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## **The World Heritage Villages of Shirakawa-Gō and Gokayama, Japan: Continuing Culture and Meeting Modernity**

**Rana P.B. Singh\***

**Abstract.** The mountainous villages of Shirakawa-gō and Gokayama are well known for the unique architecture of their "Gassho" farmhouses, and enlisted in UNESCO World Heritage List in 1995. These villages with their Gassho-style houses subsisted on the cultivation of mulberry trees and the rearing of silkworms. The large houses with their steeply pitched thatched roofs are the only examples of their kind in Japan. Due to the difficulty of access until recent times, the relations between this area and the outside world were very limited — and this long isolation gave rise to the unique culture and traditional social systems, folklore and customs, which have maintained their continuity. Taking people participation, environmental assessment and behavioural approach this paper throws light on the deeper heritage values, their role in nature conservation and cross-cultural and comparative studies. The paper also reflects the experiences as ethnological report based on the personal experiences during December 2004, the time when the Tokai Hokuriku Jidosha Do, the national highway passing nearby was opened.

**Keywords:** Cultural heritage, Gassho farmhouses, heritage tourism, heritage conservation, traditional system, World Heritage site, heritage preservation, nature-culture interface.

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1. Background of UNESCO World Heritage Sites (WHS) in Japan and Legal context

The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (known as the World Heritage Convention), adopted at the 1972 General Conference of UNESCO, called for a list to be nominated of natural and cultural sites of "outstanding universal value". In December 1993, Japan's first World Cultural Heritage sites were registered: the Buddhist Monuments in the Hōryūji Temple area (Nara) and Himeji-jō Castle (Hyōgo). The fifteenth such site was registered in 2015, with the recognition of Sites of Japan's Meiji Industrial Revolution (spread across eight prefectures). In the list the recent most included is the National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo, which was registered as a UNESCO World Heritage site as part of "The Architectural Work of Le Corbusier" on 17 July 2016. The country's first two World Natural Heritage sites were also recognized in December 1993: Yakushima, and Shirakami-Sanchi. These were followed by Shiretoko (Hokkaidō) and the Ogasawara Islands (Tokyo). As of December 2016, there were 1,031

* **Prof. Rana P.B. Singh**, MA, PhD, FJF, FIFS, FAAI, FACLA, '*Ganga-Ratna*', is Vice-President, ACLA: Asian Cultural Landscape Association (SNU Seoul, Korea), and Vice-President: BHAJ, Big History Association of India, and was Professor of Geography (spel. Cultural Geography & Heritage Studies), & Head (2013-2015), Institute of Science, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, UP 221005, India. Email: ranapbs@gmail.com ; <https://banaras.academia.edu/RanaPBSINGH/Papers/> [**Pdf Ref. 507.17**].

World Heritage sites around the globe (802 World Cultural sites, 197 World Natural sites, and 32 mixed properties); a total of 192 countries have signed the World Heritage Convention. Japan records 20 WHS in 2016 that include 16 Cultural Sites, and 4 Natural sites (see Table 1).

Table 1. Japan: Heritage Sites Inscribed on the World Heritage List, December 2016.

<i>Se</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>World Heritage: Cultural Sites (number of sites)</i>	<i>Prefecture</i>
1.	1993	Buddhist Monuments in the Hōryū-ji Area (2): Hōryū-ji, Hokki-ji	Nara
2.	1993	Himeji-jo castle (1)	Hyōgo
3.	1994	Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto (17)	Kyoto, Shiga
4.	1995	Historic Villages of Shirakawa-gō and Gokayama: Gassoh-zukuri (92 farmhouses)	Gifu, Toyama
5.	1996	Hiroshima Peace Memorial: Genbaku, Atom bomb, Dome (1)	Hiroshima
6.	1996	Itsukushima Shinto Shrine: Itsukushima Jinja (1)	Hiroshima
7.	1998	Historic Monuments (7) of Ancient Nara, and Kasugayama Primeval Forest	Nara
8.	1999	Shrines and Temples (3) of Nikko	Tochigi
9.	2000	Gusuku Sites and Related Properties (9) of the Kingdom of Ryukyu	Okinawa
10.	2004	Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mie, Nara, Mountain Range (19 sites)	Mie, Nara, Wakayama
11.	2010	Iwami Ginzan Silver Mine and its Cultural Landscape (14)	Shimane
12.	2011	Hiraizumi - Temples, Gardens, and Archaeological Sites (5)	Iwate
13.	2013	Fujisan, Sacred Place and Source of Artistic Inspiration (12)	Shizuoka, Yamanashi
14.	2014	Tomioka Silk Mill and Related Sites (1)	Gunma
15.	2015	Sites of Japan's Meiji Industrial Revolution: Iron and Steel, Shipbuilding and Coal Mining (9)	Kyushu, and Yamaguchi, Shizuoka, Iwate
16.	2016	The Architectural Work of Le Corbusier, an Outstanding Contribution to the Modern Movement: (1) National Museum of Western Art	Tokyo

<i>Se</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>World Heritage: Natural Sites</i>	<i>Prefecture</i>
1.	1993	Yakushima (island): warm temperate ancient forest	Kagoshima
2.	1993	Shirakami-Sanchi: Siebold's beech forest, mountains	Aomori, Akita
3.	2005	Shiretoko: peninsula and marine area	Hokkaido
4.	2011	Ogasawara Islands: Chichi-jima, Haha-jima, Muko-jima, Iwo-jima	Tokyo

(Source: accessed: 20 December 2016, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/jp>)

Of course the concept of cultural heritage has changed and expanded considerably, and it is used in different countries with modification in the light of their own cultural traditions and the ways they treat heritage, however it is commonly perceived as movable (paintings, sculptures, coins, manuscripts) and immovable (monuments, archaeological sites, and so on), and also intangible attribute like oral traditions, performing arts, rituals, etc. And, Natural heritage refers to natural sites with cultural aspects such as cultural landscapes, physical, biological or geological formations. Majority of sites in Japan represent a combination of several characteristics, as also in case of Shirakawa-gō.

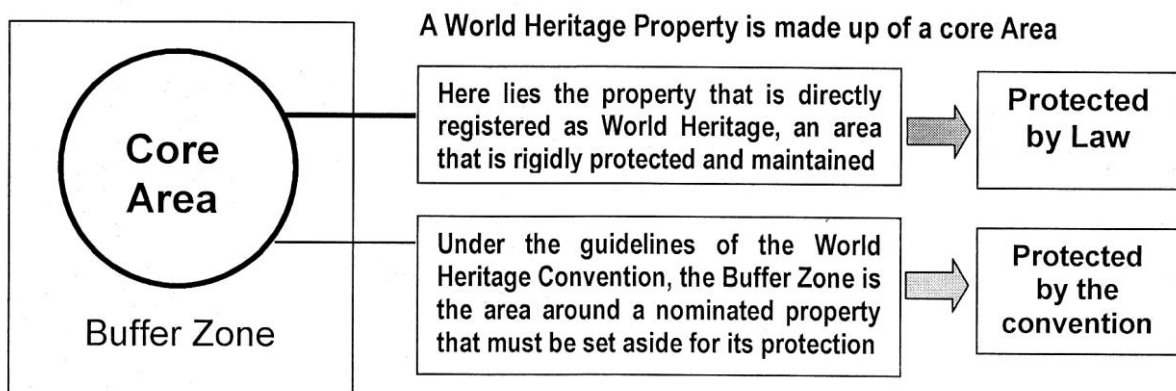
In Japanese culture all the cultural and natural heritage have their value and meaning because of the continuity of memories attached to them since ancient past and symbolised in the notion of '*fūdo*', which in Japanese philosophy signifies the relationship between collective memories and shared values of the landscape. Literally '*fūdo*' means wind and soil; whereas climate can only have its meaning if both the objective and subjective elements are taken into consideration. The natural landscape, weather or the natural geographic setting

only have a meaning if they are considered together with their social-cultural environment and manifested values their in by the resident people. The maintenance and preservation of this ethics and values are important issues for sustainability of heritage sites along with their humane uses.

On the line of critical appraisal and viability in the present era of globalization, at least three layer of globalization are noted that has direct impact on the 'existence-maintenance-continuity' path of the heritage sites, i.e. (i) globalisation of economy; (ii) globalisation of cultural industries; and (iii) globalisation of lifestyle. It is alarming that these three aspects are not only extremely enabling, but they also pose certain dangers and anxiety. Yet in the context of the existing legal framework, such interests could be mediated through the interaction of nation states. This further implies the need to define the custodianship of a particular community to be attached to a particular heritage.

Based on the historical analysis of heritage concerns, it is observed that 'Japan's involvement in heritage conservation has been intimately linked to its sense of national identity and that Japan's national interest was reflected in its use of cultural heritage has been an important element in its self-portrayal as a responsible global and regional citizen. Building on its historically significant and distinctive approach to conservation and the rich scope of its national heritage protection system, Japan has developed a heritage-based strategy, which it has used as part of its cultural diplomacy, designed to increase its 'soft power' both globally and within the Asian region' (see Akagawa 2015). Two-layer frame (core and buffer zone) is used to preserve, conserve and maintenance of sustainability and these programmes are protected by the state law and the convention operated by the institutions involved there (see Fig. 1). Same is the case of Shirakawa-gō.

Fig. 1. Extent of the World Heritage Site in Japan



Source: World Heritage Protection - Japan, Report, 2015.

The Japanese policy emphasizes the maintenance of happiness and wellbeing of residents in the heritage area, and further encourages the young people to awaken themselves for living close to the serene nature and heritage. It is recently realized that local government and local governance, policy makers and educational institutions – altogether have to share closely for the sustenance and sustainability of the heritage.

Japan is one the first countries that passed law for the protection of heritage and monuments. The Meiji government started heritage protection efforts in 1871 with the enactment of the Proclamation for the Protection of Antiques and Old Properties. This proclamation was the first law, which was revised in 1872, while adding issue of conducting surveys and registering heritage properties. Thus the first museum (Tokyo National Museum) was founded in 1872. During 1919-1950 the Law for the Preservation of Historic Sites, Places of Scenic Beauty and Natural Monuments was passed with several additions and sub-clauses for making more practical implication. Since 1950 Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties (LPCP) become enacted and still remain the basic frame of jurisdiction

for heritage preservation. Under LPCP three categories of heritage are classified: (i) Tangible (movable, and immovable properties), (ii) Cultural properties (monuments, historical buildings, and places of scenic beauty), and (iii) Intangible properties. The classification and definition and authenticity are further modified in 1992 on the guidelines of UNESCO WHC, and further incorporated in 2004 taking in view WHC “Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage” (see Kakiuchi 2014). The coverage of LPCP has been further widened that cares for the six categories of cultural heritage, viz. (i) Tangible, (ii) Intangible, (iii) Folk cultural, (iv) Monuments, (v) Cultural Landscape, and (vi) Groups of Traditional Buildings. Good to know that majority of Japanese people (residents and outsiders, both) are willing to pay a significant amount of money and labour through involvement for heritage protection. At the same time, one of the most important values of cultural properties might be the bequest value: the value derived by people today from the expected enjoyment of heritage by future generations (see Kakiuchi 2012).

2. Geographical Personality of Place

The Historic Villages of Shirakawa-gō (*Shirakawa-murā*, 白川郷) and Gokayama (五箇山) are one of Japan’s UNESCO World Heritage Sites, consisting of the traditional villages of Ogimachi, Ainokura and Suganuma (Figs. 2, 3 and 4). The site is located (36°16’ N and 136°54’ E) in the Shō-gawa river valley stretching across the border of Gifu and Toyama Prefectures in northern Japan. These villages were very difficult to access for a long period of time as they are located in a mountainous region in isolated setting. Shirakawa-gō (“White River Old-District”) is located in the village of Shirakawa in Ōno District of Gifu Prefecture (Chūbū region). The Gokayama (“Five Mountains”) area is divided between the former villages of Kamitaira and Taira in Nanto, Toyama Prefecture. These villages are well known for their houses constructed in traditional architectural style known as *gasshō-zukuri*; they have existed since the 11th century and most of the houses are more than 250 years old. During the Edo period (1603-1868), these houses had been accepted as representative of the regional traditional culture. The Gassho-zukuri, “prayer-hands construction” (合掌造り), style is characterized by a thatched and steeply slanting roof resembling two hands joined in prayer. The **A**-frame house design is exceptionally strong and, in combination with the unique properties of the thatching, allows the houses to withstand and shed the weight of the region’s heavy snowfalls in winter (see Singh and Fukunaga 2009).

Fig. 2. Heritage Village of Shirakawa-murā, Gifu, Japan.



Fig. 3. Ogimachi, the nucleus of heritage sites of Shirakawa-gō: historic buildings.

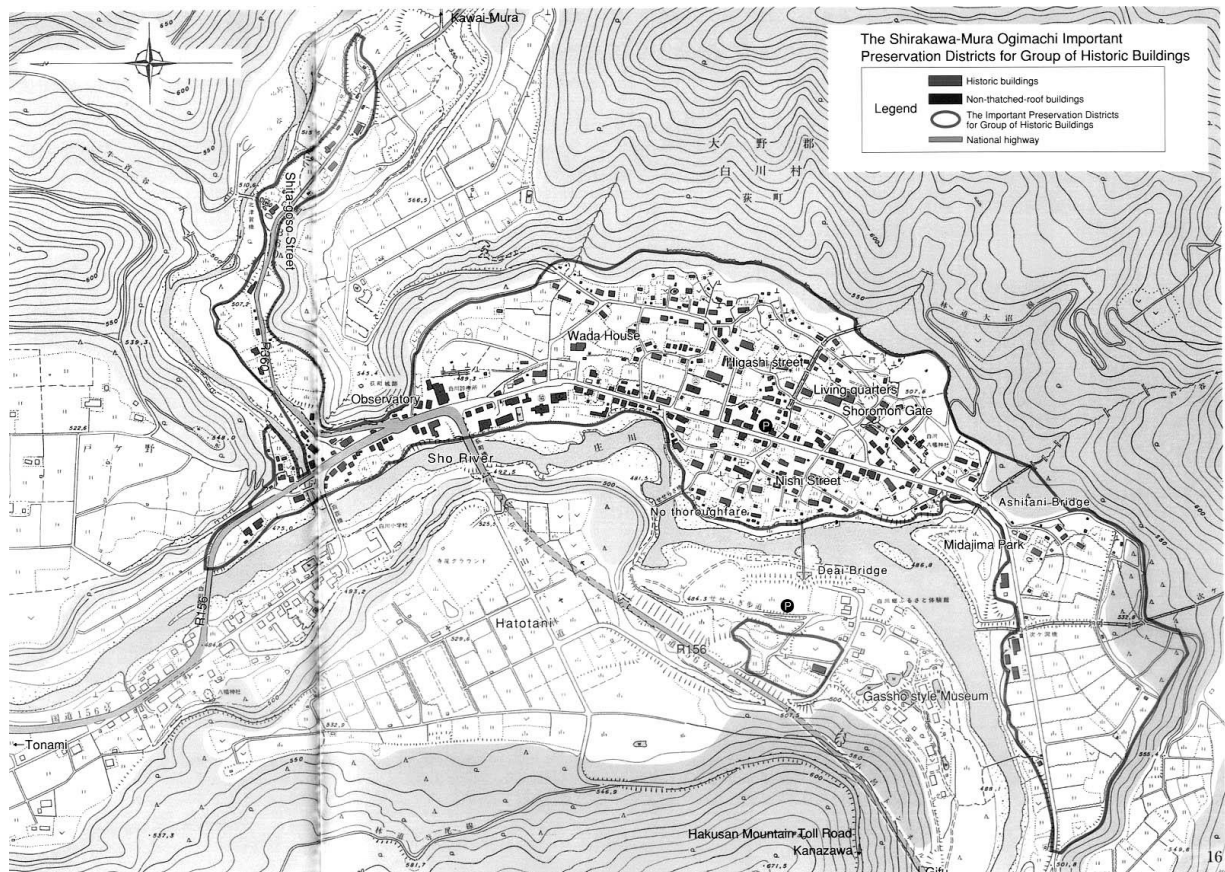
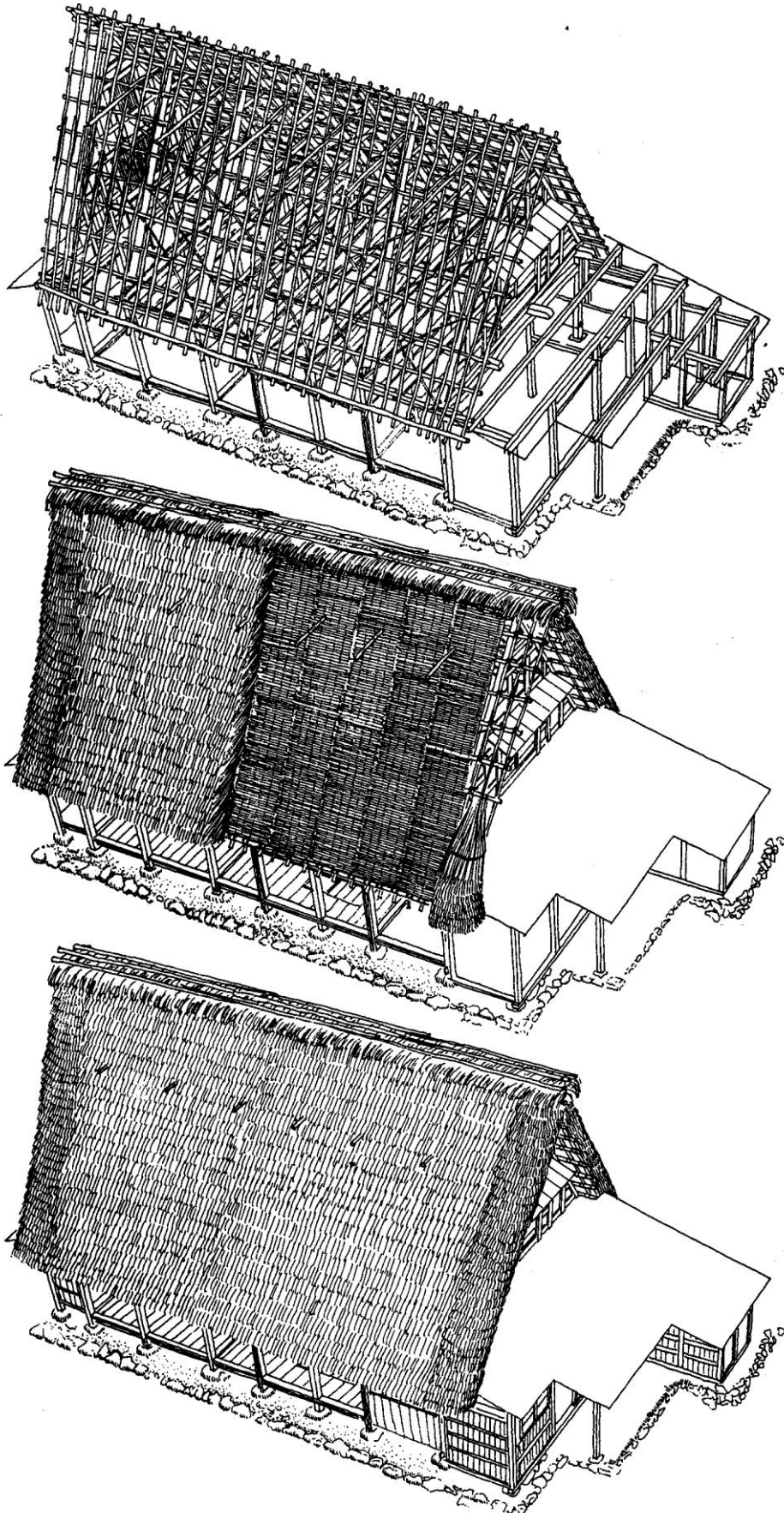


Fig. 4. Ogimachi, the nucleus of heritage sites of Shirakawa-gō: bird's eye view.



Fig. 5. The structure of the Gassho-style house [cf. Saito and Inaba 1996, p. 74]



(a)
Body frame
structure: a house
frames without
chona-bari beams.

(b)
Sasū (truss-like)
structure: the *usu-
bari* beams placed
on the body frame,
having the *sasū*
structure
constructed on the
top.

(c)
Flooring and roof-
framing: *sunoko-
yuka* (wood or
bamboo slat
flooring) is
installed, and
sloping rafters are
supported on the
yanaka (horizontal
framing members).

The Gassho-zukuri houses (Fig. 5) are large, with three to four stories encompassed between the low eaves, and intended, historically, to house large extended families and a highly-efficient space for a variety of industries. The upper stories of the Gassho houses were usually set aside for sericulture, while the areas below the first floor were often used for the production of *nitre*, one of the raw materials needed for the production of gunpowder. The most striking aspect of the exterior of these houses is their thatched roofs. Rice straw and Pampas grass are used for their materials. Those materials absorb sound, which makes the inside keep quite. It also serves as a material to repel the rain.

Gassho-style houses have been developed in a process of human's adaptation to nature in a way to fit into the village people's life. The roofs of the Gassho-style houses are set at a 60 degree incline which can easily withstand vast amounts of snow in winter. These houses subsisted on the rearing of silkworms, ensho(nitre)-making, and Japanese paper-making. The farms of Gokayama have been small, so the village people were dependent on the income they received from the production of silkworms, nitre(gunpowder ingredient), and paper. A long time ago, nitre-making was one of the most important industries in Gokayama. Ensho(nitre)-making was as important as agriculture, but now the eco-tourism and heritage tourism have dominated the economy and well accepted by the inhabitants.

During the Meiji era (1868-1912) Japan has recorded a great transformation towards modernity and industrialization. Like other parts in the country Shirakawa-gō also noticed changes. Earlier in the practice of slash-and-burn and shifting cultivation and associated family composition the four stories houses, called *Gassho-zukuzi*, well suited to the habitat and economy (cf. Mizoguchi 2006). Similar to the period of the 17th to 20th centuries Shirakawa-gō is still characterized by its low agricultural productivity. But the economy is now strongly supported by providing local hospitality and traditional meals in local '*minshuku*' guesthouses, which gives special experience of the traditional past of rural Japan.

Of course at the end of the Meiji era landscape was conceived as one of the objects of national monuments that need to be preserved, but perceptible preservation and accepting it as part of cultural tradition started in 1915. From 1915 to 1920, categories of national monuments had been discussed, in which landscape shifted its position from natural monuments to *meisho* – originally means a place of scenic beauty. In 1927, new perceptions of landscapes, which focused on natural geography, were spread over to Japan, that is how new types of landscapes were designated as "natural monument and *meisho*", which indicates Natural Reserves (Kuroda and Ono, 2004). In this process of change and adaptation Shirakawa-gō has also drawn attention of the authorities. By late 20th century under management of historic landscape, this area has further received special attention and care too considering it as ensemble of heritage buildings and natural beauty that together making it universally important (cf. Son, Kuroda, and Shimomura 2003). This is now accepted as rich resource for tourists where they can learn how to behave and communicate with the serene message and spirit of place (cf. Kuroda 2011; Hanyu, Kuroda and Takahashi 2002).

Shirakawa-gō records an area of 356.55 km², recording population of 1,893 on the Census day of 1st October 1995, and successively in the followed up five-years span recoded inhabitants of 2,151 (in 2000), 1,983 (in 2005), 1,733 (in 2010), 1,610 (in 2015), and reached to 1571 (in March 2017). This shows a trend of population decrease of -1.46% annual during 2010-15. The density of population has recorded no major change; in fact, it fallen down from 6.0 to 4.5 persons per km². The Shō-gawa River flows through the village, and most of the population is inhabited in its valley. Located in one of the snowiest places in Japan, the densely-forested mountains of the region still occupy 95.7% of total land area, and prior to the introduction of heavy earth-moving machinery, the narrow bands of flat lands running the length of the river valley limited the area available for agriculture and homestead development. After 1960s, grassland, which was distinctive character of forest landscape, had decreased and the change makes the border between forest and village clearer than before. Forest landscape has evolved through use by the people whose activity and occupancy shaped it, and current landscape, which is covered by trees, has been formed as a

result of decrease of forest use only for a few decades (see Kuroda, Hanyu and Takahashi 2003). Obviously the constant push of heritage and nature-based tourism has influenced the residents to maintain and preserve the forest landscape together with maintenance and continuity of old and traditional heritage houses and landscape that are now proven as rich resources for tourism.

The following two criteria taken by the UNESCO WHC for inscribing Shirakawa-gō as Cultural Heritage on 9th December 1995:

- **IV:** The Historic Villages of Shirakawa-go and Gokayama are outstanding examples of traditional human settlements that are perfectly adapted to their environment and their social and economic *raison d'être*, represented with a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history; and
- **V:** It is of considerable significance that the social structure of these villages, of which their layouts are the material manifestation, has survived despite the drastic economic changes in Japan since 1950. As a result they preserve both the spiritual and the material evidence of their long history, thus representing a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change.

At the centre of this area is the Shō-gawa River, flowing from south to north along the deep valley winding through this range of 1500-metre high mountains. Because of the steepness of the mountain slopes, most of the villages in this area are located in the narrow strip of land along the river valley floor. In the past, in village after village we could see unique and beautiful landscapes with their clusters of Gassho-style houses set against the surrounding irrigated rice fields and dry crop lands, but now only these three villages which are inscribed on the World Heritage List still retain the traditional landscape. As part of the development plan a new national highway route, the Tokai Hokuriku Jidosha-Do, is constructed in 2004 at the approval by the national council. This highway connects Ichinomiya City in Aichi Prefecture with Oyabe City in Toyama Prefecture, thus covering total length of 185km, with a width of 20m with four traffic lanes. The basic plan of the section of the roadway which affects the designated world heritage districts was designed in 1973; this section passes about 500m to the west of Ogimachi Village, and runs about 700m to the west of Sukanuma Village. But the height of the base pillars is kept in way that it does not directly pollute and damage the serene and scenic environment and wildlife. The environmental impact assessment of this highway has been done in relation to air and water pollution, noise, and the impact on wildlife and the scenic landscape; as a result of this assessment, the most serious impact judged refers to the detrimental effect on the scenic landscape of the Ogimachi district. As a countermeasure, under a strategic plan tree-plantation has already been in process along the roadside and the embankments, and the design of the forms and colours of bridges are significantly controlled to protect the view of the landscape from Ogimachi Village.

Due to the difficulty of access until recent times, the relations between this area and the outside world were limited and was cut off from the rest of the world for a long period of time — and this long isolation gave rise to the unique subsistence culture dominated with the cultivation of mulberry trees and the rearing of silkworms, and associated traditional way of life that perfectly adapted to the mountainous environment that further reflected in the social systems, folklore and socio-economic circumstances and customs which have been handed down to the succeeding generations. Because of the steepness of the mountain slopes, the three traditional villages in this area, viz. Ogimachi, Ainokura and Sukanuma, are located in the narrow strip of land along the river valley floor, and occupied by beautiful landscapes with the clusters of Gassho-style houses set against the surrounding irrigated rice fields and dry crop lands. However, in spite of the processes of transformation the culture and

landscape have maintained their continuity as symbol of human history despite of economic upheavals, which in the past century drawn attention of people from all-over the world, including Unesco WHC.

Shirakawa-Murā records 45.6 hectares of land under World Heritage area. This is the only such site, which is active, and people live and do their traditional works. There are 148 households, consisting of 608 persons. There are 332 total buildings, consisting of traditional buildings 109, non-traditional buildings 208, new construction 7, and under-construction 8. Traditional buildings are surrounded by traditional agricultural farms, old water drains, also including mountain areas, trees, heritage properties, and are red marked. In total 92 Gassho-zukuri are inscribed in the WHL. In this group the heritage assets are Yellow marked. The three nominated heritage property areas are: Ogimachi Village (Shirakawa-Murā; area: 45.6 ha) in the south, Suganuma Village (Kamitaira-Murā; area: 4.4 ha) in the north, and Ainokura Village (Taira-Murā; area: 18.0 ha) in the further northeast (cf. Table 2). Out of the total 5 Heritage areas, 3 are under Prefectural Government, 1 covering 300.45ha under Central Government Act, and 1 covering 105.02 ha under World Heritage Site when it was declared on 9 December 1995.

Table 2. Shirakawa-Murā: Cultural Heritage areas – Distribution and characteristics.

Shirakawa-Murā, 白川村	Lat. N./ Long. E.	Area of the property (ha)	Area of Buffer Zone I (ha)	Area of Buffer Zone II (ha)	No. of Gassho- zukuri as in WHL	Total Population, March 2017
Ogimachi Village, 荻町	36° -15' / 136° -54'	45.6	471.5	35,655	59	1,303
Ainokura Village, 相倉	36° -25' / 136° -56'	18.0	3,863.6	9,406	24	189
Suganuma Village, 菅沼	36° -24' / 136° -53'	4.4		9,477	9	79
TOTAL	---	68.0	4,335.1	54,538	92	1,571

(Source: Saito and Inaba 1996, p. 42; and reports from Mayor's office 2004, 2016, 2017).

Each property in the Shirakawa-Murā is surrounded by its own primary buffer zone (I), and is further protected by a secondary buffer zone (II), a wider area which contains all three villages. Buffer Zone I refers to an area in which alteration of the existing state is strictly regulated to preserve the natural and/or historic environment. Buffer Zone II connotes an area in which development actions over a certain scale are controlled to conserve the natural environment and the cultural landscape. The areal extents of these areas are given in Table 2.

Since December 1971 there has been an active local People Organisation, constituting neighbouring Land, People and tract of Nature (L-P-N). Daily human life also needs to be maintained on the harmonic principle of integration among the L, P and N. It is notable that there does not exist any legal structure or NGO for this purpose. However, the old people born in the village have formed such an organisation to serve the above cause for the good reasons.

2. The Issue of Tourism Pressure

It is a matter of pride and honour for every Japanese that Shirakawa-gō is included in the Unesco World Heritage List on 9 December 1995. This is model to have a harmonious life by eco-friendly balance between nature and culture. The result is profitable by strong influx of tourists every year, i.e. 1.8 million in 2004, 2.3 million in 2008, and over 2.6 million in 2015. The local people have survived many old traditions and they themselves follow the ethical code and rule to conserve and preserve the heritage assets of Shirakawa-go. It is unfortunate that most of the tourists perceive and use this area like sight scene for enjoyment

and amusement through the modernised means and modern way of thought. However, this tendency is not worthwhile and in fact, dangerous for the future prospects of this unique World Heritage. Of course life need to be adjusted according to the modern transformation, however on the other side the nature-man harmonious relationship based culture also be conserved for the sake of sustainable future and economic benefit, we need both at the same time, nature-based old traditions and at the other end good life with economically sustainable means. This is a big challenge in social planning and cultural awakening! The role of media will serve as catalyst in this respect (see Singh and Fukunaga 2005, p. 2). An owner of 'inn' expressed that these are lack of basic economic structure for strong sustenance, checking the new opening and growth of rest houses/ inns because of the opening of national highway (Tokai Hokuriku Jidosha-Do) nearby, declining tendency of local agriculture, and lack of any union associating inns and rest houses. Moreover, there is a lack of strong leadership within the society and stakeholders. Most of the tourists coming here just to enjoy and relax, mostly for 2-3 hours, and they never realise the need for sustainable development and deeper understanding together with conservation of nature and culture (Singh and Fukunaga 2005, p. 4). Of course, the Japanese tourists dominate, however Chinese, Taiwanese, Vietnamese and Koreans also visit in good number.

It is informed by the mayor's office at Shirakawa-gō that not exactly any kind of opinion surveys was made before proceeding to inscribe it in the Unesco WHC in 1995, neither even succeeding years such surveys are made. However, by the general perception and experiences attempts are made to preserve the serene environment of the region. The crucial issues include the gap of understanding among the governmental authorities and the stakeholders concerning the limit, intensity and perspectives of the speedy growth and impact of tourism. The notable concern is the keen interest and awakening of the authorities. There exists an active and strong association of the Unesco World Heritage Sites in Japan through which each one seeks coordination with other heritage sites that helps to make a shift and balance on the demographic, economic and environmental pressures that varies according to seasonal changes. This association is under the Agency for Cultural Affairs (ACA) of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), which helps to maintain, protect and regenerate the activities and programmes adopted. The financial support is subsidized by the ACA under the special 'World Heritage Fund' and the local NGO or voluntary organisations, especially for repairing and restoration, and community functions. At the site level the Mayor's office takes care of all the programmes and their implementation.

There is also contestation and confrontation between the two ideologies, the one dealing with increase of tourism, and the other with preservation of cultural heritage and control of environmental deterioration. Both sides of people talk of human right too in their own right. However, in between two contrasts, preference should always be given to preserve Shirakawa-gō primarily as agricultural and natural landscape as symbol of Japanese historical and traditional heritage. Only sustainable and rational plans to be given preference in which heavy traffic should be stopped outside, no big parking space be developed close to heritage area, and above all there should be legal control and monitoring with active public support and participation. Mentioned be made that 1.6 million tourists paid visit to this site in 2003, and in 2015 this number already crossed 2.6 million. Further, in 2004 after opening of national highway, Tokai Hokuriku Jidosha-Do, passing nearby, the heavy traffic has increased rapidly and tremendously. This will cause a great threat to the heritagescape of the region. The Division of Cultural Affairs noted that the opening of this national highway, growth of transit tourists and 3-4 hour tourists, high charges for bus parking, checking private cars and small buses in the heritage area, are some of the problems emerged recently that area faces today. There is need of urgent consideration to emphasise space (for movement), scale (referring to landscape) and intensity (of growth pressures); the involved authority is hopeful that they would succeed at reasonable level within a short period of time (Singh and Fukunaga 2005, p. 3).

The other associated and supporting organisations include Heritage Museum, and Gifu Prefecture Board of Education – of course take care of the specific activities according to their main objectives. Whatever major perspectives or programmes are taken into considerations, preference always to be given to preserve Shirakawa-gō primarily as agricultural and natural landscape. There is a strong harmonious tradition to build Gassho-style houses in this Murā. To keep this tradition alive the local Junior High School has started a programme through which all the students collaborate in making this house; together with villagers they take active part intensively and within a day complete one of the Gassho-style houses. Such programmes are part of the curriculum together with non-curriculum activities.

Promotion of adult education and cultural awakening among the schools, school children, and associated parents is a good programme that runs in the schools of the area, viz. 2 Primary and 1 Junior High Schools under the directives of Japanese Board of Education. The curriculum and programmes have a strong purview of heritage education, awakening and practical training and adoption of a heritage house for further care with commitments. The teachers and members of the board actively collaborate with Mayor's office for such programmes.

On the scale of the four hierarchical categories of the heritage as identified in Japan, the following four heritage properties and sites are enlisted and administered by the governmental institutions with the support of the other institutions (NGOs and social): (1) Enlisted in Unesco World Heritage List (e.g. Traditional and old Gassho-style houses, numbered to 92 in Shirakawa-gō), (2) National Heritage as defined by the Central Government (the Wada House), (3) Prefectural Heritage as identified by the Pref. Govt. (e.g. Myzenji Folk Museum, The Heritage Museum), and (4) Local Heritage as defined by the local government (e.g. Doburoku Festival Hall, Myozenji Shrine, Honkakuji Shrine). 'Wada House' and 'Nagase House' in Ogimachi village are open to the public, offering an opportunity to learn about how people lived long ago and still love to continue the tradition. Altogether there are 935 cultural assets as identified by the Gifu Prefecture Government; all these sites are irrespectively of their identification are visited by the tourists and pilgrims.

According to the mayor of Shirakawa-gō, Mr. Hisashi Taniguchi, 'In Japan everything is standardised – life, architecture, traditions, and there does not exist difference between old and new. However, in Shirakawa-gō people feel more close to the nature and culture and this feeling is well symbolised in the built architecture, Gassho houses, and people's harmonious lifestyle set in natural landscape' (see Singh and Fukunaga 2005). The JICA (Japanese International Cooperation Agency) has made a programme for Asian people by supporting them to see Tokyo (– modern culture) and Shirakawa-gō (– old tradition), from both the perspectives, i.e. life and built architecture. Use of old traditional Gassho-zukuri houses as resource for tourist attraction helps maintenance of the ancient spirit of place and also to convey the inherent messages of cultural continuity that the human generation can learn and further pass on to the succeeding generation; thus by the processes of maintenance, renovation and recreation one can learn lesson from the past and envision the future through creation in the present. Of course Japan has a historical record in such transformation and continuance, Shirakawa-gō is noteworthy and unique in this list (cf. Sasaki-Uemura 2007). Transformation and impact of increasing flow of tourist have strong impact on the village life. The residents are slowly adapting these changes and making their subsistence through additive commercial activities fitting into the demands of tourists, like transferring their traditional house to become restaurant, souvenir store, café, etc. and these activities certainly provide them extra income.

The Japanese sense of national loyalty and their love to their cultural symbols have promoted mass of tourists to see World Heritage. This is similar to the case of Alberobello, southern Italy (Sicily), which was enlisted in UNESCO World Heritage List in 1996, taking in view of its *Trulli*, white-washed limestone boulder stone houses with pyramidal, domed or conical roofs built up of corbelled limestone slabs. This site wants to collaborate with

Shirakawa-gō in various programmes of conservation, management and promotion of heritage tourism. Forward steps are in process.

The first detailed social and architectural surveys of Gassho-style houses were conducted by Inagaki (1952-1954), and by the Education Committee of Gifu Prefecture (1957). The Agency for Cultural Affairs started an emergency investigation of traditional houses in 1966 and the results affected conservation measures. In 1975, the government revised the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties and established a new system for the conservation of the 'Important Preservation District for Groups of Historic Buildings'. Cultural properties were widened from individual buildings to living villages. This was a big change in protection issues in Japan. Before the revision, cultural properties were preserved exactly as they were before; this is called 'freeze preservation' and it is hard to apply to living villages. The Agency for Cultural Affairs widened their territory from preservation to creation (Nishimura 1997). In 1976, seven districts including Ogimachi Village were first defined as 'Important Preservation District for Groups of Historic Buildings' (Kuroda 2011, p. 162). Presently, two organisations are effective in conserving the cultural landscape in Ogimachi Village, viz. the 'Organisation for the Conservation of the Natural Environment in Ogimachi Village' and the 'Foundation for the Protection of Gassho-style Houses in World Heritage'. Majority of residents consult and take assistance of these organizations for repairing and conservation of their traditional houses (Kuroda 2011, p. 162).

Consideration of tourism as a very fruitful means for earning money is a challenging threat to the idea of preservation of natural and cultural heritage. To satisfy the needs of increasing tourism in absolute the area has faced a threatening problem of loss of landscape beauty and natural cover during the last ten years. This resulted to different kind of social-cultural contestations and conflicts. In this context there are two considerable alternatives. Firstly, to come back to the old style of traditional life based on harmonious relationship between Nature and Man for which Shirakawa-gō was once known in history ('philosophy and lifeways that refers being close to nature'). Secondly, to divert and use the income generated by the inflow of tourists in making the local life, tradition and heritage much better and sustainable for future while preserving the old traditions and heritagescapes. In reality both the situations are quite hard to implement, but not impossible. Of course, these problems were not discussed with the local people, or newly migrant settlers, however it is realised that a rational balance between economic benefits and preservation of natural-cultural heritage to be strengthened and made part of the action programmes.

The perpetual survey of the residents shows both positive and negative impact of inscription of Shirakawa-gō in the WHL. Soon after its inscription in 1995 in WHL there was suspicious about the future, but after booming of economy due to heavy mass of tourists, people started adopting the modern life style. However, during last two decades with impact of several movements and community work to protect the cultural heritage for sustainable development, the tendency started changing. The thriving impact of tourism on landscape and culture, in terms of economic benefit and increase in employment has been realised, but not at the cost of loss of the cultural heritage and serenity of nature (see Kuroda 2011). Thanks to the programmes led by Junior High School and Toyota Eco-Institute that help mass awakening among children, young residents and also among sensitive tourists to get training and preparing themselves as nature-based cadres for caring and saving the heritage.

During 2010 when Shirakawa-gō was celebrating its 15th anniversary of inscription in the WHS, the crucial problems like aging of population, conversion of agricultural farms into parking lots, overcrowding of the visitors that ultimately disturb the serene environment of the area, were realised by the local residents and authorities (cf. *Japan Times* 2010). It was realised that a viable, indigenous and sustainable strategy to be made for taking care of these heritage sites. Since then some new programmes to preserve and maintenance of the serenity of nature and heritage have been initiated.

The recent report about the visitors in Shirakawa-gō, recorded a little over 2.6 million in 2015, refers that most of the foreign visitors stay only an average of 90 minutes there,

resulting into about zero business that turns to the loss for local economy and sustainable development. "We would like to work out measures to encourage travellers to spend more, especially to stay at least a night," said an official of the village's tourism promotion division (cf. *Japan times* 2016). The village authorities and other institutions taking care of heritage tourism and conservation are collaborating with travel agencies and financial institutions to come up with ideas for travelers to stay longer, including overnight stays, and get involved in the activities of Toyota Eco-Institute for preserving and caring the nature and heritage. The promotion of indigenous art, craft and souvenir items, and means to have direct experience of traditional life while having family-stay are also important for promotion of the economy and livelihood that ultimately will help the preservation strategy for the heritage.

3. Present concerns for Future

On the line of his experiences and daily communication and understanding Mr. Mitsuru Nakagawa (1935-2016), a resident involved for three decades to promote heritage tourism, suggested the five major strategies: (1) Reconstruction and revival of local social community group for preservation of culture, nature and landscape, including public awareness programmes. (2) Diversion of sufficient money from different organisations at World, National, Prefectural and Local levels in making various supporting projects successful. (3) Only richer enjoy life in lavish manner, therefore they should realise to pay more money for good causes in the development of heritage resources. (4) Mass awakening, legal rights and control, and transaction of money, to be integrated through spiritual feelings of the community. (5) There is a need of social leader that can link local experiences, spiritual thought, administrative functioning, governmental support, and better attitudes and respect for the nature (see Singh and Fukunaga 2005). We face a difficult social stigma that no way local community accepts anybody from outside (those not born in this village) as their leader in any respect. I terribly feel this and unable to work together with local people! On the other hand, some rich persons purchased the land and while constructing their home they demolished the old and valuable structure, but no body from the local community had objected. However, let us have hope and always marching towards betterment of our culture through conservation of beauty of natural landscape and the built architecture and Gassho-zukuri houses on the line of sustainable heritage development (see Kuroda, Shimomura, Ono and Kumagai 2001).

Commenting on the relationship between cultural assets and properties, and tourism, the authorities of the Agency for Cultural Affairs express that "certainly, we face the problem of less coordination between the issue of heritage preservation, and increasing pressure of tourism. Obviously, we also realise that most of the tourists pay visit just to enjoy, rarely awakening them to act voluntarily for saving the heritage tradition and serene nature. This is a major issue of our dialogues in Diet Meetings. We realise the need for attitudinal survey and mass awakening. An example of the latest cultural heritage enlisted (in July 2004) from Japan in the WHL, i.e. 'Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range', be cited where preservation strategies are framed with strict consideration that the area be used only for pilgrimage, not for enjoyment or fun". This way the heritagescape will be preserved and maintained sustainably. Every year several thousands of pilgrims walk on this route, and follow the ethics and code of conduct to save the nature and tradition while experiencing the spirit of place that has been realized and revealed by their fathers and their forefathers in the past. This spirit and social acceptance are "the lessons for other such heritage sites in Japan, and also similar cultural landscapes (of mixed properties) in other countries too" (Singh and Fukunaga 2005, p. 13). With the growing sense of tourism and wish to see culture in the mirror of history and tradition, heritage resource management becomes a focal issue in both the ways: protection and maintenance of sacred sites, and survival and continuity of pilgrimage ceremonies. Fostering a rediscovery of forgotten (or, about so) common cultural heritage and practices at sacred places (if in a sense Shirakawa-gō be considered so) that

centred on reverence to and harmony with the Earth as source and sustainers of life, the conservation and preservation of such sacred and pious sites would put a strong step in this direction (Singh 2008, p. 135).

Of course, there has been a strong movement in Japan to merge and unite the villages with the cities for development programmes; however it is doubtful in this strategy that the villages would receive equal facilities and be able to maintain their rural function and natural setting. The case of Shirakawa-gō is different as it is trying to maintain its traditional identity in a natural setting, and not to be directly being part of the Takayama City. Increasing demand for more parking spaces is the latest problem, which is increased by the private owners by converting the agricultural land into parking space. There is a strong need for legal control and social bondage on such happenings through the local government like Village Council together with people's organisations. Social consciousness and awakening are also necessary. The role of media and advertisement plays like a catalyst. Advertising the best image of Shirakawa-gō outside the prefecture and the nation through media, newspapers, TV shows at regular bases (weekly and monthly) has given prime importance. This helped to create a mass awakening among the citizens (mostly Japanese) with sense of proud and honour. But for the rest of the world the problem is lack of dissemination of information, statistics and news in English and other European languages.

Of course the Mayor's office is trying to improve the situation to attract international tourists, but it is a challenge and tough task. Of course there were two stage goals for 2005 (celebrating a decade of inscription of WHC) and 2010, and supporting programmes, they structurally yet more concerned with East Asia. It is good to note that in 1974 Shirakawa-gō was the only farm village selected as an Important Preservation District for Groups of Historic Buildings (Kuroda and Ono 2002). Since aspect of planning and conservation system concerning with characters of farm-village had not established at the time, only Gassho-style houses have been focused on, but on the line of changing strategy and impact of international pressure now such programmes are taken seriously.

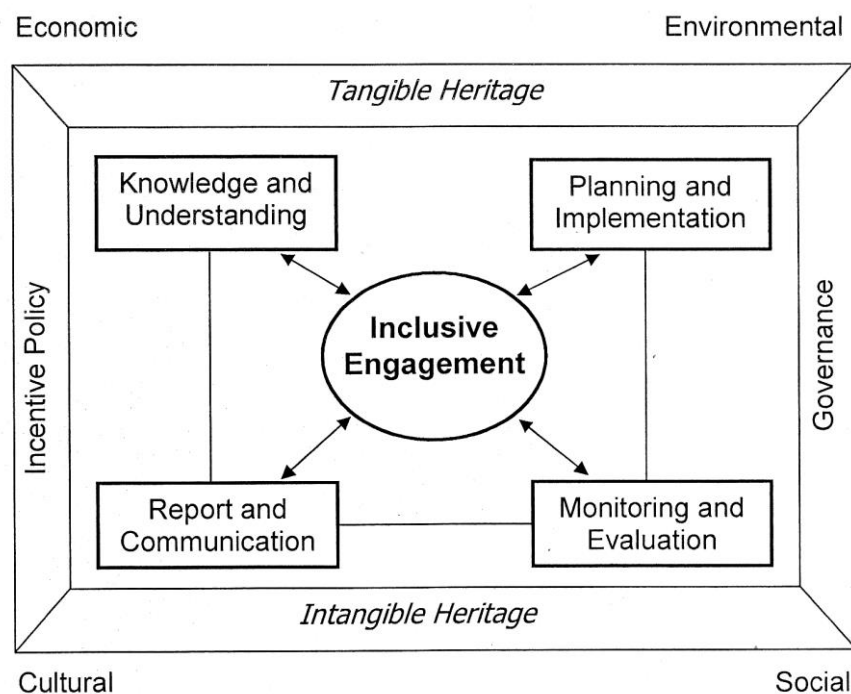
Under the landscape protection, old stone construction, preservation and repairing of old drain and old stone fencing of the drain are the issues of preserving cultural heritage. Every time it is noticed that the traditional and old cultural lands are decreasing and threatened continuously which always turned to be a great loss that would be repairable. Keeping sufficient distance between two buildings is an important issue for maintenance of the architectural beauty and longevity of the houses. However, now-a-days people are avoiding this for this personal gain and quick profit, which may be checked by strict law and rules to be amended in the earlier laws and acts related to heritage and buildings. Additionally, the reconstruction and repairing also need to be approved by the Board of Education and Heritage Committee. As apart of reverential development every visitor is strictly requested to follow the following six ethical codes of behaviour: avoidance of litter or bring trash into the village, taking extra caution to prevent fire, protecting the natural environment and ecology, not disturbing the privacy of residents, using only public restrooms and lavatories, and finally accepting prohibition of camping.

The Association for the Protection of the Natural Environment (*Mamorukai*) has been working in Shirakawa-gō since 1966, and since opening of World Heritage Fund unit in 1996, with latter's active collaboration promotes the two board plans: (1) Protect the Natural heritage assets and environment, and (2) Promote regional development, including cultural traditions like folk dance and folk songs (intangible heritage). In the cultural programmes they invite visitors from the outside and also encourage local people to actively participate, this result to enhance mutual cohesiveness and social harmony and place attachment. The *Mamorukai* also maintains close relations with inns, souvenir shops, restaurants, etc.; this is an example of public consciousness and active participation in democratic way.

Like some other heritage sites for Shirakawa-gō the prefectural government (of Gifu) provides grant to the owners of historic properties to install fire-prevention facilities. This is comparable to South Korea, where the transmission system for the living human treasures

given not only economic compensation to the performers but also greater prestige and individual self-respect to ensure preservation of intangible cultural heritage (see Mat Radzuan and Ahmad 2016, p. 2919). This should actively be promoted in Japanese communities. To have a balance among potentiality, optimality and the real situations existing at a heritage site, the working framework is divided into four main indicators, viz. tangible heritage, intangible heritage, incentive policy, and the governance (Fig. 6). Of course there has been a long discussion about heritage during last four decades as to 'when', 'how', 'what' and 'why' it should be taken care of. In the present heritage management plan in Japan 'sustainable community' principle is accepted a holistic frame, hoping that "a well designed and implemented incentives programme will take into account the positive and negative aspects of incentives programmes and the programme benefit to the community" (Mat Radzuan and Ahmad 2016, p. 2920). In case of other heritage sites in Japan, several negative aspects are noted. Excessive tourism may damage or contaminate cultural properties, deteriorate residents' living environments, increase income disparities, and destroy natural environments and landscapes; moreover the sites may lose its value after designation as a World Heritage Site (Matsui 2014, p. 154-155).

Fig. 6. Framework of the cultural heritage incentives for sustainable communities (after Mat Radzuan and Ahmad 2016, p. 2920).



The situation is not so promising mainly due to increasing attitudes among youngsters towards materialism and *lifonology* ('technology as a way of life'). Taking this in view some forms of informal and intensive course and training are introduced, viz. "World Heritage and Civil Participation" (code shared with "Citizens' Participation for Environment"). Additionally, attempts are being made on the line of UNESCO Budapest Declaration (2002), taking "Five Cs" carefully keeping in mind the befitting conditions in Japan, i.e. *Credibility* (outstanding representation), *Conservation* (ensuring effectiveness), *Capacity-building* (active assistance and proper implementation of measures), *Communication* (mass awakening and public participation), and *Communities* (responsibilities taken by communities of implementation and maintenance). A recently held Workshop on 'Capacity Building Workshop on Nature-Culture Linkages in Heritage Conservation in Asia and the Pacific' (18-30 September 2016, University of Tsukuba, Japan), has performed field-based experiences and survey in Shirakawa-gō, hoping that this

programme will become an instrumental for the interpretation, conservation and sustainable management of both natural and cultural heritage sites, and ultimately serve as a model for other similar sites. To achieve goal of inclusive heritage development sustainably 'community-based-tourism' (CBT) has been proposed that should incorporate the concepts of eco-museum (conserving and utilizing cultural and natural resources), destination management organization (DMO), and public-private-partnership (PPP) (see Nishiyama 2016).

The issues like civil participation, pilgrimage and simulation of the pilgrimage and holy sites will make us think what the world heritage meant for community, and by and large by all the visitors, in terms of attaching the values, management as city planning and involvement of local community. Shirakawa-gō presents a good example of continuity and maintenance of the tradition. Near the Ogimachi village, Gassho-zukuri Minka-en outdoor museum is made up of 27 thatched roof houses that have been relocated from various areas in Shirakawa-go. A temple, a coalhouse, and a horse paddock have been built, preserving the old scenery. There are live performances of traditional industrial arts like dyeing and weaving, and visitors can even try making these crafts themselves. At the "Soba Dojo", guests can experience making Japanese soba noodles.

Like in other countries in Japan too, in recent decades the concept of tourism has broadened as the industry reacts to global changes such as developments in travel, and a more conscientious traveler who seeks a specific type and quality of vacation. The industry has therefore seen a slowing of mass tourism and the emergence of specialized markets including health and wellness tourism, sports tourism, religious tourism, rural tourism, event tourism, eco-tourism and cultural heritage tourism (Francis-Lindsay 2009, p. 151). Shirakawa-gō is also facing these changes in different intensities and degrees.

4. Epilogue and Vision

Change is inevitable. As our world shifts from one orientation towards another, various stakeholders coalesce and diverge in the flux of development. Every now and then emerges a fusion of forces ready to take on challenge after challenge making together a great challenge to make a harmonious balance between tradition and modernity, between serenity of nature and needs of the materialistic culture. How do we understand that both sides are complimentary to each other? It is the matter of contexts, re-generative process and mass awakening to live close to nature with love and respect! How the philosophy of sustainability to be part of lifeways? These issues need to be re-considered seriously and deeply while maintaining the inherent qualities and power at Shirakawa-gō. Heritage is a cultural identity to be reflected in the purview of individual, unique and multiple layers of pluralism, especially with respect to religion (*reflected as lifeways*), at least in cultural environment like Japan that maintained their traditions and continuity together with high-tech modernity. In the span of time the layering of various traditions put their marks, which in the sequence of time sometimes turn to be the issue of conflicts due to claims and uses by the different groups for different purposes; consequently resulting to the issues of representation, belongingness, control and power, dissonance and contestation (Singh 2008, p. 125).

The World Heritage Shirakawa-gō Gassho style Houses Preservation Foundation (2004), through its popular brochure, profusely illustrated with photographs, cartoons and models, propagates the "Rule for Visitors", that all the visitors and expected and appealed to respect and follow; they are (Singh and Fukunaga 2011, p. 145):

1. There are no public trash cans. Please take your own trash with you. Return fast food packaging to the restaurant where you purchased the food.
2. Gassho style houses can catch on fire easily. Smoking is allowed only within designated areas. Do not discard cigarettes butts or smoke while walking. Making a fire or setting off fireworks in the village is strictly prohibited.

3. Do not take any plants home from Shirakawa-gō. Respect the natural environment and help us protect it.
4. People are living in the village. Please refrain from entering private land, gardens and rice fields. Do not peek into residences or open doors of the houses. Also, do not pick wild and/or cultivated flowers and plants or remove produce from the gardens.
5. Use designated public restrooms only. Using the bathroom in other than public rest rooms is strictly prohibited.

The above five codes of conduct and human concerns are widely disseminated in the form of posters and advertisements from the TV and media sources. These codes further need to be accepted as moral and ethical code of human behaviour (like a *dharma*, in Buddhist ethics). Moreover, this should be strongly taught in the primary schools; such awakening movements should be from 'down to up'. Let the young generation learn such good lessons and life philosophies that help to make the future more peaceful, happy and harmonious with nature. It is to be remembered that the maintenance of intrinsic value of cultural heritage and its relationship to sustainable tourism development has been the historical reality and carrying on tradition in Japan in contrast to other countries of the oriental world. The primary aim in the strategies for the regional development centred around the world heritage, like Shirakawa-gō and Gokayama, is not to attract more tourists, but to cultivate the unique value of the world heritage that visitors could feel and carried as message. The regional development with this aim would result in establishing the high-quality of regional brand and lead to regional activation. This will be a great example of integrating locality with universality (cf. Imai 2006).

Located in a mountainous region that was cut off from the rest of the world for a long period of time, these villages with their Gassho-style houses subsisted on the cultivation of mulberry trees and the rearing of silkworms. The large houses with their steeply pitched thatched roofs are the only examples of their kind in Japan. Despite economic upheavals, these heritage villages are outstanding examples of a traditional way of life perfectly adapted to the environment and people, and social and economic circumstances (see Singh and Fukunaga 2011, p. 142). Gassho-Zukuri houses have not changed their form, such as waterways, houses and farms, for more than at least two hundred years. Therefore, historical authenticity of this village is preserved. However during the last three decades drastic change in the spatial infilling (construction on non-Gassoh houses) and lifestyle as described by Kuroda (2011, p. 160): "Previously, residents of Ogimachi Village made their livelihood through sericulture and agriculture. Today, they make money from the tourism industry and the construction industry. The relationship between the people and the landscape changed with the changing of their lives. Forests used to have a close relation to most livelihood activities, such as sericulture and agriculture, but today, forests have little relation to any form of livelihood".

It has been realized that "approaches to improve the conservation of material authenticity will involve developing a system to conserve the elements removed from the building, and facilitating the interpretation of the monument through an adequate differentiation of original work and repaired elements. In the case of living architectural environments (e.g. Shikakawa-gō), strategies be applied giving priority to the preservation of the authentic use and function of the heritage" (Honda 2015, p. 107). The role of institutions (community organizations, and Toyota Eco-Institute) becomes more important in this direction.

UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization) International Conference on Heritage Tourism (24-26 February 2016, Nara, Japan) has emphasized two crucial objectives to foster and preserve the WHS; these are: 'Ensure that heritage tourism development is responsible, inclusive and sustainable and that it contributes to the socio-economic development of host communities and improves their well-being'; and 'Explore new and innovative approaches to the management of tourism flows in heritage sites taking into

account the integrity of the sites and an effective communication of its values, as well as the engagement of the whole tourism supply chain.' These strategies should be implied with the help of local people, institutions and the government.

Of course, Shikakawa-gō has received certain economic benefits from the inscription on the World Heritage List, it must address many challenges if the "original Japanese landscape" is to be sustained through the strategy of PPP (Public-Private-Partnership). The society should be careful and conscious in maintaining order and public awakening to keep peace in the society and harmony with the nature. Religious beliefs and practices have shaped the local geographies through the built forms set in the natural environment and associated rituals and performances. In course of time such visual forms and traditions are sometimes considered as symbol of political control, identity, hegemony and social security, thus also turning to conflicts and political interference as the division and sub-divisions in the society segmented around their narrow defined goals and territorial demarcations on the line of individualism, consumerism and materialism (cf. Singh 2008a). Such notions should never be promoted taking the universal image of the place that has wonderfully reflected upon the harmonious blending of human ingenuity and divine nature.

NOTE: The present essay is based on Singh, 2017 (*f.c.*).

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