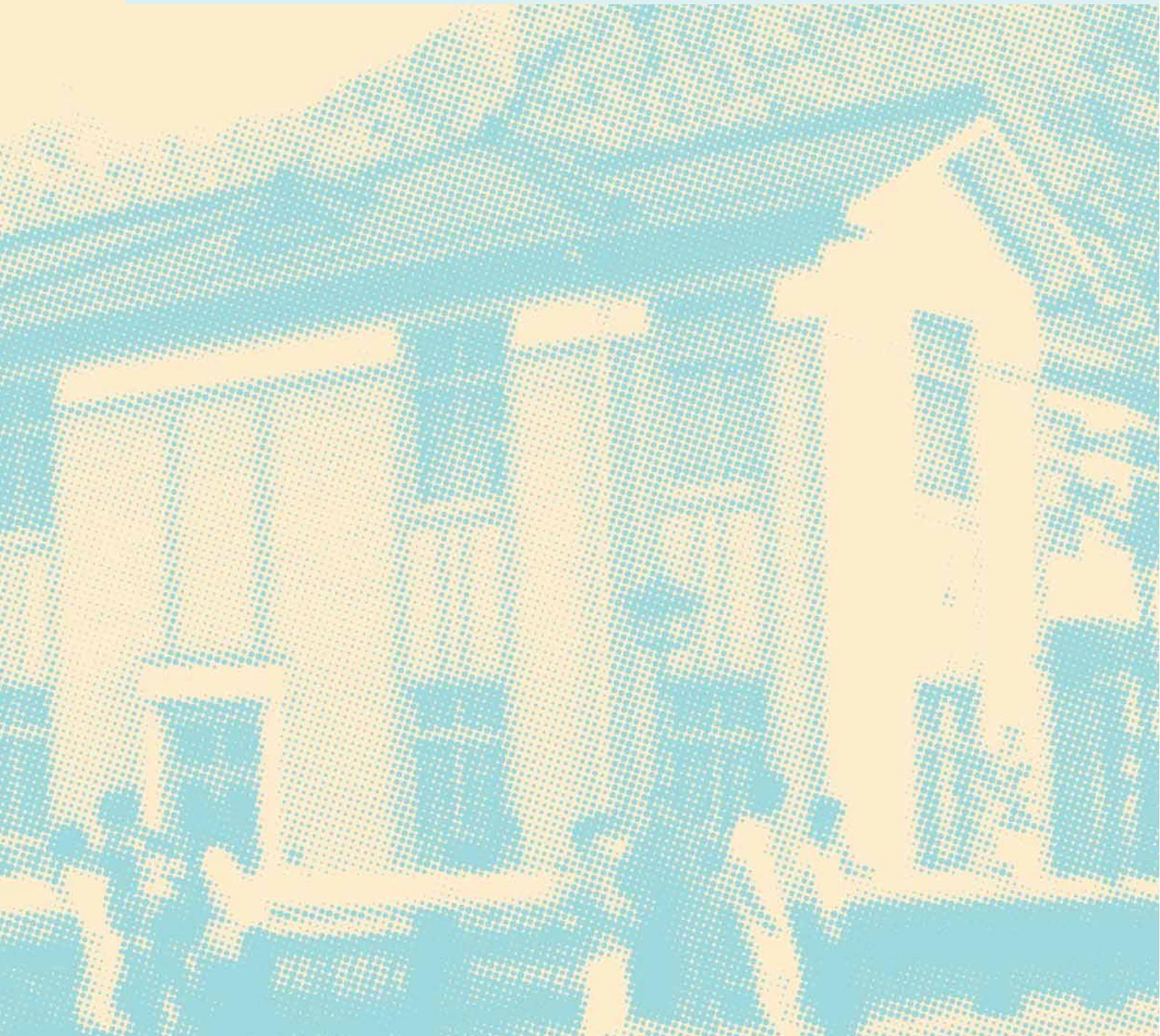


Defining Intangible Cultural Heritage and its Stakeholders: the Case of Japan

Voltaire Garces Cang



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● **Voltaire Garces Cang**
Ph.D. Candidate, Rikkyo University, Japan

Introduction: Gujo Odori, a Festival

Gujo Odori is a Japanese *Bon* (festival for the dead usually held in midsummer), in this case a dance *matsuri* (festival) held annually in Gujo Hachiman, Gujo City, in Gifu Prefecture. Landlocked Gifu Prefecture, and even less Gujo City and the administrative district of Gujo Hachiman, are not too prominent in Japan's consciousness, and are known primarily for the historic villages of Shirakawa-go and Gokayama, UNESCO World Heritage sites, and to some people for the *ayu*, the sweetfish found abundantly in its many rivers.

Gujo Odori begins in mid-July, when the *Hasshosai*, the launching ceremony, is held in front of the old town hall plaza by shrine officials—the traditional sponsors— and local government representatives, with Gujo Hachiman residents and tourists in attendance. Every year, the politicians outnumber the shrine representatives at least ten to one. Aside from public administrative and festival committee officials, also present are members of different organisations such as the local education board, the chamber of commerce and the tourist association.

From early September, during thirty-one selected days within a two-month period, townspeople and visitors dance a repertoire of ten short dances of varying rhythms, on themes ranging from history to agriculture to nature, in different parts of the town selected for

historic, and other more mundane reasons, such as easy access and capacity. Although Gujo Hachiman has a population of less than 17,000, on festival days the number of people more than doubles, and during the *Tetsuya Odori* (all-night dancing), a period of four days from the 13th to 16th August - conveniently co-inciding with the *Bon* holiday in Japan - the crowds swell to four times the number of residents (Gujo City, 2006), all contributing activity and profit to the festivities.

Like most Japanese festivals of ancient provenance, the origins of *Gujo Odori* are hazy. The first historical appearance of the name *Gujo Odori* was in 1914, when it was the name of one type of dance performed in celebration of the opening of the new town hall. In 1923, the *Gujo Odori Hozonkai* (*Gujo odori* dance preservation society), an organization formed one year earlier and still existing today, formally established the repertoire of dances, naming the whole set *Gujo Odori* in a pamphlet printed to promote the dance (Gujo Odori hensan iinkai, 1993). This eponymous pamphlet also contained the first known historical account of *Gujo Odori*, which dated the origin of the dance to the late 16th century, around 1590, when local clan leaders supposedly instructed the inhabitants of Hachiman to perform dances to honour deities to thank them for victory in war, or maybe for good harvests. Thus, in 1991 the festival celebrated its 400th-

year 'anniversary' in 1991.

However, *Gujo Odori* is not merely a huge festival in a small town. Since 1997, the Japanese Government has designated *Gujo Odori* as an 'Important Intangible Folk-Cultural Property,' one among 246 such Properties (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2006). Previously, it was a 'National Folk-Art Intangible Cultural Property,' designated in 1973, before its present category was created. This paper, through the example of designated intangible heritage, specifically *Gujo Odori* in Gifu Prefecture, will discuss significant issues that characterise the field of intangible cultural heritage in Japan.

Intangible cultural heritage in Japan: identifying the 'what'

Japan was among the first countries in the world to legislate for the protection of cultural heritage. One of the early Imperial Decrees of the Meiji government (1868-1911) called, in 1871, for the *Preservation of Ancient Objects*; this was subsequently followed by several laws that ordered, among other things, the preservation of shrines and temples, sites, monuments and *national treasures*. In 1949, a disastrous fire that destroyed ancient murals in the Horyuji temple in Nara accelerated the enactment of the *Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties* in 1950. This law distinguished between intangible and tangible cultural properties for the first time.

Until 1953, the Japanese government selected *those intangible cultural properties of particular value that would cease to exist without state protection* mainly for subsidised protection and in 1954, the law was amended to include other intangible cultural properties that were of value artistically and historically, leading to

the designation of 'Important Intangible Cultural Properties' and their holders from 1955. Again, in 1975, another amendment to the law added the criteria of folk-cultural activities that included local customs, manners, and performing arts, as well as the conservation techniques that are necessary for the preservation of both tangible and intangible heritage (Murakami & Saito, 2001; Zemans & Kleingartner, 1999).

The different amendments and categories lead to a complex mix of types of cultural heritage, but one can easily ascertain five categories specifically described under Japanese law:

1. tangible cultural properties
2. intangible cultural properties
3. folk-cultural properties
4. monuments
5. groups of historic buildings.

Thus, in the Japanese case, officially at least, intangible cultural heritage can come under one of the following three categories:

1. intangible cultural properties
2. intangible folk-cultural properties
3. traditional conservation techniques.

Stage arts, music and applied art techniques all belong to the first category; folk performing arts, manners and customs related to food, clothing and shelter, vocations, religious beliefs, annual events, etc. are all lumped under the second group.

Under Japan's *Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties*, the two major types of intangible heritage, 'intangible cultural properties' and 'folk-cultural properties' (to which *matsuri* belongs), are each

approached differently by the national government with regard to preservation procedures. In the case of intangible cultural properties, for example, pottery techniques and music, first the tradition targeted for preservation is determined, and that is followed by the identification of its 'holders.' They may seek formal selection and designation which can result in financial and other support for successor-training, performance or exhibition funding and other forms of assistance. As for folk-cultural properties, for example local religious rites and festivals, here the first step is the confirmation or determination of practitioners or preservers of the tradition, who are in many cases local public/private preservation groups. Identification (and perhaps selection and designation) of the tradition becomes the second step. Funding and other support procedures may follow. The difference in approaches, while actually expediting the selection process for each category of intangible cultural property, owes much to the nature of the intangible heritage itself: pottery techniques and music (intangible cultural properties) have an existence apart from their practitioners, while religious rites and festivals (intangible folk-cultural properties) have to be performed or practiced to exist (Miyata, 2003).

Japan's relatively long history and flourishing art traditions make it a country with a very long list of cultural objects with high historical and/or artistic value. By 1 October 2006, for the intangible heritage alone, the Japanese national government had designated 113 'Important Intangible Cultural Properties,' 246 'Important Intangible Folk-Cultural Properties,' and 73 individual and group holders of 'Selected Conservation Techniques' (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2006).

The legislation on cultural heritage in Japan is based on categories that are rather selective and precise, but this does not mean that the identification of heritage is selective and precise too. Far from it. The original intention of the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties was to preserve such important Japanese heritage that, without government protection, will decline and fall to ruin (Watanabe, 1999). It also states that intangible cultural property, such as theatre, music, crafts etc., which to our country is of high historical and/or artistic value, will be deemed intangible cultural property and will be eligible for protection. Granted that heritage in danger of decline and ruin may be relatively easier to search out, how does one determine whether its historical and/or artistic value is 'high' or not? And how is artistic value determined? The problem of categorisation is prominent in the arena of cultural heritage, whether or not the heritage is tangible or intangible in nature. Certainly it is more conspicuous in the latter field than in the former, as intangible heritage is inherently more fluid and flexible. Intangible heritage is constantly recreated even as it is preserved. And therein lies the difficulty of its definition. The concept of heritage is not easy to define because it

looks backward "[it is] something received from one's forebears [whose] core difficulty lies in the tension between the retrospective dimension and the need to redefine tradition in response to new conditions (Brown, 2003; p.183).

Brown had studied native American peoples who sought to protect/prevent their cultural possessions from



Figure 1
Former town hall, now tourist centre,
in Gujo Hachiman, Gujo City, Gifu Prefecture

use by outsiders, and to redefine their proprietary conditions. Cultural texts like music that were appropriated by researchers and subsequently stored elsewhere were - and are being - reclaimed by native American communities, resulting in power struggles that involve a large swathe of political actors moving in and around a messy system. Consequently, Brown (2003) posed questions that he could not answer, and that leads to even more questions:

On what grounds should one group's claim to an element of culture be considered more compelling than another's? Although it is relatively easy to determine whether an individual qualifies for membership in a particular group, how does one decide whether that person 'belongs to' a particular culture? (p. 219).

In other words, who makes the decisions?

Intangible cultural heritage in Japan: identifying the 'who'

Dealing with the 'what' in intangible cultural heritage is already problematic enough, but equally significant in the research field is the 'who', as the question above asks. Thus, when the National Heritage Conference held in 1983 in the United Kingdom proffered this definition: "heritage is that which a past generation has preserved and handed on to the present and which a significant group of the population wishes to hand on to the future" (Harrison, 2005, p. 5), the following questions were inevitably posed. What is the 'that' that has to be preserved? Why is it worth preserving and handing on? Who or what is a significant group? Who chooses?

A cursory look at the World Heritage Convention's 1972 definition, which identified (tangible) heritage as composed of monuments, groups of building or sites which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science [or] from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view (UNESCO, 1972), among others, also prompts similar questioning. Again, how is value, especially aesthetic value, determined? By whom?

UNESCO's category of 'Intangible Cultural Heritage' created a good 30 years later in 2003, has brought more items and objects into the heritage fold. Its list includes:

practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills - as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces "that communities, groups and individuals" recognize as part of their heritage "transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups" and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity (UNESCO, 2003).

At the same time as the objects of intangible heritage have been delineated, its stakeholders have also been identified. But who are these communities, groups, and individuals? Why indeed them, and not others?

This question was the main issue dealt with in a recent meeting organised by the Intangible Heritage Section of UNESCO and the Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU) in Tokyo, in March 2006 (ACCU, 2006). In particular, the meeting reviewed the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage and wished to define, once and for all, those identified in the said Convention's preamble and main text, as persons involved in intangible cultural heritage, that is, the above-named communities, groups, and individuals. The Convention had not provided any definition of these persons. The meeting agreed on the following:

1. Communities are networks of people whose sense of identity or connectedness emerges from a shared historical relationship that is rooted in the practice and transmission of, or engagement with, their ICH.
2. Groups comprise people within or across communities who share characteristics such as skills, experience and special knowledge, and thus perform specific roles in the present and future practice, re-creation and/or transmission of their intangible cultural heritage as, for example, cultural custodians, practitioners or apprentices.
3. Individuals are those within or across communities who have distinct skills, knowledge, experience or other characteristics, and thus perform specific roles in the present and future practices, re-creation and/or transmission of their intangible cultural heritage as, for example, cultural custodians, practitioners and, where appropriate, apprentices (2006).

Aside from these persons, the meeting also identified two other distinct groups of people included in the Convention. One is 'society', said to mean the totality of the population of a country (p.28), although it was also pointed out that specific communities, and not necessarily the nation as a whole, are involved in intangible cultural heritage. The other group is the 'multinational' or 'scattered communities/groups', who relate to a single heritage that is not limited to one geographical area or country.

The distinctions are welcome, as they clarify the roles and positions of the actors in the intangible heritage field. Ironically, however, and especially since the Convention is an international agreement, there is still a seeming adherence to the idea of 'national' cultures. However, the same may be said of most international agreements, whether or not they concern cultural heritage. As extensively discussed by cultural studies scholar Bhabha (Huddart, 2006), since international agreements are made between nations, most of the time they turn a blind eye to cultures that are not 'national'.

Nonetheless, the meeting also concluded that without the participation of the said communities, groups, and individuals, intangible cultural heritage cannot be defined and identified, as these persons are responsible for creating, maintaining, and transmitting the heritage, or at least play important roles (p.27). Communities, groups, and individuals are huge and overlapping categories, and one wonders about the actual situations and places where the distinctions can be actually and uniformly applied. Certainly different intangible cultural heritages have different stakeholders who may belong to one or more of the categories, or to none whatsoever.

As already mentioned, in the area of intangible (folk-cultural) cultural heritage, Japan's national government relies on the role of local preservation groups in the identification - and designation - of traditions. Local governments in Japan that work closely with the preservation groups are considered to be those most familiar with the needs of their local community, and are thus considered the best persons - 'communities', with the occasional 'individuals', in the above sense - to serve the population's 'cultural needs' (Watanabe, 1999). As they adopt the regional equivalent of national cultural policy (support for creative activities and development of infrastructure), the local groups also create programmes to revive specific cultures by nurturing traditional and folk culture (such as folk dance, music,

crafts, and festivals) (p. 67).

***Gujo Odori* as intangible cultural heritage: 'whats' and 'whos'**

The importance of *Gujo Odori* to the town of Gujo Hachiman is emphasized in the Gujo Hachiman Hakurankan, a pre-War, European-style building that was originally the tax office; it was renovated in 1991 to become the town's main museum. The Hakurankan's display area is divided between two floors, into four sections: 'Water' (*mizu*), 'History' (*rekishi*), 'Skill' (*waza*), and 'Dance' (*odori*). 'Water', 'History' and 'Skill' are more or less evenly spread across the second floor, while 'Dance' monopolises the whole space on the first. 'Dance' is, of course, *Gujo Odori*. It has long been identified with the town. It is in fact its identity, the main reason people come to Gujo Hachiman: during the two-month festival period, an average of 300,000 visitors have descended on the town in the past ten years.

At present, *Gujo Odori* is a repertoire of ten dances performed at night by townspeople and tourists, forming a circle around the *yakata* (wooden stage) of musicians who sing and play the drums, flute and *shamisen* (Japanese three-stringed guitar). It is danced on thirty-one - sometimes thirty-two - nights that are deemed auspicious, including the four successive nights of the *Tetsuya Odori*. The dancing starts around eight o'clock in the evening and lasts until eleven p.m., although the *Tetsuya Odori* continues to around four or five a.m. the next day. In recent years, the opening ceremony and dancing has been held in the plaza in front of the pre-War town hall (now housing a memorial exhibit and souvenir shop), while during the rest of the festival season the dancing site is moved to different areas within the town. No accessories, such as fans, or special costumes are required, but *geta* (wooden clogs) are the preferred dancing shoes since they make distinctive sounds when the feet strike the pavement, according to the rhythm and pace of the dance. The hand movements are very simple, and although some dances require a few complicated steps, these are not too difficult even for people who do not in any way consider themselves dancers.

Gujo Odori is a rousing affair; the dances are fast and rhythmical. There are hundreds and sometimes thousands of people who surround the *yakata*, and it is easy to simply move with the crowd - and difficult to get out of it. Anyone, from toddlers to senior citizens, can join in, and the overwhelming majority of the dancers are

outsiders.

Since 1971, the *Gujo Odori Un-ei Iinkai* (*Gujo Odori* steering committee) has been in charge of *Gujo Odori*'s management during festival season. The committee is composed of representatives from the *Gujo Odori Hozonkai*, local government (mainly officials of Hachiman's Commerce and Tourism Section in the town office), Hachiman's residents' associations (*jichikai*), shrine and temple officials included, the tourism groups and the local Chamber of Commerce. The most important roles in the committee are given to the residents' associations, the Commerce and Tourism Section, and the *Gujo Odori Hozonkai* (Adachi, 2000).

The residents' associations are responsible for determining the dates and places for *Gujo Odori* to take place, depending on the auspicious days for the shrines and temples (and *jizo* or Buddhist deities) in their areas, or for those with connections to their areas. After determining the dates and locations, the residents' associations make a formal request, through the steering committee, to the *Gujo Odori Hozonkai* for their performance to be on the set schedule.

The Commerce and Tourism Section fulfills the administrative duties for *Gujo Odori*, as it is in charge of tasks like negotiations with the local police and fire departments for their deployment on the set dates and sites, advertisements and announcements about *Gujo Odori* through the media, as well as logistical assistance for the *Gujo Odori Hozonkai* before, during, and after their performances.

The *Gujo Odori Hozonkai*, after receiving the official requests from the steering committee, perform as scheduled. On festival dates, the members wear uniform

yukata (cotton kimonos), and perform the dances for the festival-goers to follow. Every night, the members only dance in the beginning, for thirty minutes to one hour, after which they move around the crowd to pick out fifteen people - locals, visitors, or tourists of any age or sex - who they deem 'experts' in dancing. These dancers are later given certificates attesting to their qualification as *Gujo Odori* experts. The certificate is free, but the wooden frame that fits its unusual long rectangular shape is sold to the recipient for two thousand yen, if desired.

The *Gujo Odori Hozonkai* is presently made up of around seventy members, and outside the festival season they perform the *Gujo Odori* as official representatives of the tradition, in Gifu Prefecture and all over Japan. Every September, for example, a *Gujo Odori* event is held in Tokyo's Aoyama district, as the Aoyama name is associated with one of the families that ruled the Gujo area more than three centuries ago. *Gujo Odori Hozonkai* members sometimes also give lectures and demonstrations in schools and other public places when requested.

As seen above, the *Gujo Odori Hozonkai* is the chief stakeholder in the heritage that is *Gujo Odori*. The group was established even before any legislation on intangible heritage in Japan was formulated, and is probably the main reason for *Gujo Odori*'s longevity. It has always existed from the time the idea of *Gujo Odori* came to be, and it has worked both in the background and foreground to promote *Gujo Odori* into the prestigious 'Important Intangible Folk-Cultural Property' that it is now. It even audaciously extended *Gujo Odori*'s history far back (to four centuries ago), and became responsible for its



Figure 2
Visitors and residents dance *Gujo Odori* around the *yakata*
[wooden, movable stage]

constant re-invention throughout the dance's lifetime.

It is the same *Gujo Odori Hozonkai*, however, that has also influenced the development of *Gujo Odori* that has been converted exclusively into *Bon Odori*, with a spiritual (as opposed to secular) bent. In response to the patriotic trends of the time, in 1923 the *Gujo Odori Hozonkai* removed all traces of the vulgar and worldly in the repertoire of songs, leaving only *healthy amusement* (Adachi, 2004; p. 87). One other major transformation was critical: the introduction of the *yakata*, on which *Gujo Odori Hozonkai* members perform the music and songs, and around which the participants dance. Before 1953 when the wooden stage was first used, any participant, especially someone talented and popular, was able to perform the songs to which other festival participants danced. However, for the past half-century, the music performance has become exclusive to the *Gujo Odori Hozonkai*.

In the manner of its transmission, the tradition of *Gujo Odori* has also been transformed into one that is not unlike other Japanese traditions that are run by *iemoto* (titular family heads, mostly of art traditions, in Japan). Adachi (2004) goes so far as to say that the *Gujo Odori* has become an *iemoto* system under the auspices of the *Gujo Odori Hozonkai*. This is due to the manner of training future dance and music teachers by the present members of the *Gujo Odori Hozonkai*: they follow the *isshi souden* (to one heir, all inheritance) style, whereby only one designated successor receives complete, exclusive training from just one master.

The tea ceremony practice in Japan is a good window into the *iemoto* in the Japanese tradition. A well-known icon of 'Japaneseness', (Reischauer, 1988/1999; Sadler, 1933/2002) the tea ceremony is actually a complicated set of rituals with one simple aim - to serve a bowl of tea. First established in the latter half of the 16th century by its legendary founder, Sen Rikyu, the tradition has, by and large, been held within his family and descendants, with the occasional offshoot. In practice, the title of 'Grand Tea Master' is given to the first son, who receives early training for the post which he occupies upon the death (or occasionally, retirement) of the incumbent.

All of the most important knowledge and practices are handed down to one heir exclusively. In the tea ceremony tradition, the present head of Urasenke, the biggest and most widespread of the tea schools today, is the 16th generation after Rikyu. His chief role is to preserve and to transmit practices, not only about tea and

its service, but also other knowledge ranging from formally-stylized Japanese language and manners, Zen teachings, Japanese cuisine, brush calligraphy, traditional tea house architecture, pottery and many other practices that are respected traditions and intangible heritage in their own right.

As with its counterparts in other Japanese cultural practices, tea ceremony rituals have been revived, recreated, or re-invented. And as with many others, all the revival, recreation, and re-invention is done by, or through the approval of, a single individual, the *iemoto*. The *iemoto* has sole authority to define not only what the tea ceremony is, but he also establishes all the rules for its observation (Plutschow, 1999 & 2003). The minutest rules and details, say, the sound made by the water ladle as it is laid on the bamboo lid rest, or the position of the sweets on the tray, are not changed without sanction from the *iemoto*. Even the most senior, licensed teachers in the organization are required to follow these rules; outsiders, even the national government - perhaps *because* it is the national government - do not have any say.

The *iemoto* system may be peculiar to Japanese intangible cultural heritage, but it is found throughout Japan's traditions, including the 'three Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity' of UNESCO: *Nohgaku* theatre, *Bunraku* puppet theatre, and *Kabuki*. Although one may consider the *iemoto* to be an 'individual' as also defined under the UNESCO Convention, he is, if one delves further into the system - shall one say - in his own league, not under Japanese government control, nor under UNESCO influence. He is part of intangible heritage, and he is also not part of it.

In the case of the *Gujo Odori Hozonkai*, being *iemoto* and at the same time being a seventy-strong group of preservationists, they could be identified under any of the three main categories of the Convention. In fact, from the roles that they have played and still play in the *Gujo Odori* tradition today, they could be all of the stakeholders - community, group, and individual. That is quite a lot of power and prestige to be in the hands of a few.

Conclusion

Gujo Odori is but one example of intangible cultural heritage, but one which is formally designated as such despite its vague origins and uncomfortably short history. However, this situation is not at all atypical of intangible cultural heritage in Japan. Many of the festivals around

Figure 3
Focal point of Gujo Odori is the yakata [wooden, movable stage] around which festival participants dance to music performed by assigned musician and singers; paper lantern in foreground shows the characters for "Gujo Odori"

Figure 4
Close-up of the yakata [wooden, movable stage]; banner indicates "Kawasaki." one of ten dance songs in the Gujo Odori repertoire



the country, including the officially designated intangible folk-cultural properties, are not as old as they are reputed to be. Although some of the *matsuri* rituals may have been performed across several centuries, they have been transformed or revised to suit contemporary purposes, for example, by the shifting of procession routes because of urban centre development, or by adjusting dates and locations to accommodate more tourists.

The famous fire-lighting Daimonji *matsuri* of Kyoto, for instance, was 'rediscovered' only after 1950, and in the early 1960s and was adapted into a 'modern capitalistic form' from its original traditions (Caron, 2003). Bestor (1989), in his study of the local festival of a district in Tokyo, said that tradition in Japan does not require it to remain unchanged, for *innovation and flexibility are highly regarded and the vitality of the community is the raison d'être for preserving (or creating) tradition, not the other way around*, while enhancing the feeling of solidarity that the tradition brings (p. 253).

But traditions, including festivals, can also exclude. Robertson (1991) mentioned how the *shimin matsuri* (citizen's festival) of Kodaira highlighted the tension between new residents and the 'natives' who claimed descent from the village founders. The former were prevented from participating in the performance of the most important and dramatic parts of the festival, effectively creating a hierarchy based on one's length of stay in the community. Like *Gujo Odori*, which was said to have begun when clan leaders in the 16th century ordered dancing festivities as a form of thanksgiving ritual, the festival in Kodaira had its beginnings as an event sanctioned by the local authorities. Kodaira's present festival is administered by the local government, while festival committees are composed of long-term

residents. The power to control the festival has granted, subtly, the power to control the community at large. Here there are shades of *Gujo Odori* in the hands of the *Gujo Odori Hozonkai*.

Still, the *matsuri* or festival has been tirelessly promoted by local and national governments as a 'quintessentially' traditional Japanese practice, and though newly minted at times, it is given a traditional Shinto form and attached to historical, local political and social/religious organisations. The Shinto forms themselves were *revitalized, reinvented, or simply created from nothing during the late 19th century* (Caron, 2003, p.169). The fact of tradition being 're-invented' is a topic with foregone conclusions (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983), and researchers in the social sciences have frequently pointed out that tradition has continually been utilised to comprehend, explain or manipulate contemporary society. The festival is no exception, of course. Yanagisako (1985) has stated that *Tradition [is] a cultural construct whose meaning must be discovered in present words no less than past acts* (p.18).

The ill-defined line between the traditional and the non-traditional notwithstanding, Japan has created a system for selecting and identifying tradition, that is, heritage, which it deems significant for its own patrimony, and no less for its identity. Among these are many Japanese art traditions that are strongly linked to Japan's core identity, such as several martial arts, flower arrangement (*ikebana/kado*), as well as the above-mentioned tea ceremony (*chado/sado*). Many of them are long-standing traditions and fit very appropriately into the Japanese government's designation of intangible cultural heritage, though in fact many do not need protection from *decline and fall into ruin*, as they have fanatical followers and supporters who will ensure their longevity for years

to come.

Yet, still, they are not designated cultural properties. It would be safe to say that the reason for the non-designation is not so much due to the 'what', as each of these traditions has strict rituals and rules that have been established and transmitted for generations, and each is inarguably identifiable and determinable as intangible heritage. The omission may be due more to the 'who', that is, the stakeholders in the tradition. The keepers of the heritage have become so established and entrenched that even the national law and its regulations on intangible cultural heritage in Japan have become irrelevant. For aspects of intangible cultural heritage that have already been formally designated under Japanese law, the government has, perhaps unwittingly - especially in the case of intangible (folk-cultural) cultural heritage - contributed largely to the granting of prestige and power to preservation groups such as the *Gujo Odori Hozonkai*. Yet one also wonders about the situation if one took away such preservation groups - for if there were no such stakeholders, the preservation (and re-creation) of such traditions, at least in Japan, would be unthinkable. 🇯🇵

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