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Between Preservation and Tourism Folk Performing Arts in Contemporary Japan

Abstract

This article considers Japan's folk performing arts (*minzoku geinō*) as originally having been objectified through tourism. Through the case study of the rice transplanting ritual Mibu no Hana-taue, I examine the creative process through which people concerned having gained their identity by using tourism as a resource to produce/reproduce the practice of folk performing arts. I conclude that we must consider the experiences and feelings of the people concerned in the folk performing arts in constructing notions of authenticity.

Keywords: folk performing arts—Festival Law—tourist resources—intangible cultural properties—performance competitions

JAPAN'S FOLK PERFORMING ARTS (*minzoku geinō* 民俗芸能) have long been considered as important cultural properties that must be preserved. Surprisingly, however, their relationship to tourism has not been considered in depth, even though the development of mass tourism and other social changes have markedly altered their form. In particular, the 1992 Festival Law (Omatsurihō お祭り法), which promotes the exploitation of folk performing arts as tourist resources, clearly expresses the current situation of folk performing arts. Thus, before debating the pros and cons of the Festival Law, we should stop to reconsider the ways in which we have come to objectify folk performing arts.

TOURISM AND FOLK PERFORMING ARTS

This article contends that Japan's folk performing arts have been objectified through tourism. By examining the history of folk performing arts studies, I demonstrate how the development of modern media, such as railway networks and travel magazines, has played a decisive role in this objectification process.

No matter what our views regarding Japan's folk performing arts, we cannot avoid premising them within the context of tourism. Some critics believe that tourism destroys folk performing arts as authentic cultural phenomena. However, rather than treat folk performing arts as authentic cultural phenomena existing as real entities, I consider them to be a type of culture that comes into being through the medium of tourism—that is, a form of tourist culture. By focusing on the practitioners of folk performing arts, I seek to de-center perspectives that stress the authenticity of the folk performing arts as cultural phenomena. Instead, I locate authenticity in practitioners' subjectivity, and in the creativity with which they adapt to new contexts.

As a case study, I take up the famous Mibu no Hana-taue 壬生の花田植 (Mibu Rice Planting Ritual). Though designated as an "important intangible folk cultural property" (*juyō mukei minzoku bunkazai* 重要無形民俗文化財), the Mibu no Hana-taue is a contemporary cultural phenomenon which

continues to be produced/reproduced through tourism. For example, when practitioners first began to participate in performance competitions, they discovered new sensations called *noboseru* (to forget oneself) and *hazumu* (to rise in spirits), which originated in the pleasure of performing and being observed. To help them sustain these sensations, practitioners have created two unique strategies, which they employ selectively in responding to two different contexts: that of the protection of cultural properties and that of tourism. In maintaining the sensations of *noboseru* and *hazumu*, practitioners have engaged in a creative process that uses tourism as a resource to produce/reproduce (or interpret/reinterpret) *Mibu no Hana-taue*, and to provide themselves with a sense of purpose and identity. The authenticity of folk performing arts can be located precisely in this creative process. This article concludes that we should reconstruct the notion of authenticity by considering the experiences, attitudes, and feelings of the practitioners of folk performing arts.

THE OBJECTIFICATION OF FOLK PERFORMING ARTS

What images does the reader have of the “folk performing arts”—Lion Dance, Kagura, Bon Odori? These examples may call to mind a pastoral and harmonious landscape (HASHIMOTO 1989a, 74–80). In recent years, the folk performing arts have received an increasing amount of attention. A crucial moment in this process was the passage of the 1992 Festival Law, which calls for the use of folk performing arts to promote tourism, commerce, and industry in specific localities. The purpose of the Law is thus to use folk performing arts to revitalize local communities. As a result, we can observe various contemporary cultural phenomena in which folk performing arts are transformed into tourist resources.

There are pros and cons concerning the Festival Law. However, the relationship between tourism and folk performing arts existed long before the promulgation of this law. Although the academic term “folk performing arts” was created after World War II, folk performing arts themselves can be considered as an objectified field produced through the medium of the modern tourism movement. Instead of questioning the rights and wrongs of the Festival Law, we must reconsider the perspectives that we have employed to objectify folk performing arts.

The history of folk performing arts studies most clearly demonstrates the process of objectification (HASHIMOTO 1989b, 29–36). From the advent of the modern age, Japan’s rural population flowed into the cities in large numbers. Furthermore, as a result of the development of modern media, such as the railway network, the postal system, and radio, the public began to “discover” various local religious and folk performances—now called “folk performing arts”—which had previously remained concealed within

each locality. At the same time, the public developed a nostalgic view of the folk performing arts, which were identified with concepts such as “tradition,” “simplicity,” and “archaism.” These views themselves also emerged and were widely transmitted through various modern media.

The rapid development of the railway network is especially significant as a technological and historical basis for the objectification of the folk performing arts. The Railway Ministry and related organizations published various kinds of travel guides covering festivals, performing arts, customs and manners, hot springs, and scenic spots located along each railway line. The Railway Ministry also offered free train tickets to the media so that they might contribute to an increase in the number of travelers, and numerous travel magazines were published. A travel boom arose all over Japan. The travel magazines were not only sold as handy tour guides at the kiosks in each station; they were also sent out widely and directly to consumers through the postal system.

This trend helped crystallize the field of folk performing arts studies, which began in response to the social trend that produced the concept of “folk performing arts.” The same, in fact, can be said with regard to the field of Japanese folklore studies pioneered by Yanagita Kunio 柳田國男. Travel magazines, furthermore, played a decisive role in the development of folk performing arts studies and folklore studies. For example, *Tabi to densetsu* 旅と伝説 [Travel and lore], which was first published in 1928 as a hobby magazine and whose academic character emerged only later, offers us significant records of folk performing arts studies and folklore studies during the early period. In 1933 Kume Ryūsen 久米龍川, known as a collector of love letters, began publishing *Kyōdo fūkei* 郷土風景 [Landscapes of local areas]. Although this journal began as one of the popular travel magazines, in 1933 it was retitled *Kyōdo geijutsu* 郷土芸術 [Art of local areas], its contents were changed, and it began to feature numerous articles on the folk performing arts (Miyao Shigeo 宮尾しげを, a well-known cartoonist and researcher of folk performing arts, criticized Kume’s facile approach, saying that he had merely published the magazine in order to obtain free railway tickets).

These early examples indicate that folk performing arts studies began with the utilitarian idea of using folk performing arts as a tourist resource, and that eccentric travelers and sightseers contributed to the development of folk performing arts studies through the print media. In particular, the title of the magazine “Landscapes of local areas” well expressed the characteristics of such folk performing arts studies during that period. In other words, the magazine articulated and produced the “landscapes” that were projected on the windows of trains running ahead to “local” areas.

Folk performing arts scholars, however, later sought to deny or conceal this origin. They not only disdained tourists and sightseers, but also considered people like Kume as secular dilettantes. Folk performing arts studies established its significance as an academic field by excluding the context of tourism, which suggested commercialism. The folk performing arts, originally discovered as a tourist resource, were thought to express values such as “tradition,” “simplicity,” and “archaism.” Because of these authentic and inviolable values, researchers believed that the folk performing arts should not be used as tourist resources, but rather should be preserved as “cultural properties.”

This view became increasingly influential, and, especially after the addition of the category “intangible folk cultural property” (*mukei minzoku bunkazai* 無形民俗文化財) to the provisions of the 1950 Cultural Properties Protection Law (Bunkazai hogohō 文化財保護法), has long functioned as an absolute belief upon which not only folk performing arts studies but also the general objectification of folk performing arts has been premised (THORNBURY 1994, 212–15). Therefore, despite the intrinsic connection between tourism and folk performing arts, this relationship has not been considered in depth. And this is why folk performing arts researchers became almost hysterical in their opposition to the Festival Law.

However, social changes including mass tourism have altered the mode of existence of folk performing arts. Today, folk performing arts do not necessarily present pastoral and harmonious scenes, but rather stimulate awareness of a paradoxical situation (HASHIMOTO 1990, 378–81). The Festival Law is the natural and inevitable result of the tendency to exploit folk performing arts as tourist resources, and as such it can be said to best express the present situation of folk performing arts. Thus, it is time for us to reconsider our perspectives on folk performing arts. Given the existence of the Festival Law, we must clearly state that folk performing arts are a product of objectification through the medium of tourism.

THE EMERGENCE OF FOLK PERFORMING ARTS

The conditions which I have described so far suggest that, regardless of our perspectives on folk performing arts, we must base those perspectives on the context of tourism. One perspective holds that tourism destroys folk performing arts as authentic cultural phenomena (the “corrupted folk performing art” critique). This view has dominated the discourse among folk performing art researchers since the passage of the Festival Law (MINZOKU GEINŌ GAKKAI HENSHŪ IINKAI 1993, 83–85). While it contains a degree of validity, this critique reveals the researchers’ preoccupation with the centrality of their own discipline, and tends to underestimate the role of folk performing arts prac-

titioners themselves. As a result, it denies the subjectivity and creativity with which those practitioners can decide whether or not to use tourism as a resource to produce/reproduce the practices of the folk performing arts (ŌTA 1993, 388).

Therefore, I consider folk performing arts not as authentic cultural phenomena existing as real entities, but rather as cultural phenomena which emerge through tourism—in other words, as a kind of tourist culture. By paying attention to practitioners' sensations, I intend to de-center the perspective that views folk performing arts as authentic cultural phenomena. This idea may at first appear strange. However, even without referring to the Festival Law, one can find in the field of folk performing arts many examples of developments mediated through tourism. In the following section I will introduce one such example, Mibu no Hana-taue.

The Mibu no Hana-taue is the first example of a “nationally designated important intangible folk cultural property” (*kuni shitei jūyō mukei minzoku bunkazai* 国指定重要無形民俗文化財) in Hiroshima Prefecture. Mibu no Hana-taue is one of the *gaku* 楽, or entertainments, that accompanied rice-planting, and which are widely distributed in the Chūgoku area (SHINFUJI 1956; USHIO 1968). Although it has received national designation, Mibu no Hana-taue does not embody the idea of “preservation” of “cultural property.” The present style, in fact, appears to have developed under the repeated influence of tourism.

Today Mibu no Hana-taue refers to an event that is performed jointly by two villages, Mibu and Kawahigashi, in Chiyoda-chō, Yamagata-gun, in Hiroshima Prefecture, on the first Sunday of June each year. The site is a privately-owned rice field in Take no Hana of Mibu, not far from the Chiyoda Interchange on the Chūgoku Freeway. The current style of this ritual is very recent. Historically, Mibu and Kawahigashi have handed down separate rice-planting *gaku* called *hayashi-da* 囃し田, or rice field songs. *Hayashi-da* were performed in the rice fields of large landlords, who sponsored the events and mobilized large numbers of participants. The rituals featured *shirokaki* 代掻き, in which a large number of bulls were paraded in the field in order to level the soil prior to planting, and songs called *taue uta* 田植歌, sung by young women (*saotome* 早乙女). After the middle of the Meiji era, powerful landlords gradually disappeared from both Mibu and Kawahigashi. Also, following a 1903 ordinance issued by the governor of Hiroshima Prefecture, the “Ten Point Program of Agriculture,” prohibited outside singing, the *hayashi-da* disappeared temporarily.

In the early Shōwa era, however, a movement arose in both villages to revive the *hayashi-da*. In Mibu, the *shōkōkai* 商工会 (commerce and industry association) of a small shopping district in Mibu-chō interviewed people

who remembered the way the ritual had been performed in the past and, with their help, recreated it. They established the Mibu Dengaku Group (Mibu Dengakudan, originally called Mibu Nōgakudan), and performed the *hayashi-da* as one of the community's annual events. In addition, Hiroshima Railway Company mobilized many sightseeing buses to bring tourists to see the Mibu *hayashi-da*, which thus gradually came to represent folk performing arts in Hiroshima Prefecture. A *dengaku* 田楽 (rice planting performance) group in Kawahigashi also successfully revived the local *hayashi-da*, but because theirs was a small village removed from the center of Chiyoda-chō, this group focused more on reproducing the original form than on attracting tourists (MASHITA 1991, 116–26).

A decisive moment in the penetration of the context of tourism into *hayashi-da*, not only in Mibu but also in Kawahigashi, was the spread of performance competitions, which had started during the same period and became popular throughout the Chūgoku region (KODERA 1941, 118–29). These competitions generally took the same form. Local *shōkōkai* invited groups of *hayashi-da* performers from each locality to compete for group and individual prizes. Mibu and Kawahigashi *hayashi-da* groups were regular participants. Mibu was particularly highly reputed, and won first prize on numerous occasions. As the fact that they were sponsored by commerce and industry associations reveals, the purpose of these competitions was to revitalize local economies. By stirring up people's competitive and wagering spirits, organizers hoped to gather crowds and get them to buy local products. To put it bluntly, they wanted to make a profit from the competition.

The competitions brought significant changes to the *hayashi-da* of Mibu and Kawahigashi at various levels. Changes at the level of sensations were especially important. For example, since the competitions involved a ranking process, the main purpose of the ritual became to win. In order to obtain first prize (or at least a top ranking), each locality's *hayashi-da* developed showy acting styles and costumes designed to appeal to judges and tourists. Groups also changed styles from year to year. Believing that the audience's applause would greatly influence the outcome, local cheering groups participated enthusiastically. Mibu and Kawahigashi, which were neighbors, became fierce rivals, and the competition between their cheering groups is said to have been quite intense.

The competitions were usually held at school athletic grounds. Under these conditions, it became impossible to bring in bulls for the *shirokaki* ritual, and most *hayashi-da* in the competitions came to eliminate this feature. As a new type of space, however, athletic grounds offered new possibilities. Originally, rice planting songs were performed in muddy paddy fields, where movement was difficult and a simple line formation was the most per-

formers could hope to achieve. In contrast, athletic grounds permitted exuberant performance movements and offered limitless possibilities to create new styles.

The competitions were suspended during World War II, but soon after the War they were restored and continued for a few years. However, because local *shōkōkai* faced financial hardships, the competitions eventually disappeared. Thus, these competitions can be considered particular phenomena limited to a specific period. The changes mentioned above emerged only within the framework of the competitions. But we must remember that the context of tourism had spread beyond this framework, even into the *hayashi-da* performed in the rice paddies. Furthermore, since the same people participated in rice paddy performances and competition performances, *hayashi-da* as a whole rapidly assumed the character of a show. Also, by leading participants to experience the pleasures of performing and being observed, the competitions can be said to have drawn *hayashi-da* into a new domain of sensation.

This type of *hayashi-da*, however, was also framed within the new category of “cultural property.” The Kawahigashi *hayashi-da*, which was regarded as having preserved the original form, was designated as a “cultural property” by Hiroshima Prefecture in 1959. And the Mibu *hayashi-da*, which had early on turned into a show, also received this designation in 1975. In the same year a partial amendment of the Cultural Properties Protection Law provided for the designation of a new category of “important intangible folk cultural properties.” This development had various repercussions throughout Japan. In Hiroshima Prefecture, the Mibu and Kawahigashi *hayashi-da*, united under the new name of Mibu no Hana-taue, received the honor of becoming the prefecture’s first “nationally designated important intangible folk cultural property” on 4 May 1976. The reason for uniting the two performances, which were originally distinct, was that this would facilitate national designation. Thus, Mibu no Hana-taue today refers to the combination of *hayashi-da* from Mibu and Kawahigashi.

In fact, however, the Mibu and Kawahigashi performances unite only once each year, on the first Sunday in June. On this day, the ritual is performed in the rice paddies, without the showiness seen in the old competitions. As an example of a “nationally designated important intangible folk cultural property,” Mibu no Hana-taue is performed in the original style, using a large number of bulls. Nonetheless, even if one focuses only on the first Sunday in June, it is still not possible to treat this as an authentic cultural phenomenon existing as a real entity. As I noted earlier, if one looks at the line of tourist buses, the pamphlets distributed on the site, and the broadcast explanations for tourists, one is compelled to acknowledge that

even this particular day's proceedings have become deeply embedded in the context of tourism.

Today, the main activities of Mibu no Hana-taue have been shifted to various events at which the Mibu Dengaku Group and the Kawahigashi Dengaku Group perform. For example, in 1987, the Mibu Dengaku Group participated in the Folk Life Festival held by the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. Because they were expected to represent Japan's "authentic" rice culture, the group was asked to present the original form of their performance, and a rice paddy was temporarily constructed on the National Mall. Nonetheless, the group gave up on the idea of transporting bulls to Washington for the performance, most likely due to the high costs involved. Even after the disappearance of the old competitions, many opportunities still exist to participate in various events located within the overarching context of tourism. In other words, the first Sunday of June is not the only and absolute opportunity for Mibu no Hana-taue to take place. Folk performing arts called Mibu no Hana-taue are contemporary cultural phenomena that are ceaselessly coming into being through the medium of tourism (SASAHARA 1993, 396–99).

BETWEEN PRESERVATION AND TOURISM

What kind of sensations do the practitioners of Mibu no Hana-taue experience under the contemporary conditions described above? *Hayashi-da* originally offered an opportunity to appraise both the bulls and the bull-handling techniques used in the rituals. However, after World War II, the rapid development of agricultural technologies rendered bulls obsolete as farm animals, and many were slaughtered. The most basic conditions requiring the use of bulls in rice farming have already disappeared. Nonetheless, on the first Sunday in June each year, Mibu no Hana-taue is performed in the original style, with large numbers of bulls. This is no doubt due to the fact that the ritual has received national designation as an "important intangible folk cultural property." The bulls used in the performance, however, must be borrowed from all over the region, and no longer possess the qualities that would stimulate participants' sensations.

In this way, new agricultural technologies threaten not only the existence of the bulls, but also the *raison d'être* of the *hayashi-da* itself, which was closely related to earlier agricultural technologies. Today, however, practitioners have discovered the meaning of *hayashi-da* not in the original style, but rather in the new style of performing seen in various events conducted without the use of bulls (HASHIMOTO 1993, 5–6). For example, following their participation in the Smithsonian's Folk Life Festival, the members of the Mibu Dengaku Group edited and published a small commemorative

booklet in which they recalled the wonderful memories of their trip, and their great satisfaction at having traveled at the government's expense and performed before an American audience in Washington, D.C. It is precisely these kinds of sensations that assume major significance. Practitioners have come to experience sensations of forgetting oneself (*noboseru*) and rising in spirits (*hazumu*), which seem to have originated in the pleasure of performing and being watched at the old competitions. These terms (*noboseru* and *hazumu*) are frequently used and have gained currency during the rehearsal process, among the community of practice. They function as a practical language, that is, as a craft language, which contributes to the process in which a practitioner learns to perform and thus acquires an identity as a performer. This demonstrates the creative process by which participants, while using tourism as a resource to produce/reproduce Mibu no Hana-taue, acquired their own sense of purpose and meaning. In addition, practitioners have devised extremely unique strategies to contribute to the preservation of these kinds of sensations. As one practitioner explains:

Cultural property and competitions are different. It's not good if you are not excited (*noboseru*) in the competitions. We adopt anything that looks beautiful. We don't care whether or not we preserve the traditional forms. We don't think that we shouldn't change it because it was decided in the past. If we did it that way, we couldn't be high in spirits (*hazumu*). The ritual will die out if we stick to only the old forms. In the rice field, we do it in the same way as before because it is "cultural property." There are two ways, the "Hana-taue" and the one we do on the [athletic] ground. And the "Hana-taue" is once a year; so I've decided to continue it. I am so happy to perform with their invitation. Anyway, we won't be accepted if we just do it the same way as before. We definitely need two ways to go . . .

Interview conducted at Mibu, 4 June 1989

Practitioners have thus devised two strategies that they apply in two different contexts: preservation and tourism. At the core of these remarkable strategies lie the sensations of *noboseru* and *hazumu*. These sensations apply only to practitioners of Mibu no Hana-taue, and cannot be generalized. However, the fact that practitioners, experimenting with the disparity between preservation and tourism, continue to interpret/reinterpret Mibu no Hana-taue in order to secure their own sense of purpose and meaning, requires us to decenter our perspective on authentic cultural phenomena. In

other words, it is in the process itself that one can discover an authentic cultural phenomenon.

In his well-known collection of essays, *Utsukushii mura* 美しい村 [The beautiful village], the poet and folklorist Ushio Michio 牛尾三千夫 described the scene of *hayashi-da* being performed within a literally “beautiful village,” but lamented the absence of a “beautiful village” as he imagined it (HASHIMOTO 1989c, 10–14). I disagree with this assessment. A “beautiful village” does in fact exist: that which even today does not cease to be inscribed on the map of the senses by subjects who experience *noboseru* and *hazumu*. We must thus de-center the concepts of “tradition,” “simplicity,” and “archaism,” and instead learn to decode an entirely different set of expressions from folk performing arts. Now, because of the existence of the Festival Law, we must seek to understand the sensations experienced by practitioners of folk performing arts.

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