

Living Heritage Safe-Guarding: Capacity Building in UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage *Honba Yuki Tsumugi*

生きている遺産としての無形文化遺産のセーフガーディングに関する研究
ーユネスコ無形文化遺産結城紬の人材育成の現状と変遷を事例としてー

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1. Introduction

(1) Research Background

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is, as the name suggests, cultural heritage without tangible or physical form. UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) specifies that, "Transmitted through generations, this heritage adapts over time." Compared to other forms of heritage, this emphasis on adaptation over time has led to the transmission of ICH to be referred to not as 'protection' or 'preservation,' but as 'safeguarding.'

Since ICH lives and dies with its bearers, it is 'living heritage' in the literal meaning of the word. More specifically, living heritage is defined as something continuous (Wijesuriya, 2018) and existing within a certain context (Kunisue, 2012; Bae, Park, 2018). It is actively created and recreated (Bergadaà, Lorey, 2015), and to be understood, one needs to have an understanding of its past and present-day bearers (Iida, 2022; Takakura, 2022). This study refers to the regions where intangible heritage is practiced as 'ecosystems,' taking inspiration from the studies of Li, et al. (2023) and Hwang and Huang (2019). This use of the term ecosystem is meant to emphasize relationships and interdependence of heritage stakeholders within an area, differentiating it from the biological definition of the word.

(2) Research Aim and Methods

The aim of this research is to understand, through the case study of capacity building in *honba yuki tsumugi*, how intangible heritage can be safeguarded as living cultural heritage. To do this, this research utilizes methods of literature review, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation.

2. *Yuki Tsumugi*

Honba yuki tsumugi refers to a hand-woven silk textile and the techniques used to produce it. It is produced in Ibaraki Prefecture and Tochigi Prefecture, Japan, and is recognized and safeguarded as a National Important Intangible Cultural Property, a Japanese Traditional Craft and a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage element.

Having a history stretching as far back as the Nara period (710-794 CE), its production reached a peak of over 30,000 bolts of fabric in the 1980's. Since then, production has fallen steadily, with only 537 bolts being produced in 2023. *Honba yuki tsumugi* production is divided into over 30 steps, which are each done by separate specialized craftspeople.

3. *Yuki Tsumugi* Safe-Guarding at the Macro Level

To systematically understand the safeguarding of *honba yuki tsumugi*, the production region was analyzed as a framework of three interconnected layers. The first layer, the 'macro,' is made up of governmental stakeholders, namely the Ibaraki and Tochigi prefectural governments, and the Yuki and Oyama city governments. This layer creates the legal and financial support framework for the production region and its safeguarding efforts. However, in doing so, it also irreversibly divides the production region into two separate systems, divided along the line of the prefectural border.

4. "Middle Level" Safe-Guarding and Capacity Building

The 'middle layer' of the *honba yuki tsumugi* production region consists of the stakeholders directly involved in the craft's capacity building and safeguarding. The first set of stakeholders are industrial technology support centers, which create and host capacity building programs. The next are *shimaya*, stores that specialize in the sale of *yuki tsumugi*; apart from being textile merchants, they also oversee and manage production. The final group of stakeholders are craft co-operatives, of which the *Honba Yuki Tsumugi Certification Association* plays a central role in the region by being the only official link between the two prefectural production systems. The certification process determines whether a *yuki tsumugi* textile is 'honba' (authentic) or not. This in turn determines whether it is considered heritage, and at what price it can be sold. Through their activities, these three groups of stakeholders have developed two separate approaches to safeguarding, which in this research are referred to as safeguarding as a cultural industry (Ibaraki/Yuki) and as

cultural heritage (Tochigi/Oyama).

5. Safeguarding at the Micro Level: The Craftspeople Themselves

The final, ‘micro,’ level consists of individual craftspeople. This layer is explored through four themes meant to cover the ‘life cycle’ of a craftsperson: a site of capacity building, the experience of amateur craftspeople, a *hataya* (weaving business, employer of craftspeople), and veteran weavers who have gone independent. Common throughout these themes is that current safeguarding initiatives focus on teaching skills to craftspeople as individuals. This, however, overlooks the relationships that exist between stakeholders, and how key these relationships are to the production region and the existence of *honba yuki tsumugi*.

6. Analysis and Discussion

The capacity building of craft skills to individuals is necessary. However, as is brought to light throughout the previous chapters, it is also necessary to consider the environment that individuals will be stepping into upon completion of their training, and what kind of capacity building that environment requires. Highlighted here is the safeguarding of relationships between stakeholders, and the challenges currently faced by *hataya*. Thus, it is concluded that for the safeguarding of *honba yuki tsumugi*, it is necessary to consider the entire production region as an ecosystem, or ‘living network,’ of stakeholder relations.

7. Conclusion: Capacity Building of Intangible Heritage Ecosystems

Referring back to the key theme of intangible cultural heritage as ‘living’ heritage, it is concluded that the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage requires the safeguarding of the ‘ecosystem’ within which culture exists. In the case of traditional crafts such as *honba yuki tsumugi*, this would be the intricate collection of stakeholder relationships that come together to form a production region. Further development of this research would be to involve and consider non-human stakeholders

and the role of stakeholders from outside of the production region.

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Abstract: This research studies the silk weaving technique *honba yuki tsumugi* through the lens of capacity building, utilizing literature survey, semi-structured interviews with production stakeholders, and participant observation at sites of capacity building. By doing so, current capacity building systems are identified, as well as the way various stakeholders contribute to capacity building and the formation of the entire *honba yuki tsumugi* production system. The study concludes that it is not enough to safeguard intangible heritage through the capacity building of individuals - for intangible heritage to continue existing as living heritage, safeguarding efforts need to view intangible culture as heritage ecosystems consisting of networks of relationships and interactions between stakeholders.