with harvest, we gratefully receive, but if not we are not meant to have any.’ A similar sense of respect, awe and affinity towards Shirakami was expressed by community members, who ‘feel so grateful for this place because it is always there’ and ‘simply want to return the blessing we receive from the land’. The community’s intuition was that their existence and acts should not contradict nature; in fact ‘the mountain needs us’ and they know how to reciprocate the favour and blessing by showing deep appreciation, making the best use of what is allowed according to self-regulation, and also in a form of what may be defined as restoration and conservation work (e.g. collecting beech seed and seedlings, planting, thinning, weeding), which volunteers and ‘commuting’ community members also join. Such reciprocity and sense of connection was what they sought in their involvement with Shirakami and the community. A founder of a volunteer group says he ‘used to take food (e.g. plants) from the mountains, and so now I want to return by planting trees, caring for the mountains and running educational programmes’.

In this reciprocal network which includes nature, the spiritual and pragmatic dimensions are in fine balance; that is, ‘nature as resource’ is not denied, and spirituality is

not separate from everyday practicality. Such a linkage between spirituality and practicality in forming environmental ethics has been one major thesis of Japan's environmental scholars including Kito, who, in his Social Link Theory,⁵⁰ suggests such practicality is not addressed sufficiently in Western bio-centrism such as deep ecology and that minor-subsistence-like activities need to be promoted in today's social context.

Irony of Protection—the Nature–Culture Divide

The irony with Shirakami, however, and perhaps with many other protected areas, is the community's commitment to the place and the ideology of conservation that saved the area and was hailed as 'a triumph of environmentalism' has been threatened by its very success. Shirakami is regulated by a number of external managing bodies and their regulations,⁵¹ which now restrict traditional practices; harvesting of any kind in the core area is not allowed and entry to the core area is prohibited in Akita and restricted to 27 designated routes in Aomori. This restriction, however, is only a formality in that of about 500 applications per year,⁵² none has been rejected and there is no penalty for not carrying a permit. This means that 'tourist' walkers⁵³ (although they need to be self-sufficient as there are no facilities or trail signage) are allowed but not local residents whose purpose is harvesting.

Most controversial of all, however, is the nomination of the entire Shirakami area as the 57th *Wildlife Protection Area*, which in effect imposed a complete ban on hunting.⁵⁴ With this, those who led the conservation movement, especially *matagi* hunters, felt betrayed, and questioned the concept of protection, and the very nomination of World Heritage; as one said: 'we fought to save the area from destruction, but now the area we saved excludes us. For us, not being allowed in the mountain is like being told not to go outside at all. Shirakami has never been untouched. People always lived with it. It was always our ordinary mountains.'⁵⁵

To illustrate the contradiction of protection further, in 2003 about 450 bears were killed under a pest-control scheme in Akita when they came down to the residential areas. This is not only 'outrageous but seriously worrying', as another *matagi* explained, as bears never used to come to the village. He explained that the most they (as a group) ever hunted was six or seven a year. 'We have a fair idea that the population has been stable over the last 20 years or so after a decline due to a cold summer in 1986.' August and September are regarded as the pest-control season before the autumn harvest.⁵⁶ He said 'monkeys cause problems to orchards but never bears. Bear problems are caused by humans. Before the introduction of any restriction we never over-hunted, never took more than what we could carry ourselves as we spent days, weeks and months in the mountain. Once we got what we could carry, that was the end of the season.'

Conflict between Protection and Community

A conflict between traditional use and regulations is not uncommon; for example, with the extension of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Site (1982/1989) strict

regulation of established use in the Central Plateau was imposed. Commercial use such as itinerant grazing, commercial hunting and snaring, and recreational use such as fishing, hunting, horse riding, and off-road vehicle driving were prohibited. The concept of saving and managing nature, such as 'protected area management', as Smith suggests, can be problematic as it reaffirms the 'externality of a nature with and within which human societies are inextricably intermeshed'.⁵⁷ Ironically, the concept of protection, almost similar to designation of the sacred, imposed a nature–human divide on a community who had maintained a more sustainable relationship.

This is not to say that it is only regulations that have weakened the community's tie with Shirakami. It is clearly part of overall social change. However, it is unlikely that new regulations can replace the community, which is simply categorised together with other destructive human interference. The question is: what would become of the community network that formed this reciprocal relationship with the land, which also communicates irretrievable knowledge, skills, senses, language, rituals and narratives that bound the community together in an extended inter-generational timeframe?

Community Commitment as Cultural Heritage

What underlies the Shirakami case are complex conflicts of human–nature, protection–development, urban–rural, global–local overlap but the discussion here is limited to community and land within the human–nature relationship, rather than management. What can be learned from the Shirakami case is the sense of connection with place that is supported by a human connection, which may equate to Giddens' 'a place-based environment of trust—Kinship relationship, local communities, cosmology and tradition, which is place-based'⁵⁸ and, in Jolly's words, an 'inseparability of place and people in identity'.⁵⁹ It is the vital role of social relationships to form a sense of place and a 'quest for social relationship and meaning of life'.⁶⁰ The meanings carried by such a connection are certainly not of 'outstanding universal value' yet form a deep sense of connectivity where culture and nature are one, which may be termed as 'ordinarily sacred'.⁶¹ How can such integrity and relationships be maintained and communicated today?

Communicating Spirituality Today

At Shirakami, a Nature School was established in 2003 by some of the leaders of the earlier protest, including *matagi*.⁶² The school is housed in a 125-year-old primary school building that became available when it closed due to population decline and is now on permanent lease from the town. The school promotes development of green tourism—in the form of environmental and outdoor education catering specifically for urban school groups who have little opportunity to experience nature and nature-based lifestyles, and to interact with older generations. After one and half years of operation, the school offers an extensive range of programmes, including lectures (beech forest ecology; history of Shirakami, *Matagi* traditions; flora and fauna; folktales in Tsgaru dialect); practical—indoor (seasonal cooking; woodcrafts; wood-cutting;

straw-crafts; charcoal making); practical—outdoor:(wild plant harvesting; river fishing; tree-planting; orienteering; cycling; snow-shoe walking); and trekking (various lengths and difficulties—half day to two days). Its annual enrolment is now up to 2,000, with participants coming from primary and secondary schools all over Japan. The local community also benefits from the programmes by participating as instructors, guides and hosts, and receiving facilitators' training, workshops and seminars.

The school provides a new form of common ground where the community members maintain their association with Shirakami in a very different form but certainly with a positive outlook. The school's development presents a useful model for the transition of subsistence communities to alternative ways of maintaining the integrity and identity of a land-based community. Practical applications of this case relevant to general social contexts, particularly urban contexts, include community initiatives in defining their regionally distinctive features through the conservation of forests for the purpose of cultural maintenance.⁶³

Building a conceptual community for conservation, one can use the distinctive features of place as their identity, taking them back to 'to live in place', to coin a bio-regionalist's term. It is a process of 'reinhabiting' by 'letting things be', to use Matthews's term.⁶⁴ This may also resonate with the idea of environmental passivism,⁶⁵ to be sensitively in tune with the state of nature and its flow, while actively being involved and promoting a community-based self-regulatory system. This approach also highlights the importance of creativity and imagination in the promotion of a sense of beauty, appreciation and celebration of community life, and positive words to articulate the human–nature relationship that are so often overlooked. As Rose suggests: 'people say that a country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, is sorry or happy. Country is not a generalised or undifferentiated type of place ... Rather, country is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness and a will toward life.'⁶⁶ What is interwoven in the land is not only biodiversity, habitat and ecosystem but also our languages, senses, emotions and timeless connections to one another—intangible cultural heritage being an integral part of the natural heritage.

Conclusion

The discussions in this paper are limited to a small community and Japan, where humans and nature have existed in such a way that co-existence has been more or less a necessity. It is not the intention to deny the concept of protection of nature as a management strategy whose orientation is necessarily a separation of the human and nature. What is emphasised here is that valuing a sense of connectivity not only with natural surroundings but also with each other as intangible cultural heritage is critical, yet still undervalued, in nature conservation. Such connectivity can only be developed over long-term daily interaction, which poses a great challenge today and demands a paradigm shift in which a sense of mutuality and reciprocity questions how we may situate ourselves in this world, as simply expressed by a *matagi* who has lived in the steep mountains where mountain gods reside:

nature is where no human exists or where human exists in total harmony with everything else—animals, plants, trees, water, mountain and sky ... where human receive from but also give to nature ...

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Notes

- [1] Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, UNESCO (2005), Available from http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=16429&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html
- [2] In this paper nature, environment, place and land refer broadly to a community's surrounding natural areas.
- [3] *Shira* = while, *kami* = divinity, spirits, deities, and *sanchi* = mountains.
- [4] Terms used respectively by Thayer (2003); Berg and Dasmann (1990); Relph (1976); and Clifford (1995).
- [5] Leopard, *A Sand County Almanac*, 204.
- [6] Norberg-Schulz, in Hay, 'Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought', 156.
- [7] Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 220.
- [8] Terms used by Relph (1976).
- [9] Seamon, in Hay, 'Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought', 157.
- [10] Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 220.
- [11] *Ibid.*, 229–30.
- [12] *Ibid.*, 230.
- [13] See the author's further discussion in Kato (2004).
- [14] Said, in Gupta and Ferguson, 'Culture, Power Place', 37.
- [15] Schech and Haggis, *Culture and Development*, 27.
- [16] Berg and Dasmann, 'Reinhabiting California'.
- [17] Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 41.
- [18] van Eyck, 'A Miracle of Moderation', 109.
- [19] Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 34.
- [20] Cohen, 'Belonging', 2–3.
- [21] Rodman, 'Empowering Place'.
- [22] Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 32–33.
- [23] Shirakami (1,232 m), Mukai-Shirakami (1,243 m), Manase (988 m), Futatsu-mori (1,086 m), Kodake (1,042 m), Ashika (1,000 m) and Tengu (958 m).
- [24] The year 1993 was the first in which Japan had a nomination, having become a signatory state of the World Heritage Convention in the previous year (Ministry of Finance, Japan, 2002).
- [25] UNESCO (2004).
- [26] Tsugaru-Quasi NP—Special Zone (0.624—Buffer), Special Protection (0.344—Core & Buffer). Preservation Area (Core, 10,139), Conservation & Utilisation Area (6832—Buffer) (Forestry Agency, 2002, 2003; Agency for Cultural Affairs, 1997).
- [27] The criteria fulfilled by each site are: Tasmania (82/89, N 1, 2, 3, 4; C-3, 4, 6); Kakadu NP (81/887/92, N-2, 3, 4; C-1, 4); Willandra Lakes (81, N 1, C 3); Uluru-Kata Tjuta NP (87/94, N-1, 2; C-5, 6).

- [28] Tongariro, NZ (1993, Natural 2, 3, Cultural 6); Philippines Rice Terraces (1995, C 3, 4, 5); Sintra, Portugal (1995, C 2, 4, 5).
- [29] ICOMOS (1993); Phillips (1998); Rössler (1993a, 1993b, 1997).
- [30] UNESCO (2004), WHC, Article 1, Section 38.
- [31] Total population 13,616 (2005): M 6,443, F 7,173; 65+ M 1569, F 2437, under 15 M 834, F 838. The author acknowledges the generous support and willing participation of the people of the Shirakami community.
- [32] The current numbers in the region are 8 (Nishimeya 4, Ajigasawa 1, Fukaura 2 and Minehama 1). Black bears are not regarded as endangered at this stage but local numbers are declining (pers. comm.).
- [33] An example is a Jomon archaeological site, Sannai Maruyama, uncovered in 1995.
- [34] All participants' comments are the author's translation from Japanese.
- [35] Extreme ageing has been noted generally in rural areas in Japan since the early 1980s; many of the communities in the region saw their population decline more than 30% between 1960 and 1995, with those aged 65+ exceeding 20%.
- [36] Laws and regulations issued by the Environment Agency including Water Protection (1957), Anti-smog (1962), Anti-pollution (1967), and Noise Pollution (1968) were issued after Itai-Itai (1955), Minamata mercury poisoning (1956), Yokkaichi asthma (1961), and Kanemi oil (1968).
- [37] Forestry Development Public Corporation, later the Green Resource Agency.
- [38] Many unattended *jinko-rin* are now affecting catchment (e.g. erosion), and 40–50-year-old cedars are causing serious hay fever problems nationally.
- [39] UN Conference on Environment and Development, UN Conference on Human Environment (1972), World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002, Johannesburg).
- [40] Preservation, protection, and conservation are 保存, 保護, 保全 Natural monuments, a concept proposed by von Humboldt (1800), were introduced by Miyoshi Manabu. 1919 Protection of historic sites and natural monuments (national monuments, 850, special monuments 72), 1931 Akita dog, Toki (Nipponia Nippon, 1934, 1952 special). 1950 Protection of cultural properties (flora, fauna, geographical features, natural reserve) (Numata, 1998, 1994).
- [41] E.g. performance, craftwork skills, festivals (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 1997).
- [42] As stated, following the Rio Summit in 1993 the government was under strong pressure to promote environmental conservation.
- [43] Some say these secrets are not to be told even to their sons.
- [44] Pers. comm. Early *matagi* practice is documented from about 500 years ago and is known for its complex rituals, taboos, ceremonies and use of specific languages. As a group of eight or so individuals, *matagi* enter the mountain in search of black bears (at the end of winter when the hibernation season ends), mountain vegetables in the spring, river fish in the summer, and rabbits and firewood in the winter, spending about 1–3 months at a time. Only two people are recognised as the region's *matagi* and approximately 200 are left in Japan. Today, their main sources of income are farming and tourism (e.g. guest houses, mountain guides).
- [45] Minor subsistence (e.g. rice farming) as the main subsistence activity is surrounded by a diverse range of related and peripheral activities (e.g. mountain vegetable and mushroom gathering, river fishing, water bird hunting, carp farming) (Matsui, 1998; Kito, 1996, 1999; Inoue, M., 2004; Inoue, Y., 1997, 1999; Suga, 1999, 2004).
- [46] Matsui, 'The Realm of Minor Subsistence', 169.
- [47] *Iriai*—the right of a group or local community to access common properties (e.g. mountains, field) mainly to collect plants and firewood.
- [48] Hardin (1968); Tsuchiya (2004).
- [49] *Sazukaru, itadaku*. *Sazukaru* is most commonly used as in 'bless with a child'.
- [50] Kito, 'Environmental Philosophy', 12. Kito suggests that Social Link Theory consists of three main components—environmental sustainability, social equity, and ontological richness—and

in this framework the concept of preserving pristine wilderness does not fulfil social equity in its exclusion of humans. What environmental philosophy should address, as Kito suggests, is the 'quest for social relationship and meaning of life'. Supporters of this concept include Inoue, Y. (1997, 1999) and Matsui (1998).

- [51] Forest Ecosystem Protection Area (1990/1994), Natural Environment Protection Area (Agency of the Environment, 1992); river fishing on the six rivers running through the core area was banned partially in 1994 and banned completely in 1998.
- [52] Application 626 (2001), 521 (2000), 320 (1999) (Shirakami Visitor Centre).
- [53] Tourist facilities include two VWHA Centres, Shirakami Visitor Centre, Hello Shirakami, Annon Visitor Centre), and Mini Shirakami and its Visitor Centre. They are staffed by local residents.
- [54] Accordingly, many old *matagi* huts have been removed. One restoration attempt by a group of walkers was halted because it represented 'unlawful interference of public property that was built unlawfully in the first place' (Ministry of Environment, Japan, 2005).
- [55] Less traditional practice was seen in Akita. Shirakami was virtually unknown until the 'protest and WHA' nomination and was known as the Kosai Mountains by the local people (pers. comm.).
- [56] The former regulations allowed hunting between 15 November and 15 February, and, outside this season, 'pest control' hunting was allowed. According to *matagi*, however, the best hunting time is a period of about one week when they come out from hibernation before starting to eat. This is the best time for fur, meat and gall bladder (approx. \$100 for 1 g); the winter bears (during the hunting season) are totally unusable, so they hunt only in spring and have a limit of three a year.
- [57] Smith, 'The Protection of Nature', 41.
- [58] Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, 102.
- [59] Jolly, in Rodman, 'Empowering Place'.
- [60] Kito, 1996, 12.
- [61] Taylor, 'Exploring the Ordinarily Sacred', 56.
- [62] As stated above, population decline, particularly in remote areas (*kaso* = excess scarcity), has caused many schools to close or merge in recent years.
- [63] The former: soundscapes and scent-scapes (an author-coined term translated from a Japanese word *kaori-fukei* = landscapes with particular fragrance) and the latter: 'forests of 1,000 years' (detailed elsewhere) are some of the community-initiated approaches.
- [64] Matthews, 'Letting the World Do the Doing'.
- [65] Takagi, *Nuclear Era*, 127–40.
- [66] Rose, *Nourishing Terrains*, 83.

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