

Protecting *the Weak*

Entangled Processes of Framing, Mobilization and Institutionalization in East Asia

A Turbulent Love Affair: Japan and UNESCO World Heritage

Prof. Dr. Christoph Brumann
Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology

The UNESCO World Heritage Convention and its renowned list of World Heritage sites has been nowhere more successful than in Japan and the other East Asian states. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in the World Heritage Committee and in Japan, the lecture will analyze the Japanese engagement with this global system. Japan started out as a 'model student' of the convention, presenting flawless candidates and embracing conceptual shifts proactively. It also contributed to expanding authenticity conceptions and establishing the separate UNESCO convention for intangible cultural heritage. Recent years, however, have been more marked by bumpy candidatures and open displays of national self-interest. East Asian rivalries came to the fore in in the 2015 Committee session in Bonn: after a major diplomatic drama, South Korea agreed not to oppose the World Heritage inscription of a Japanese nomination but Japanese delegates had to admit to the use of Korean forced labour in these early industrial sites, provoking severe domestic criticism. Once again, the thorough politicisation of what is now a major global arena became apparent.

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Christoph Brumann is Head of Research Group at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle ('The Global Political Economy of Cultural Heritage' and 'Buddhist Temple Economies in Urban Asia'), Honorary Professor of Anthropology at the University of Halle-Wittenberg, and a member of the Academia Europaea. He is the author of 'Tradition, Democracy, and the Townscape of Kyoto' (2012) and has published numerous further books and articles on urban anthropology, cultural heritage, international organisations, the concept of culture, globalisation, gift exchange in Japan, and utopian communes. He is currently preparing a book on the UNESCO World Heritage arena.

Contact person: Prof. Heike Holbig, Faculty 03, Institute for Political Science,
Email: holbig@soz.uni-frankfurt.de

For further information: www.protectingtheweak.uni-frankfurt.de