

無形文化遺産におけるジェンダーに基づく役割分担のダイナミクス ー 日本の山・鉾・屋台行事を事例として

The Dynamics of Gender Roles in Intangible Cultural Heritage:
A Case study of Japanese Yama Hoko Yatai Float Festivals

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1. Introduction

Gender and intangible cultural heritage are linked. Gender roles often play a part in traditional practices, while traditional practices affect gender codes and expectations. Both gender and intangible cultural heritage (ICH) are dynamic constructs, constantly being created, reiterated and renegotiated, and they are both factors in the construction of the other. This research examines the dynamics of gender roles in ICH through case studies of a specific type of festival – the Yama Hoko Yatai float festivals – found in various regions throughout Japan. These festivals are an interesting arena to study the dynamics between intangible cultural heritage and gender since while the festivals are and have traditionally been male events, some festivals have seen changes to allow for female participation in roles that were earlier only available to men.

(1) Research design and methodology

Chapter 1 starts with an introduction of the research topic and outlines the research design of the study. In this chapter, the author outlines the theoretical framework and methodology and briefly introduces the festivals that are the focal point of the study – the Yama Hoko Yatai float festivals.

The Yama Hoko Yatai float festivals are major local events, and while there are differences between the individual festivals, all of them center around a procession of large floats. The festivals are traditionally organized and managed by the local residents of the concerned float neighbourhoods. Nowadays, the festival communities also have an official organizational structure in the form of preservation associations (*honzonkai*). On a national level, the National Association for the Preservation of Float Festivals represents the preservation associations of 36 Yama Hoko Yatai float festivals. The

scope of the study is limited to these 36 festivals and these are approached both in-depth as well as on a collective level in order to attain a multifaceted picture of the gender situation within the festivals.

The interaction between gender and ICH is approached by using a combination of methods: a survey among the preservation associations connected to the festivals, interviews with a selection of preservation associations following the survey, and analysis of the official descriptions of the festivals within the national and international safeguarding systems. The survey and the interviews are used to examine the on-site situation, as perceived by the local stakeholders and practitioners, while the analysis of the official descriptions of the festivals is used to examine how gender is handled and described in the safeguarding systems.

A survey was conducted among the preservation associations connected to the 36 festivals. The purpose of the survey was to map the current gender situation in the respective festivals. The questionnaire which was sent out inquired about the preservation associations' membership structure, gender roles and restrictions in the festivals, as well as changes that have occurred in these roles and restrictions. The results of the survey raised further questions concerning the details of the changes and of how they had happened and of the local circumstances.

In order to examine the situation in depth, interviews were conducted with a number of selected preservation associations. Upon analysis of the results of the survey described above, a number of festivals where changes in the gender rules had occurred were selected, and the respective preservation associations were contacted for interviews. Interviews were conducted with a total of seven preservation associations. The aim of the

interviews was to grasp the circumstances of the ‘gender situation’ within the individual festivals. The interview questions were mainly focused on the details of the different gender roles and gender rules, the changes that had occurred in these roles and rules – what had changed, why it had changed, and how it happened – and on whether the changes had become naturalized and whether the changes had affected the perceived value or meaning of the festival.

It is also relevant to understand the wider context. To that end, the official descriptions of the festivals within the contexts of the relevant national as well as international safeguarding systems were also analyzed. The Yama Hoko Yatai float festivals are recognized in two heritage safeguarding systems – the national legislative system and UNESCO’s 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The 36 festivals examined in the study are all protected by Japanese heritage legislation as ‘Important Intangible Folk Cultural Properties’. 33 of these 36 festivals are also inscribed on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity pertaining to the 2003 Convention. This means that, as part of those designation and inscription processes, the festivals have been handled and described within those respective contexts. The official descriptions of the festivals within these two systems were analyzed in order to examine how gender is approached in the descriptions of the festivals within those respective contexts.

(2) Aim and goals

Within the cultural heritage field, gender is often treated as a ‘niche topic’ (Wilson, Ross J.: The tyranny of the normal and the importance of being liminal, in *Gender and Heritage: Performance, Place and Politics*, edited by Wera Grahn and Ross J. Wilson, 3-14, Routledge, p.3, 2018). Nevertheless, gender is an important factor to acknowledge in the critical examination of heritage. As Smith (2008) has argued, heritage is gendered (Smith, Laurajane: Heritage, gender and identity, in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, edited by Brian Graham and Peter Howard, 159-178, Ashgate, 2008.).

Regarding the aim of the study, the research sets out to provide valuable information and knowledge about the interaction between gender and ICH which will be useful for state parties and other stakeholders when revising policy, legislation and other instruments,

including the 2003 convention. As such, the goals of the study are to map the current gender roles and changes that has occurred in them, identify factors/triggers of change, examine whether the occurred changes have affected the sense of value and/or meaning of the festival, and examine whether the occurred changes have been naturalized or not.

Drawing from the resulting information and conclusions from these investigations, the study addresses and discusses a number of overarching questions concerning the underlying mechanisms of the changes and of the gender roles being upheld. In the festivals where the gender roles/restrictions have changed – is there a pattern to how they have changed? What do gender roles mean for the continuation of the practice? Why have some festivals changed and not others? These questions are addressed in the discussions in the final Chapter.

2. Background

Chapter 2 introduces the Yama Hoko Yatai festivals more thoroughly and paints a background of the festivals. The origin of the festivals – stemming from the *goryō-e* (service to appease restless spirits) events held in Kyoto – as well as the basics of the festivals – the procession of large floats – and their various roles are outlined. Part 2 of Chapter 2 examines related research on gender within Japanese festivals. Especially noteworthy is Wakita’s research indicating that women were probably participating in the Kyoto Gion festival – and riding on top of the floats – in the early days (Wakita, Haruko: *Chūsei Kyōto to Gion Matsuri: Ekijin to Toshi no Seikatsu*, Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 2016), and Brumann’s study on Kyoto containing an interesting description of the discussions surrounding the participation of female musicians (Brumann, Christoph: *Tradition, Democracy and the Townscape of Kyoto: Claiming a Right to the Past*, Routledge, 2012). Part 2 also examines studies relating to the social significance of festival participation and touches upon the topic of *nyonin kinsei* (customary female exclusion) and the idea of female impurity and blood pollution.

Chapter 3 outlines the wider scholarly debate on gender within the field of ICH. A particular focus is placed on the handling of and the discussions concerning gender within the framework of the 2003 convention. The

author points to how the topic of gender has been receiving increased attention in recent years. However, the contentious question of how to handle gender equality and how to handle potentially discriminatory practices has yet to be solved. The author outlines a timeline for the changes pertaining to gender that have occurred within the framework of the convention and raises examples of discussions that have taken place.

Part 2 of Chapter 3 outlines the gender equality legislation in Japan and touches upon policy changes that were introduced in the 1990s. Part 2 also touches upon international reports addressing the current situation concerning gender equality in Japan.

3. Analysis of official descriptions

(1) National safeguarding system

Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the festivals' official descriptions in the context of the national ICH safeguarding system, i.e. the national heritage legislation. The author examines whether and how gender was addressed in the official descriptions of the festivals. The results of the analysis show that gender roles were generally not a clearly described aspect. Roughly half of the descriptions contained no mentions of gender. In approximately one third of the descriptions, gender was indicated by the choice of words. In around one fourth of the descriptions, gender was clearly mentioned. Two of these descriptions (both designated in 1997) mentioned gender restrictions – both of them mentioning that women had earlier been prohibited from participating, but that women are now participating in large numbers.

(2) International safeguarding system

Chapter 5 examines the festivals' official description in the context of the international ICH safeguarding system, i.e. the 2003 convention. In this context, there are three relevant inscriptions – the two formerly individually inscribed elements 'Yamahoko, the Float Ceremony of the Kyoto Gion Festival' and 'Hitachi Fuyumono', as well as the currently inscribed group element 'Yama Hoko Yatai, float festivals in Japan', in which the two former are now included. The analysis found a difference in approach towards the topic of gender among these three cases. Also, in order to offer context to the inscription of the float festivals, Chapter 5 also presented an analysis of all elements inscribed by Japan on

UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The results of this analysis showed a noticeable difference in visibility between women and men among the inscribed elements.

4. Survey and interviews

(1) Survey with the preservation associations

Chapter 6 presents a survey conducted by the author among the preservation associations connected to the 36 festivals. The survey was conducted during autumn-winter 2018 and the response rate was 64%. The results of the survey revealed existing gender structures in the festivals, and some common patterns could be identified. The results also showed that changes in the gender roles and gender restrictions have occurred in around half of the festivals (from where a reply was received), and that the most-cited trigger of change was a shortage of available participants. Gender awareness in some form was also mentioned as a contributing reason in three cases (it may also be noted all three festivals underwent the changes in gender restrictions around the same time).

Regarding what roles were/had been made available to women, the results showed that women's participation was generally limited to the roles of *hikite* (the role of pulling the ropes of the float), *hayashi* (musician) and dancer. At the same time, several of the replies reported that women were participating in roles 'behind-the-scenes' (*urakata*). Regarding the membership structure of the preservation associations, the results showed that the organizations are generally male dominated, and more than half of the preservation associations reported all-male membership tallies. While there are significant differences between the different festivals in gender structure and approach, the overall results show that the festivals are mainly male arenas, and that women's participation is generally conditioned and auxiliary.

(2) Interviews with a selection of preservation associations

Chapter 7 presents the results of the interviews the author conducted with representatives of seven different festivals following the survey. The selection of festivals was based on the results of the survey, and only preservation associations that had reported a change in the gender roles

or restrictions were considered for selection. The interviews provided in-depth information about the 'gender situation' among the preservation associations and their festivals – about existing gender roles and restrictions, the rationale behind the restrictions, the changes that had occurred, why and how they had occurred, attitudes towards female participation in the festival communities, whether the restrictions were being challenged, whether the inscription on UNESCO's Representative List had affected the practice, predictions about changes that might occur in the future, and more. See findings in the individual case studies. Through the interviews, it was possible to get a good picture of the gender conditions of the examined festivals. As such, the interviews also served to deepen the understanding of the survey results.

To mention some of the main results, the interviews showed that there seems to be a limit to the (front stage) roles that women are allowed to participate in, and women's participation is typically restricted to the roles of *hikite*, *hayashi*, and dancer. By contrast, the role of festival officer appeared to be a male domain. The author notes how female participation, where allowed, is conditioned. Regarding the limitations, the author notes how one limit seems to concern the proximity to the floats, and another limit seems to concern age. Concerning what triggered the change to allow female participation, a shortage of people stands out as the most frequently cited reason, while another trigger of change seems to have been a consciousness about gender equality.

Aside from providing information concerning the pre-determined research questions, the interviews also offered additional information, and it was possible to identify some interesting and recurring themes, offering insights into the underlying societal structure and the rationale behind the gender-based restrictions. It also became clear that it is common that women are active in roles 'behind the scenes', such as preparing food, taking care of guests and relatives coming to visit for the festival, serving tea, producing equipment etc. It also became clear that it is not uncommon with women participating in the festivals in secret or unofficially in roles only available to men, either before the role was opened up to women or in roles that are still closed for women.

5. Summary results and conclusions

Chapter 8 summarizes the results obtained through the various investigations presented in the previous chapters and discusses conclusions drawn from the overarching results. The chapter is divided into different sections. The first sections address the main themes of the study – the gender roles and restrictions of the festivals, the changes that have occurred in these, and the handling and description of gender within the two safeguarding systems. As outlined in the introduction, the goals of the study are to map the current gender roles and changes that have occurred in them, identify factors/triggers of change, identify the direction of change, examine whether the occurred changes have been naturalized, and examine whether the occurred changes have affected the sense of value and/or meaning of the festival.

Based on the results of the study, the latter sections discuss some overarching questions concerning the underlying mechanisms of the changes and of the gender roles being upheld. In the festivals where the gender roles/restrictions have changed – is there a pattern to how they have changed? What do gender roles mean for the continuation of the practice? Why have some festivals changed and not others? The author discusses the festivals as 'miniature societies' where societal norms, values and structures in the greater society can be seen reflected, as well as being reacted to, reshaped and reiterated. The author also discussed the question of how to address the topic of gender within the safeguarding systems.

(1) Summary results concerning the main research themes

Based on the results of the study, a clear pattern could be identified concerning what roles were allowed for women participants. There were mainly three (front stage) roles available to women: *hikite* (the role of pulling the ropes of the float), *hayashi* (musician), and dancer. In terms of gender-neutral roles, it seems that *hikite* and *hayashi* are the roles most likely to be performed by both women and men. Other roles, including festival officer and 'person in charge', appeared to be male domains.

Concerning the reason for prohibiting women/girls from participation, several factors could be identified, such as religion, physical strength, the 'burden of responsibility', and concerns regarding problems that

might occur if mixing women and men.

In the results of the survey conducted among the festival preservation associations, approximately half of the received replies reported that changes had occurred in the gender roles or gender restrictions. Concerning what triggered the change to allow female participation, a shortage of people stands out as the most frequently cited reason in both the survey as well as the interviews. The most cited cause of the shortage of people was *shōshikōreika*, a term referring to declining birth-rates combined with an ageing population. Another trigger of change seems to have been a consciousness about gender equality.

Concerning the direction of change, according to the results of the survey among the preservation associations, the most common direction of change was towards increased inclusion, i.e. allowing women and girls to participate more. Regarding whether the occurred changes have become naturalized or not, the results of the interviews show that naturalization has happened in more than half of the examined festivals.

In the interviews, the informants were asked whether the change in gender restrictions had affected the perceived value or meaning of the festivals, such as for example the religious meaning weakening, or the sense of community strengthening. From what could be gathered from the interviews, there were no accounts of that by allowing female participation, the value of the festivals had lessened. Contrarily, positive effects were mentioned in several interviews.

Concerning the gender approach within the two safeguarding systems, the results of the analysis show that in general, gender roles are not described as part of the cultural property within the national context of the designation information, at least not clearly, and roughly half on the descriptions contained no mentions of gender. In the handling of the festivals within the context of the 2003 convention, a variety of gender approaches can be discerned. It may also be noted that the description of the group element ‘Yama Hoko Yatai, float festivals in Japan’ in the nomination file for inscription on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity contains only general mentions of gender. There are no mentions of gender restrictions and overall, the description conveys an inclusive image where the

whole of the concerned community participates (Nomination file for ‘Yama, Hoko, Yatai, float festivals in Japan’ for inscription on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, 2016). The author notes how that description, given the different stances towards female participation displayed by the various festivals, does not convey the complexity of the situation.

Furthermore, by combining the results from the different chapters, the author could discern that several instances of gender awareness coincide in time with a period of advances in gender equality in Japanese society.

(2) Discussions and conclusions

Concerning why some festivals have changed while others have not, the author suggests and discusses a hypothesis involving population density as a factor. In this hypothesis, festivals in more urban areas are less prone to lift the gender restrictions than festivals in more rural areas, due to the impact of *shōshikōreika* being easier to mitigate in urban areas by means of inviting people from outside of the core neighborhoods to participate. The author further discussed how, in this hypothesis, there is an implied order of priority to different types of changes, where allowing boys and men from the ‘outside’ to participate is implicitly more easily acceptable than allowing local women and girls to participate.

Concerning what gender roles mean for the continuation of the practice, the author concludes that, based on the results of the study, having gender restrictions is not a crucial factor for the continuation of the practice. In the interviews with the preservation associations, there were no accounts of that by allowing female participation, the value of the festivals had lessened. There were however mentions of positive effects in several interviews. The author discusses how this would suggest that male-exclusive participation was not a crucial feature of these particular festivals.

Concerning the festivals where changes have occurred in the gender restrictions, the author discusses a detected pattern in the changes, namely that there seems to be a limit to the roles made available to women. While women are increasingly being allowed to participate as *hikite* and *hayashi*, the top positions have remained a male domain. Based on the results of the interviews, the author discusses frequently cited rationale for the

gender-based restrictions in participation. The author concludes that while changes are happening in the direction of increased female inclusion, the underlying societal structure has remained intact. Women are being allowed to participate to some extent, but not (yet) in ways that threaten the positions of power currently held by men.

6. Final notes

The research results provide valuable information to an under-researched area and offer insights into under which circumstances – and how – gender roles and restrictions within ICH can change, and also provide indication of how the festivals might change in the coming years. By using a multi-step methodology to approach the festivals both in-depth as well as on a collective level, the study could produce new and important knowledge about the dynamics of gender within traditional practices. Through its collection of primary data, the study has also provided valuable information concerning the gender structures within the examined festivals. The study provides new knowledge about how changes in the gender roles and gender restrictions of these festivals occur, which is of interest also in a wider research context. As such, the results of this study offer insights into the role of gender in the practice of intangible cultural heritage.

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