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# Conceptualizing Heritage Education from Past to Present in Japan

Mayumi Okada<sup>1</sup> and Amanda Gomes<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

This paper explores heritage education in contemporary Japan within a conceptual expansion of heritage as cultural property (bunkazai) to include cultural heritage (bunka isan), which is a consequence of national efforts to address socioeconomic issues. Although heritage is used in school education, social education, and lifelong learning, the definition of “heritage education” has not been formalized in Japan. This paper situates heritage, its management, and education within contemporary policies and historical developments and aims to highlight the interaction and dynamism of Heritage and Education. Before World War II, heritage education was employed to cultivate a modern national identity mainly through public appreciation and, later, to contribute to indoctrinating the public in order to strengthen Japanese imperialism. After the war, the heritage management system was reformed based on a new constitutional law promoting a democratic and pacifist postwar Japan. Over the following decades, the concept of heritage and its management policies were informed by social and economic concerns, globalization, and neoliberalism. Today, heritage education has a broader role in Japanese society, encouraging the participation of various stakeholders in order to promote local identity, regional revitalization, and tourism development.

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While there is no direct translation for ‘heritage education’ in Japanese (Okamura 2011), this does not imply the lack of a connection between heritage and the public or an absence of opportunities to teach and learn about heritage in Japan. In fact, there is a dynamic interplay between heritage, the public, and education throughout modern Japanese history. The last few decades have been characterized by the gradual appropriation of global concepts of heritage and related management practices by the state to support economic recovery efforts and frame citizenship. Rather than replacing previous practices, these developments were established separately overtop of existing structures and more recently have begun to make connections between the two. These developments have been studied across multiple disciplines but have not coalesced into a singular field or practice in Japan. Moreover, a holistic framework for heritage education in Japan does not exist, despite the growth in academic discourse.

In this article, we situate heritage education in Japan within a palimpsest of multiscalar practices and principles resulting from heritage and education policies as well as the socio-historical context of their development. In particular, developments in the conceptualization of heritage in Japan are integral to understanding the state of heritage education. Currently, both cultural property (bunkazai) and cultural heritage (bunka isan) refer to heritage as a whole. The former was officially adopted during the early stages of postwar development in Japan and continues to be the most widely accepted administrative term for heritage. The latter has become more prevalent across research and policy concerning heritage, as well as within the general public over the past few decades (Matsuda 2013). Throughout this paper, bunkazai (cultural property) and bunka isan (cultural heritage) are used to refer to distinct concepts and

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management systems in Japan, while heritage is an umbrella term. Moreover, there are several adjacent terms used across policies concerning cultural properties, tourism, and education that fall under the umbrella of heritage education, such as dissemination (*fukyū*), enlightenment (*keihatsu*), and utilization (*katsuyō*). These concepts are informed by the Confucian underpinnings of education in Japan, the introduction of Western pedagogy, and the aims of the state. In order to understand the development of heritage education in Japan, it is important to explore these concepts and the subtle shifts in their meaning over time.

This paper presents heritage education as a series of nested, interlinking concepts developed by the government to support state-making efforts and to reinforce national identity. The following historical approach to their development is presented in three stages informed by structural reforms that reference the previous systems. The first three sections consider prevailing political ideologies, the construction of citizenship, and the connections between policies concerning heritage and education. Finally, a summary of contested heritage considers the legacy of these practices, their impact on marginalized communities in Japan, and their relationship to heritage education.

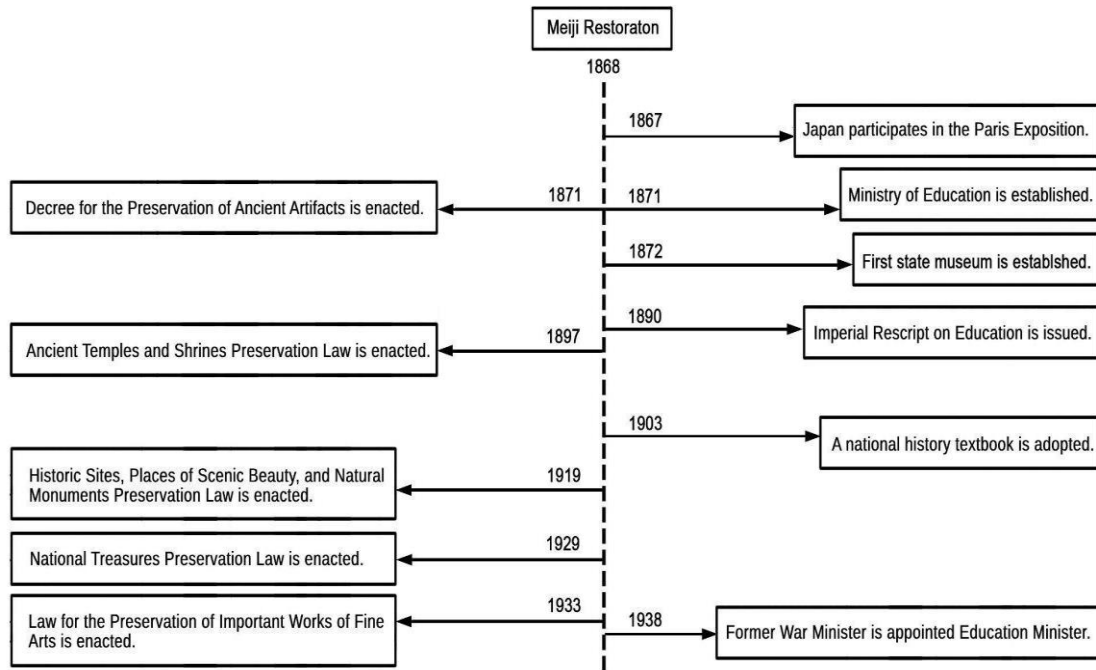
## **A Historical Overview of Heritage Discourse and Education in Japan**

Japan has a long history of heritage management and heritage-making practices, as evidenced by the treasure house of Tōdai Temple, Nara. The Shōsō-in, as it is called, dates back to 746 CE and was built as a repository to preserve valuable objects, including foreign items brought to Japan via the Silk Road. Items of intangible and tangible heritage were protected by a select group of stakeholders, such as the imperial family, temples, shrines, and feudal lords. On the other hand, heritage education emerged as an essential part of the state-making process of prewar Japan as the Imperial government sought to establish itself as a modern colonial power among its Western counterparts. Since then, heritage education has gone through several stages of development closely tied to heritage discourse in Japan. The postwar period brought about a paradigm shift in attitudes and policies towards heritage and education ushered in by occupying forces framing a democratic nation. Over the last few decades, heritage education has expanded as Western concepts of heritage and heritage education have been appropriated to foster both global and national citizens of Japan. These three modern periods are not unique to this article, and there are other resources that explore the prewar, postwar, and current periods within the context of their research (Scott 2003; Edwards 2005; Kakiuchi 2016; Teeuwen and Rots 2020). The following overview of the historical developments and sociopolitical context aims to clarify how the concept of heritage and education have come to be mobilized by the government, which is essential for conceptualizing heritage education in Japan.

### **Prewar Period: The Imperial State and Heritage Education**

The emergence of heritage education is tied to the centralization of heritage and education policies of the emergent, modern nation-state of Japan. It was essential in establishing a new national identity that was shared with its citizens as well as with the world. The first national policies concerning the protection of heritage were implemented following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, which ended the policy of national isolation in place for hundreds of years and established a new system of government. Prior to this, items of tangible and intangible

heritage were protected by a select group of stakeholders, such as the imperial family, temples, shrines, and feudal lords (Agency of Cultural Affairs 2001, 3). These forms of heritage were reframed as new categories like historical sites and natural monuments were established (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1:** Heritage Policies and education reform during the prewar period.

The earliest ordinance issued by the Meiji government concerning heritage instituted state-sanctioned definitions of Shinto and Buddhism. In order to support a new political framework centered around the imperial family, it declared Shinto the national religion.<sup>3</sup> This policy led to a movement to abolish Buddhism and destroy Buddhist artifacts across Japan. In response to this loss, the Meiji government issued the Decree for the Preservation of Ancient Artifacts in 1871, which required each province to inventory cultural property and preserve it. As a result of this effort, the government created thirty-one categories of heritage items.<sup>4</sup> Following this first set of policies, the Ancient Temples and Shrines Preservation Law of 1897 established a heritage management system overseen by the Agency of Domestic Affairs and later the Ministry of Education.

Consequently, heritage was mobilized to educate citizens to encourage an understanding of the new nation-state and citizenship. When the law of 1897 was deliberated at the parliament, temples, shrines, and associated religious cultural goods were recognized not only as outstanding historical and aesthetic objects but also as important educational materials for the people of the new nation-state due to their honorable history with the imperial families (Morimoto 2010). The “national treasures” (kokuhō) throughout Japan were assembled in newly established Imperial

<sup>3</sup> In prewar State Shinto, the emperor was recognized as a living god (arahitogami) and the highest object of faith.

<sup>4</sup> Categories included religious goods, weapons, calligraphy, clothing, crafts, and Japanese lacquerware.

museums in Tokyo, Nara, and Kyoto for public appreciation, and historical sites were used to foster national identity as well as to enforce Japan's imperialism.

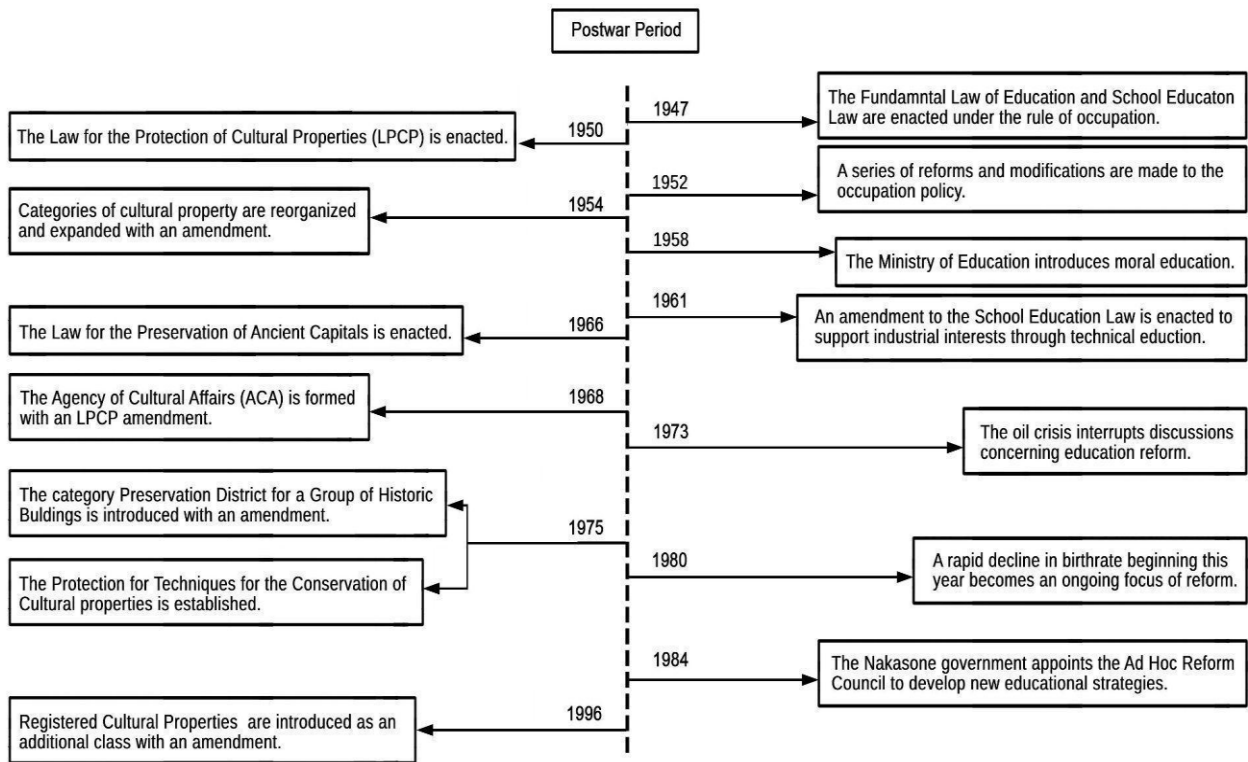
As with heritage, education went through massive reforms at the outset of the Meiji period in order to foster modern citizens who would support the development of the Japanese empire. The earliest policies emphasized the role of State Shinto, traditional Confucian values, and modern sociopolitical developments (Luhmer 2006). The publication of state-edited history textbooks for elementary schools based on imperial myths in 1903 resulted from stronger national control over compulsory education. Archaeological materials and historical sites were interpreted as evidence of these myths to maintain the national constitution centered on the emperor (Morimoto 2010:394). The later expansion of heritage and its management occurred under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education as an extension of imperial control. The Historic Site, Places of Scenic Beauty and Natural Monuments Preservation Law enacted in 1919 recognized historical sites associated with the achievements of the imperial family and past warlords as sacred sites.

With the expansion of the Japanese empire during this period, heritage was further utilized to promote national pride and ideological indoctrination. When colonizing parts of East Asia and the Pacific, heritage was used as proof of Japanese superiority and justification for control of these regions. For example, when Japan annexed Korea in 1910 and implemented colonization and assimilation policies, many researchers of archaeology, anthropology, and architecture conducted surveys across the Korean peninsula, collecting data as well as artifacts. These items were displayed at a museum established by the Office of the Governor-General of Korea to showcase the authority of Japan's imperialism (Arai 2012).

As we have seen in this section, a system of cultural heritage management was promoted as part of the establishment of the Imperial state, and at the same time, heritage and education were utilized to construct citizenship. This heritage education ultimately contributed to the spread of Japanese imperialism throughout East Asia. However, the heritage education used at that time was completely rejected after the war, while its legacy is still an issue today in the form of recognition and restitution.

### **Postwar Period: Promoting Peacetime Democracy through Heritage Education**

Following the war, heritage education was once again mobilized by the reformed state to reimagine citizenship in Japan in contrast to its Imperial predecessor. Heritage and education were initially reconceptualized by Allied Forces. The creation of a new constitution was overseen by the General Headquarters of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (GHQ) during the occupation of Japan following the war. Enacted in 1947, the constitution shifted power from imperialism to a constitutional monarchy. These sweeping reforms were then adjusted by the postwar state following the return of Japanese sovereignty. Heritage education in Japan was radically reformed to support the development of a democratic nation focused on pacifism and postwar recovery (Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Heritage Policies and education reform during the postwar period.

Early postwar heritage management was focused on the protection of cultural properties. In the years immediately following the end of the war, heritage was at risk due to economic instability. A fire at the main hall of the Hōryū-ji temple in 1949, the oldest wooden structure in Japan, became the impetus for the development of the postwar heritage regime. In 1950 the Art and Monument Branch of GHQ drafted the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties (LPCP), which was then enacted by the Japanese government (Scott 2003). The primary aim of the LPCP, according to Article 1, is to ensure the preservation (*hozon*) of cultural properties and their utilization (*katsuyō*) for national cultural promotion. While preservation is generally understood as relating to the maintenance of cultural heritage, the meaning of utilization is vague. Article 4 of the LPCP mentions public appreciation in reference to utilization, which, while similar to Western notions of interpretation, defines the role of the public as passive recipients of specialist knowledge. The term interpretation has been avoided in Japanese heritage management as it harkens back to the employment of prewar ideology in the production of knowledge concerning cultural heritage (Moriya 2019). The LPCP also established a different sense of ownership of cultural properties, insofar as what once fell under Imperial control in order to support its legitimacy is now managed by the state on behalf of the nation.

The development of postwar heritage education was initially restricted by the GHQ's control over education reform during the postwar period. Cultural heritage was scrutinized for its

potential to revitalize imperialist and nationalist sentiment<sup>5</sup>, and, as a result, there were efforts not to employ it within the standard curriculum (Hood 2021). However, at the regional level, heritage was incorporated into postwar local education movements, which aimed to be democratic, scientific, and for the people. In 1953, the Tsukinowa mounded tomb (kofun) was excavated by local residents, mainly teachers, students, local heritage clubs, and professional archaeologists. This community-based approach to heritage management fostered the development of a local archaeology study circle and extracurricular activities for local students (Tsuchiya 2017:44). Moreover, postwar history education focused on the acquisition of skills to understand history through the investigation of archaeological artifacts and historical sites. It was also critical of the use of myths and legends.

As with heritage legislation, a series of amendments following the end of the occupation made adjustments to the Western and liberal aspects of education. At the regional level, the reintroduction of moral education, or *dōtoku*, as a non-standard subject that draws on Confucian ideology to promote social cohesion, provided a framework for the study of intangible and tangible heritage (Kitamura 2019). However, it should be noted that national standards for moral education are not always followed at the local level (Bolton 2015; Chiba 2022). Additionally, moral education continues to be an area of study central to nationalist reforms of later right-wing parties.

During the early postwar period, heritage education was utilized by the state to respond to socioeconomic issues caused by rapid economic growth, urbanization, and depopulation of rural areas. In particular, urban and rural land development contributed to the loss of cultural properties, such as archaeological materials, traditional buildings, and folk materials. One example of early postwar heritage education is a 1966 measure, "Regional Initiatives for the Protection of Cultural Property" (Bunkazai aigo chiiki katsudō) aimed at fostering patriotism through supporting public understanding of cultural properties. The government produced resources for educators, catalogs of cultural properties, and films. Additionally, an annual week-long campaign was created to raise public awareness for the protection of cultural properties. The newly introduced regional initiatives followed three guiding principles: (1) the development of knowledge and awareness of cultural property through school and social education, (2) the dissemination of information regarding the protection of cultural property to the public, and (3) the promotion of the protection of cultural property through local committees. In addition to public appreciation, these new initiatives expanded the concept of utilization to include the development of school curricula and social education activities (Agency of Cultural Affairs 2001:86-89; Moriya 2019:67-71).

In response to the issues discussed above, the government established the Agency of Cultural Affairs (*bunkachō*, ACA) in 1968 under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) to enforce legislation concerning the protection and oversee the selection and designation of cultural properties, national treasures, and important cultural properties. It was also expected to provide instruction, orders, and recommendations regarding the management of designated cultural properties to their owners and regulate any changes to the physical fabric of cultural properties, export restrictions, and restoration injunctions. It would

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<sup>5</sup> Designated historical sites associated with the Meiji Emperor, except for those with historical values assigned by academics, were undesignated in 1948 (Agency of Cultural Affairs 2001, 14).

also become responsible for the establishment and operation of museums, theaters, and research institutions for cultural properties. While the ACA was established as the direct managing body for cultural properties, ACA also plans and implements measures regarding heritage education. Though the ACA is responsible for policies concerning heritage, as well as its preservation and utilization<sup>6</sup>, local heritage managers are employed at local Boards of Education overseen by MEXT. With the establishment of the ACA, heritage education is regulated across multiple government bodies at varying levels.

When the LPCP was amended in 1975, the government not only expanded the categories of cultural properties to ensure their protection<sup>7</sup> and took measures to find a balance between development and preservation, but also embraced *fukyū-keihatsu*, dissemination and enlightenment, as a means of generating greater public awareness for these cultural properties and their protection. This model was intended in environments of formal education and social education, or *shakai kyōiku*.<sup>8</sup> Social education is situated between school education and home education and is frequently held in museums, libraries, and *kominkans* (citizens' public hall and cultural center; Abedellatif 2021). Local governments administer this style of community-based learning, and it is ultimately up to them if cultural properties are a part of these learning opportunities.

The support of local communities was positioned as essential in protecting cultural property from postwar development, while cultural properties were framed as a resource to support postwar national and local identity (Agency of Cultural Affairs 2001; Moriya 2019). In other words, while actively participating in the preservation of cultural properties, the public was still passively receiving knowledge created by specialists to mobilize citizens to support postwar economic recovery and development in most other cases. Postwar heritage education was utilized to contribute to the protection of cultural properties from the rapid development that took place as the nation sought to recover economically and socially. The emphasis on preservation in heritage management and the limited scope of utilization contributed to the amorphous state of heritage education. However, the next few decades brought a renewed interest in the socioeconomic role of cultural properties in Japan. In turn, heritage education expanded to generate new roles for citizens in the promotion of their local cultural properties.

### **Contemporary Period: Heritage Education, Japanese Neoliberalism, and Globalization**

The employment of global heritage protection strategies has been central to the expansion of heritage education, policies, and management over the last 30 years. While global approaches

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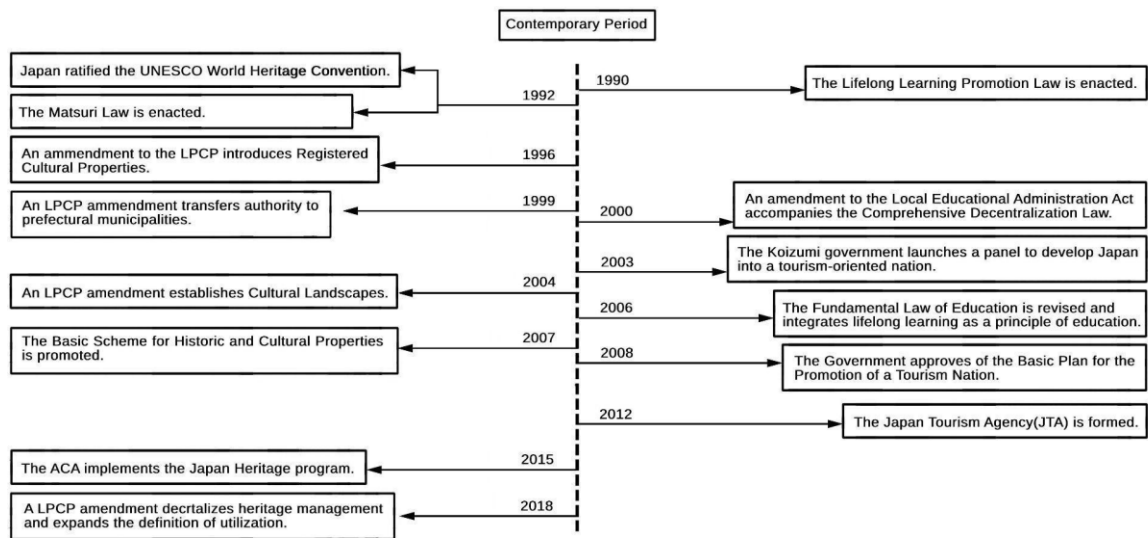
<sup>6</sup> Agency of Cultural Affairs, "Major Roles of the National Government, Local Government and Owners." Retrieved from [https://www.bunka.go.jp/english/policy/cultural\\_properties/overview/index.html](https://www.bunka.go.jp/english/policy/cultural_properties/overview/index.html) (accessed 23 February 2021).

<sup>7</sup> In 1975 the LPCP was amended to recognize the protection of Buried Cultural Properties (*maizō bunkazai*) or archaeological materials, the designation of Folk Cultural Properties, and the introduction of preservation districts for groups of traditional buildings (Teewen and Rots 2020).

<sup>8</sup> In the prewar period, social education had been an instrument for national indoctrination. After the war, prewar ideas and institutions were dismantled, and social education was revived in a new democratic framework. Although it provides community education outside of schools through local institutions such as libraries, museums, or public halls (*kōminkan*), the centralized aspect of social education was criticized and its role downplayed, when the idea of lifelong learning was introduced in the 1980s.

to heritage management provide a wider system for situating Japanese cultural heritage, the nuances of national regulations and local practices should be treated equally as part of a holistic framework of Japanese heritage education. The relationship between contemporary heritage management developments and nonlinear neoliberal reform in Japan (Tiberghien 2014) aids in understanding the fragmented and overlapping forms of heritage education in Japan. Neoliberal policies and global heritage practices have reshaped the concept of heritage in Japan since the 1980s, restructuring its management through decentralization and deregulation, as well as the responsabilization of citizens for their management (Figure 3). Consequently, heritage education has been expanded to produce individuals and communities that actively participate in new frameworks for heritage management as represented by the expansion in the meaning of utilization.

While responding to external pressure to pursue a more active role in international politics, Japan introduced heritage reforms on a global stage while simultaneously taking steps to reframe national heritage practices to facilitate marketization and commodification for tourism and regional revitalization. As early as the 1970s, the government explored ways of attaching culture to Japan’s foreign policy to control the nation’s image abroad and protect its economic interests (Bukh 2014; Loo 2020; Nakano and Zhu 2020). However, cultural heritage would receive increased attention following Japan’s ratification of the World Heritage Convention in 1992. Japan adopted global approaches to heritage and contributed to them, focusing on a diplomatic policy of cultural exchange and cooperation (Akagawa 2015). The government utilized the inscription process to brand itself globally. For example, the nomination of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial focused on the nation’s commitment to peace and avoided its wartime legacy (Nakano and Zhu 2020).



**Figure 3:** Heritage policies, educational reforms, and related legislation during the contemporary period.

The same year as Japan’s ratification of the World Heritage Convention, the government enacted legislation that positioned cultural properties as a resource for local tourism and business

strategies to promote economic revitalization. The 1992 "Law Concerning the Promotion of Tourism and Specific Regional Commerce and Industry through the Implementation of Events Utilizing Local Traditional Performing Arts," or the Matsuri Law, promoted the self-regulation of heritage management at the municipal level. This law encourages the utilization of local traditional performing arts for regional revitalization. While utilization was a tenant of the protection of cultural properties in Japan initially associated with public appreciation and academic study (Agency of Cultural Affairs 2015), this law was broadened to include the active engagement of heritage resources by local stakeholders, especially the business sector, to address economic issues. Initial pushback from within local communities against the restructuring of heritage management as it places emphasis on economic stakeholders rather than on the individuals or groups holding traditional knowledge and techniques (Teewan and Rots 2020) demonstrates the tensions that continue to form in response to subsequent stages of neoliberal reforms.

The development of lifelong learning under the Nakasone administration was part of market-oriented reforms to education centered on promoting individualism and freedom, reframing the relationship between the state and the individual (Takayama 2009). Moreover, Nakasone's administration sought a balance between a focus on economy and culture, as well as nationalism and internationalism in its reforms (Hood 2001). Formalized in 1990, lifelong learning has been promoted at the national, prefectural, and local levels, with cultural activities prominently centered (MEXT 2009). Through this approach, individuals are positioned as central to preserving and promoting cultural properties, which have been threatened by socioeconomic factors, specifically the aging society. Local communities are not only the target of keihatsu, or educational activities aiming to generate local understanding of cultural properties, but also participate in raising awareness of heritage within and outside of Japan.

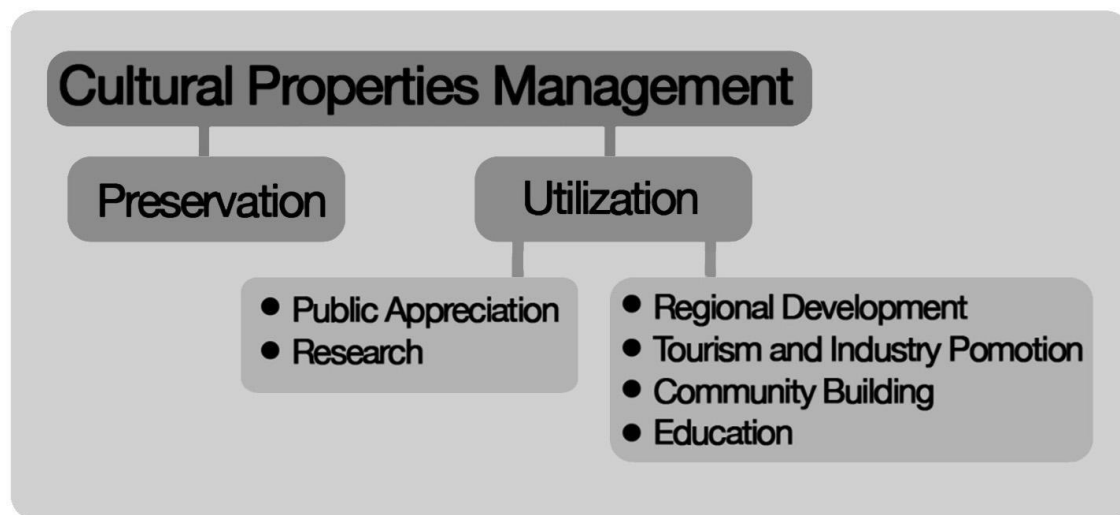
The Koizumi administration's (2001-2006) structural reforms indirectly addressed education in Japan, simultaneously encouraging decentralization and neoconservative values (Murakami 2019). During this period, an expanded model of the utilization of cultural properties partnered their promotion with the engagement of local communities in the responsibilities of heritage development. The global tourism strategy of the government focused on rebranding Japan as a "tourism-oriented country" (*kankō rikkoku*). Within this framework, cultural heritage was promoted as a resource for economic recovery following the collapse of the financial bubble in 1992 and was utilized to perpetuate the discourse on the nation's uniqueness and homogeneity (Iwabuchi 2015). The establishment of the Japan Tourism Agency and increased privatization would eventually create a multi-sectoral partnership for heritage management.

The 2006 Basic Plan for the Promotion of a Tourism Nation led to the establishment of the Japan Tourism Agency, which works in partnership with local heritage managers to utilize cultural properties in regional development (Japan Tourism Agency 2007). While placing emphasis on tourism for economic recovery, the Koizumi administration furthered decentralized and promoted communal cohesion through the participation of various actors in community building (*machizukuri*), a bottom-up approach to community development to create social capital and a resilient community (Dimmer 2016). Due to the ambiguous nature of *machizukuri*, it has generated innovative local workshops on various aspects of heritage, including local resources,

but has also promoted the involvement of private businesses. Public participation and decentralization are key aspects of machizukuri.

Education within the context of community building rarely fits a particular model, although it can follow prescribed formats. As the first Abe administration (2006-2007) came to power, the next wave of neoliberal reforms reinforced the role of communities and cultural properties in rebranding localities. In 2007 “The Basic Scheme of History and Culture” (Rekishi Bunka Kihon Kosō) was established to frame a wide range of regional cultural properties (including tangible, intangible, designated, and non-designated properties) and their management within the surrounding environment in a holistic manner (Agency of Cultural Affairs n.d.). It encouraged local communities to collaborate with public and private sectors to establish connections between local cultural properties and regional identity. This framework used a narrative, or ‘story’, that highlighted the uniqueness and diversity of local culture through the integration of regional planning, community building, and tourism within management plans (Nishimura 2011). The process of assembling cultural properties for reimagining and rebranding regions has reemerged in later initiatives aimed at economic revitalization through tourism.

Heritage management and education were expanded through programs associated with the third stage of neoliberal reforms in Japan by the Abe administration (2006-2007 and 2012-2020). The government distanced itself from Koizumi’s policies, placing greater emphasis on education reform with nationalistic ideology (Tiberghien 2014). Additionally, regional and multisectoral approaches to heritage management were supported through programs implemented during the second Abe administration. An amendment to the LPCP in 2018 reformed the heritage management system to address the most pressing issues of depopulation, declining birthrate, and an aging society. It encourages local governments to take the initiative in the management of cultural properties. In addition, private organizations are permitted to participate in cultural property management. This amendment places greater emphasis on the role of local municipalities in the development of heritage management plans and the utilization of heritage (fig.4) in partnership with stakeholders from the public and private sectors (Agency of Cultural Affairs 2018). On the one hand, this drastic shift in cultural property management has been generally well-received for supporting initiatives to implement cultural property management that involve local communities consisting of various stakeholders. On the other hand, its connection with the government’s tourism policy in anticipation of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games has generated concerns from these specialists as to whether the focus on tourism development would overshadow preservation (Iwashiro and Takagi 2020).



**Figure 4:** Concepts encompassing utilization (based on Agency of Cultural Affairs 2015).

“Japan Heritage (Nihon Isan)” was promoted alongside the 2018 amendment. This framework positions cultural property as a resource to create economic value through utilization and promotion of cultural properties (Japan Tourism Agency 2016) both locally and nationally. It is also significant as one of the first ACA initiatives to officially use the term *bunka isan* (cultural heritage) rather than *bunkazai* (cultural property). Moreover, the ACA authorizes a ‘story’, that highlights the uniqueness and diversity of inscribed heritage and that is expected to stimulate regional branding and local identity.<sup>9</sup> Japan Heritage was positioned as a tourism development strategy from its inception with the aim of contributing to regional revitalization through the branding of cultural properties that are both recognized and unrecognized by the state. Like the 2018 amendment to the LPCP, this program was developed to encourage tourism related to the 2020 Olympic games. Japan Heritage was intended to be a temporary program as its certification only applied for five years with a cap of approximately 100 inscriptions.<sup>10</sup> In other words, it was not a sustainable program but rather appears to be an initiative built around a specific event.

One of the features of Japan Heritage is that the registration requires a ‘story’ of the region that weaves together several cultural properties. It may be created by one municipality or produced by multiple municipalities. “A Heritage of Salmon: A Journey of Ten Thousand Years in the Nemuro Strait” encompasses several heritage sites and natural landscapes throughout eastern Hokkaido and was used to promote coexistence between the Indigenous Ainu and ethnic

<sup>9</sup> The ACA supports the regions whose stories have been inscribed as Japan Heritage by providing subsidies for *fukyū-keihatsu* (exhibitions, workshops, symposiums etc.), utilization (guidance facilities etc.), development of human resource (interpreter etc.), promotion activities (online contents and leaflets) and research projects.

<sup>10</sup> 104 Japan Heritage has been certified up to today as of 7 July 2021. Retrieved from [https://www.japan.travel/japan-heritage/full\\_list](https://www.japan.travel/japan-heritage/full_list) (accessed: 7 July 2021)

Japanese of the region by uniting them under a shared heritage.<sup>11</sup> In regard to educational output, these projects were expected to include promotional activities, fukyū-keihatsu, such as leaflets and public events for local communities as well as tour guiding programs based on ‘story’ for tourists. However, there is not sufficient data to assess what was produced and whether such activities are sustainable. Additionally, since the global pandemic has derailed the government's tourism-focused plans, including those involving cultural heritage, the efficacy of these developments will likely be impacted by these unforeseeable circumstances.

Finally, the most recently inscribed World Heritage Site, the Jomon Prehistoric Sites in Northern Japan, has shown coordination between World Heritage management bodies and local heritage management for the promotion of the site through school education, lifelong learning, and tourism initiatives. While there were efforts to bridge heritage education across tiers of heritage management in Japan and consolidate practices, a recent report mentions that local managers struggled to incorporate the global evaluation and interpretation models into fukyū-keihatsu efforts (Hokkaido Archaeological Center 2023). Similar to the Japan Heritage program, education activities associated with the Northern Jomon World Heritage Site frame heritage through ‘story’. Given the hesitancy of local heritage managers with regard to global practices, the sustainability of similar initiatives requires further consideration.

### **Exploring Contested Heritage in Japan**

While much of this article has examined the development of heritage education, this section will consider how the prioritization and marginalization of different aspects of heritage in Japan intersect with education. The concept of contested heritage has been explored in various fields of research, but it has not always been labeled as such in English or in Japanese. However, as global frameworks of heritage are more readily adopted in Japan, greater scrutiny has been placed on the politics of cultural heritage in Japan. Rather than provide an exhaustive list, we will briefly survey key themes that form the nexus of contested heritage and heritage education.

Many disputes concerning heritage are linked to Japanese colonial and imperialist policies and practices. For one, heritage education has contributed to the construction of a shared national identity that has remained racialized since the prewar period (Siddle 1996). Additionally, the strategic reframing of the nation’s darker historical narratives to emphasize more favorable aspects of its cultural heritage has led to recurring disputes domestically and internationally. Lastly, the adoption of global heritage practices has elevated the profile of Japanese heritage, but it has also precipitated discord across all levels of heritage management, thereby positioning heritage education in a precarious state.

Heritage has been mobilized to support Japanese national identity, which has conflated race and ethnicity since the prewar period. The Japanese race has been set in contrast to both foreigners and the other “races” of Asia, including the nation’s Indigenous populations (Yamashiro 2013). While the prewar ideology of racial superiority in Asia was abandoned, its legacy persists in modern iterations of national identity. Thus, contested heritage in Japan involves groups perceived to be racially different, such as the Ainu and Zainichi Koreans, and their marginalization in heritage management practices. For example, there are numerous

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<sup>11</sup> A Heritage of Salmon: A Journey of Ten Thousand Years in the Nemuro Strait. <https://www.heritage-of-salmon.com/en/index/#story> (accessed: 20 December 2023)

examples of the contested heritage associated with the Ainu, an Indigenous people who faced assimilation in their traditional homelands after the Meiji period. Although their recognition as an Indigenous People by the Japanese Diet in 2008 only partially addressed the historical and ongoing appropriation, exclusion, and erasure of Ainu cultural heritage in Japan, the new law enacted in 2019 officially states Ainu people as Indigenous people in Japan and continuous initiatives have been implemented responding to the issues above.

The policy for Ainu cultural promotion has been creating opportunities for non-Ainu citizens to understand Ainu people, their culture and history as well as for Ainu to regain their culture with more stable circumstances. This policy, for example, led to the development of Upopoy – Symbolic Space for the Ethnic Harmony, National Museum of Ainu people, and Park. At the same time, there are critics who say that these measures have not been met with the full support of Ainu communities, due to the lack of consultation and their involvement in the state's tourism initiatives (Morris-Suzuki 2018). Additionally, these developments were not accompanied by a formal apology for the Japanese government's assimilation policies or direct compensation. Furthermore, there is still a need for wider discourse regarding custodianship and stewardship of Ainu heritage, as well as who tells the story of Ainu heritage. Various Ainu cultural properties are still cared for within the current management system by ethnic Japanese specialists. Although the presentation and interpretation of Ainu heritage with and by Ainu people has been initiated in some places, such as Upopoy (Okada and Edelheim 2024) and others, it has not yet spread throughout Hokkaido and Japan. Protests continue for greater involvement of the Ainu people in the management, presentation, and interpretation of their cultural heritage.

Repatriation issues over cultural property and ancestral remains affiliated with local and Indigenous peoples in regions such as Hokkaido, Okinawa, Taiwan, China, and Korea are other examples of ongoing heritage issues associated with Japan's colonial past (e.g. Arai 2012; Chiang 2014; Okada 2020). While the call for the repatriation of ancestral remains to their communities has been ongoing for decades, there have been few successful initiatives to decolonize collections in museums and universities. Recently, Ainu people, scholars, and even the general public have advocated for the return of Ainu people's ancestral remains and associated funerary objects following Japan's adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Despite the development of a national repatriation scheme for Ainu ancestors housed in the collections of universities across Japan in 2016, only a few cases of repatriation have occurred due to insufficient institutional records identifying and detailing the acquisition of ancestral remains. Additionally, the mental and physical strain of the process on community members and ongoing distrust among the Ainu, scholars, and universities are not addressed by the current policy (Okada 2020).

In the postwar period, the ongoing and fervent political debate surrounding the framing of war memories in Japan remains deeply entangled with the forging of national identity. As previously discussed, the government has employed the World Heritage inscription process to rebrand its dark heritage. In the case of Hiroshima, the focus on peace aligns with the state's efforts to promote the nation's postwar pacifism. Conversely, there have been several controversies over how to represent Japan's war memories in history textbooks from groups of various political leanings (Nozaki 2002). Ultimately, these struggles are representative of both how wartime legacies are interpreted as well as how postwar national identity is defined.

Finally, returning to the discussion concluded in the previous section, there are increasing examples of global heritage practices concurrently instigating tensions within the hierarchical structure of heritage management, casting heritage education into a precarious position. An example of an issue that has recently surfaced concerns the historical interpretation of the wartime industrial heritage sites inscribed and nominated as World Heritage Sites. In 2022, South Korea strongly opposed Japan's nomination of the Sado complex of heritage mines, mainly gold mines, as a UNESCO World Heritage Site because the property does not reflect the history of Korean wartime forced labor. South Korea's demand to recognize Korean forced labor in Japan's World Heritage is not the first. It was also made when sites of Japan's Meiji Industrial Revolution: Iron and Steel, Shipbuilding, and Coal Mining were inscribed in 2015. The Japanese government has not responded to South Korean demands to reflect and include the history of Korean wartime labor in the interpretations and presentations (Johnsen 2022).

In order to overcome these issues, it is more important to recognize multiple perspectives on the legacy of war and colonialism. Regarding Ainu heritage, it is necessary to improve the situation today that history, archaeology, and anthropology courses at the university level dealing with the historical relationship between the academia and the Ainu people are still limited in Japan. It is also important that those involved in research understand this historical fact and the conflicts today. Moreover, with regard to the contested heritage managed under the World Heritage system and UNESCO constitution preamble, the lack of multiple perspectives on the past leads to a reduction in the potential of heritage education to ensure universal value and to the exclusion of stakeholders with different perspectives on heritage education.

## **Conclusion**

As has been demonstrated throughout modern Japanese history, heritage education is one means used to reinforce the role of citizens within contemporary political structures. During the prewar period, the public, as part of the emergent nation-state, was introduced to a racialized ethnic identity essential for the modernization and colonial interests of Imperial Japan. The postwar government rejected these conceptions and employed cultural properties to support the democratizing of Japanese society. While not replacing the postwar heritage system in Japan, cultural heritage has provided a framework for situating cultural properties, their role as local resources, and the engagement of local communities in their use, informed by economic, political, and ideological concerns. This hybrid model is a result of the phased development and selective adoption of neoliberalism in Japan. In other words, heritage education in recent years can be situated at the intersection of heritage, education, globalization, and neoliberalization. Recent administrations have expanded heritage education practices to accommodate an increased focus on stakeholder participation and the economic values associated with cultural heritage in Japan. As a result, heritage management and education are designed to contribute to the development of regional identities and regional revitalization. In part, the engagement of local communities is associated with the deregulation of heritage management, while the increased autonomy of local governments reflects wider trends in decentralization. Additionally, the increasing privatization of heritage management can be seen in the rise of third-sector participation in heritage-making initiatives. One area for further research and development is the possibility of addressing contested heritage through current neoliberal systems in Japan. While

this article adds to the growing literature in English on heritage studies in Japan, it also touches upon the various contexts in which heritage education occurs. Heritage studies in Japan are not formalized in academia and do not frequently engage critical and multivocal perspectives. Similarly, while there is research in both English and Japanese on heritage education in prewar Japan, Japanese research on developments during the postwar period rarely addresses contested heritage, globalization, or socioeconomic issues. This article contributes to the growing literature on the intersection of heritage and education in Japan and provides a broader view of heritage education that considers the mechanisms of power dynamics within the state. The authors agree that there is a need for continued research on the various trends and advances in heritage education in Japan.

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