

The Function of Building and Strengthening Multi-layered Relationships
Observed in the Practice of Corporate Groups Participating in the Awa Odori
—A Possibility of the Corporations as Practitioners of Traditional Dance—

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The purpose of this dissertation is, by focusing on the various relationships created and strengthened through the practices of "corporate groups," i.e., corporate dance groups participating in the Awa Odori, a folk performing art originated in Tokushima, to demonstrate the social functions of folk performing arts which can be fulfilled in modern urban areas. The various relationships here refer to the relationship between the company and the participants created by belonging to the dance group, the relationship built among the participants of the dance group, the relationship of trust among the company, the local community and the general public, and the cooperative relationship among the dance groups.

Against the background of contemporary folk performing arts, in recent years, the emphasis has shifted from preservation to utilization with the assumption of collaboration with other fields, and there are concerns about a bias toward economic value and excessive commercial use. By focusing on the social effects of participation in dance by corporations, i.e., commercial organizations having a seemingly high affinity with economic value, it may be possible to find the social value of folk performing arts even in their utilization from the economic perspective of regional economic development and tourism resources. In addition, by showing the potential of corporations as practitioners of folk performing arts, that is, as those who operate or participate in the dance groups, we may be able to find solutions to the shortage of practitioners and difficulties in fund-raising that folk performing arts are facing today. In this study, therefore, with a focus on the actual activities of the corporate groups as practitioners of folk performing arts, what kind of possibilities for building and strengthening relationships can be found in these dance groups are examined.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the history of the Awa Odori, focusing particularly on the transformation of the art form and the involvement of corporations, in order to examine the characteristics of the art form and practitioners of the Awa Odori that have been inherited by the present-day corporate groups. The Awa Odori, which had a variety of art forms during its peak in the Edo era, was consolidated into a dance form from the Taisho era (1912-1926) onward, and moved in the direction of strengthening the unity of the group. As if in conjunction with this trend, dance groups using companies and products as symbols representing the groups have been occasionally seen, and the Taisho era is considered to be the birth of corporate groups and their involvement. As a result of the repeated trials of converting the Awa Odori into a tourism resource, it has been transformed into a stylized, standardized, and technically-sophisticated art form, and it has also been pointed out that the increasing demand for technically sophisticated "show" dances

performed by famous and general groups has eliminated a place for local residents who do not belong to any group to dance.

In Chapter 2, the characteristics of the Awa Odori as a folk performing art of today, the management of the Awa Odori festival that utilizes the Awa Odori as a tourism resource, and the situations of the practitioners participating in the festival were overviewed. It was found that although the Awa Odori has a short basic movement with two-beat rhythms, the types of dance moves and the combinations of multiple formations make it possible to structure the various types of performance as an applied development of group dances. It was shown that the corporate groups are more likely to perform in fee-based performance venues with large audiences in comparison with the general groups and the student groups which are considered to be active year-round.

In Chapter 3, a comparison was made between corporate teams participating in the Mihara Yassa Odori, the Yosakoi Naruko Odori and the Awa Odori in order to clarify the actual activities of these corporate groups in the Awa Odori. The results of a questionnaire survey on the operations of the corporate groups/teams showed that the corporate groups/teams participating in all dances consisted of a diverse range of participants, including not only the employees of their own companies but also a diverse range of personnel from within and outside the company. A characteristic of corporate groups in the Awa Odori was the tendency for many companies to include participants from outside the region and outside the company. The cooperative relationship between the famous/general groups and corporate groups was also unique to the Awa Odori. Comparing the training of dancing, the amount of practice was relatively small in the case of the Mihara Yassa Odori, and their attitude toward practice participation was more lenient. The Yosakoi Naruko Odori requires more practice and tends to demand more participation in practice from the participants. In the case of the Awa Odori, the levels of commitment to, and the awareness of participation in practice varied, indicating that there may not be a strong relationship among the attitude toward participation in practice, the amount of practice, and the implementation of the performance structure. This is considered to be a unique feature of the Awa Odori.

In Chapter 4, the specific examples of participation were identified from the information obtained through interviews in order to examine the operation of corporate groups in the Awa Odori that maintain the quality of their performances while including a variety of participants. The five types of activities identified suggest that the corporate groups ensure the quality of their performances as a "spectacle" in a fee-based performance venue by increasing the amount of practice and composing their own dance structures, or by relying on the skilled dances of famous or general groups. This is thought to be due to the unique characteristics of the Awa Odori, namely, the formation of smaller subgroups, which allows for the division of roles within the entire group and the joint performances with other groups with different levels of proficiency.

It was confirmed that the corporate groups in the Awa Odori are utilized as the opportunities for employee welfare, employee education, corporate PR, customer entertainment, and strengthening a feeling of membership among employees within the company, and for strengthening

relationships with related and business partner corporations. The relationships built and strengthened through the activities of corporate groups affect three different dimensions: the individual level, the organizational level, and the social level, suggesting that corporate groups are able to build and strengthen multi-layered relationships by embracing a diverse range of people both inside and outside the corporation. Corporate groups are formed on the basis of social ties such as broadly-defined “*sha-en* (relationships within a company),” and the power of *communitas* in the boundary situation of festivals strengthens the broadly defined “*sha-en*,” which, in turn, strengthens the multi-layered relationships in corporate groups.

Comparison of the actual activities of the corporate groups/teams of the three dances indicated that the range of participants varied depending on the characteristics of the dances and the scales of the festivals, and that the evaluation or judging process and the formation of a place to be "watched and appreciated" may have influenced the actual activities of the practitioners of the performing arts. The results of this study revealed that among the social functions of folk performing arts, the function of building and strengthening multi-layered relationships is found in the corporate groups of the Awa Odori. In addition to the organic relationship with other practitioners and their involvement in the performing arts, the corporate groups can be presented as one of the clues to solving contemporary issues arising from the conversion of the Awa Odori into a tourism resource, while supporting the modern Awa Odori.