

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

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 –
日本の山・鉾・屋台行事を事例として

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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 this dynamic through case studies of a specific type of festival in Japan – the Yama Hoko Yatai float festivals. These festivals are an interesting arena to study the dynamics between intangible cultural heritage and gender since while the festivals are traditionally male events, some festivals have seen changes to allow for female participation in roles that were earlier only open to men.

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 festivals. The scope of the study is limited to 36 festivals and these are approached both in-depth as well as on a collective level, using a multi-step methodology in order to attain a multifaceted picture of the ‘gender situation’ within the festivals. 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, about gender roles and restrictions in the festivals, as well as about changes that has occurred in these roles and restrictions. The results of the survey raised further questions concerning the details of the changes and of how they happened and of the local circumstances. In order to examine the situation in-depth, interviews were conducted with a number of selected preservation organizations. 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 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 roles and rules, the changes that had occurred in the gender roles and rules – what had changed, why it changed, and how it happened – and on whether the changes had been naturalized and whether they 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 Representative List. 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.

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 (2016) research indicating that women were probably participating – and riding on top of the floats – in the Kyoto Gion festival in the early days, and Brumann's (2012) study on Kyoto containing an interesting description of the discussions surrounding the participation of female musicians. Part 2 also examines studies relating to the social significance of festival participation and touches upon the topic of *nyonin kinsei* (customary female exclusion).

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

Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the festival's official description 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.

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 Furyumono', 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 presents an analysis of all elements inscribed by Japan on the RL. The results of this analysis shows a noticeable difference in visibility between women and men among the inscribed elements.

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 gender structures existing in the festivals, and some common pattern 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). While there are 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.

Chapter 7 presents the results of interviews the author conducted with representatives of 7 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. 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.

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 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.