

Japan today: consumption of the traditional culture

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【要旨】

今日の日本 ー伝統文化の消化ー

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日本はしばしば伝統文化を保持する国と見なされ、日本の伝統的な「祭り」は日本の内外でよく知られている。祭りは数百年、場合によっては千年に及ぶ歴史を有しているが、この「伝統」は今日の日本人によってどのように消化され解釈されているのであろうか。

京都の祇園祭や江戸の天下祭のような大きな祭りは、そのあり方について特定のパターンを作り出しており、このパターンは日本各地の地域の祭りで模倣されている。その好例が毎年8月に東京八王子市で開催される八王子まつりで、複数の大きな祭りの影響を窺うことができる。八王子市民は他の祭りの特徴を八王子まつりに取り込むことに開放的であり、八王子にとって「伝統」と思われることに順応し変容しているのである。

By the beginning of the 21st century, Japan had become a society of high consumption. My question is how traditional culture is consumed by Japanese in contemporary life.

For foreigners Japan is frequently recognized as a country that managed to preserve its traditions unchanged. That goes for arts like ukiyo-e and performing arts represented by Kabuki and No. Traditional festivals, *matsuris*, widely known inside and outside Japan, represent Japanese traditional culture from different sides, combining several elements of traditional culture, such as music, performing arts, religious rituals and clothing. One example is probably the most famous *matsuri* in Japan, the Gion *Matsuri*, that goes back to the 9th century, when it was held for the first time. The Gion *Matsuri* is held every year during July in the ancient capital of Japan, Kyoto, and is popular among foreigners and locals.

The Gion *Matsuri* is primarily famous for festival floats, *yamahoko*, with their thousand year history, but what always stays out of focus is that even five hundred years ago the *yamahoko* procession had numerous innovations to entertain people. The most common example is the decoration of several floats with tapestry made in China, India, Persia, and Europe. Some floats still have brilliant tapestries from 16th century Belgium. What was to be traditional, in the heart of Japanese traditional culture, even five hundred years ago was for consumption and entertainment, not

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only for religious purposes.

And what about the present Japanese capital and its matsuri? Tokyo, formerly Edo, out of nowhere became overcrowded with aristocracy, warriors, merchants, craftsmen and commoners. It was only a matter of time until this large crowd, including the ruling classes, would become eager for performances and festivals. The three largest festivals, Kanda Matsuri, Sanno Matsuri and Nezu Matsuri, had huge processions with floats, dashi, and portable shrines, mikoshi, and a combination of these three matsuris was called Tenka Matsuri. With a certain religious message, these matsuris had another purpose, which was entertainment. Created for upper aristocrats and shogun enjoyment, the Tenka Matsuri was so popular that it was copied and imitated outside Edo. The same goes for Kyoto's Gion Matsuri. There are dozens of Gion Festivals across Japan.

Either the Gion Matsuri or the Tenka Matsuri had patterns of what matsuri should be, and these matsuris formed the common conception of traditional culture and the way it could be reproduced in other parts of Japan. Dramatically, with the Meiji era, which started in 1868, and all the innovations and westernization, dashi disappeared from matsuri due to various reasons, but mainly because dashi did not fit in the new capital, with electricity cables, and later — with cars. But festival floats, copied with passion and devotion by people outside Tokyo for citizens' entertainment, were preserved, although the matsuri itself could have changed.

One fine example of how patterns of Edo's Tenka Matsuri with festival floats was taken and applied outside Edo, is the Kawagoe Matsuri, held every year in October in the city of Kawagoe, 32 kilometers northwest of central Tokyo. The Kawagoe Matsuri goes back to 1648, when it was held for the first time by the Hikawa Shrine. At first there were two portable shrines, mikoshi, one lion's head, shishito, and one Japanese drum, taiko, but as Kawagoe's merchant society became prosperous and powerful, the matsuri itself transformed into dashi-oriented by 1842, 26 years before Meiji and the drastic transformations it would bring to the cultural life of the Japanese. Kawagoe has been called "Little Edo" since the Edo period, so it is natural that the city and its people were strongly influenced by "Big Edo's" Tenka Matsuri.

Kawagoe Matsuri recognizes itself, and indeed it is, as a traditional matsuri, with its origins from Edo's Tenka Matsuri, owning dashi registered as Japanese National Treasures, as well as matsuri. According to an article in Koedo NET, the web resource on Kawagoe, eighty thousand people visited Kawagoe Matsuri in 2010. Every year the Kawagoe Matsuri, which is included in the top three Grand Matsuris in the Kanto region, attracts an increasing number of tourists, using the city's traditional culture as a tool.

Another example, which is my research for my master's thesis, is Hachioji Matsuri, held in Hachioji city, territorially a part of Tokyo situated 35 kilometers to the west of central Tokyo, the Hachioji Matsuri has more than 250 years of history, and, like Kawagoe, has dashi as a central element of the matsuri. At first, just like the Kawagoe Matsuri, there was only a religious procession with mikoshi, and a few other events. Again, and practically at the same time as in Kawagoe, with Hachioji's merchants becoming prosperous, dashi culture blossomed in Hachioji. The Edo Tenka Matsuri pattern was also implemented here for entertainment and was consumed by the locals.

The Second World War in Hachioji ended with the August air raid, when nearly 90% of the city was burned and half of the dashi were lost. As Hachioji's reconstruction began, matsuris faced the same problem that Edo's Tenka Matsuri had faced at the beginning of Meiji. The sudden increase of cars and new traffic made it impossible to pull dashi through the crowded, busy streets. After several years, in 1961 matsuri was reorganized in the form of a civil

festival, with parade elements, fireworks and so on, to entertain citizens. There was no sign of dashi appearing in the festival, and only in 1968, when Hachioji Civil Festival changed its name to Hachioji Matsuri, and shrine events and festival floats were included in program, were dashi pulled into the streets.

Hachioji Matsuri was still more of a civil festival, not a religious, traditional one until 2002, when the Executive of Hachioji Matsuri with the mayor of Hachioji city as its chairman, proclaimed Hachioji Matsuri to be traditional and dashi-centered, emphasizing traditional elements and regional traditional culture. Four aims were announced for the matsuri:

1. Creation and inheritance of regional culture
2. Development of tourism and industry
3. Solidarity of citizens and harmony
4. Powering up the public image of Hachioji

Starting from 2002, the Hachioji Matsuri began to accumulate features and elements of a traditional matsuri. However, for Hachioji citizens the understanding of the word “traditional” is quite different from the shrine matsuris that were performed in the Edo-Meiji-Taisho and early Showa periods. More than that, if we look closely we can find patterns of these matsuris being implemented in the Hachioji Matsuri since 2002.

I have been conducting fieldwork in Minami-cho, one of the blocks of Hachioji city, participating in the matsuri, for two years, doing interviews and taking part in Hachioji Matsuri as a member of Minami-cho. I am sure that there are other examples of how Grand Matsuri patterns are implemented in Hachioji, but I am going to show you some examples using the data I collected during my research in Minami-cho.

Case 1.

Hachioji Matsuri participants now generally wear special matsuri clothes, hantens or specially designed yukatas. A few years ago one of the Minami-cho leaders, Mr. Hirasawa, went to the Kyoto Gion Matsuri where he saw the procession of Minamikanhon-yama. The character *minami* was written on the participants' yukatas and hantens, and Mr. Hirasawa thought it would be great if Minami-cho, too, would have yukatas with the *minami* character, translated as “south,” in common with “Minami-cho.” That is how Minami-cho elders got the yukatas they now wear during the matsuri, but this is not merely a copy of what Mr. Hirasawa saw at the Gion Matsuri. The character *minami* for Minami-cho was made in the form of butterfly, which differs from the original. Again, on the Iwato-yama procession yukata, there is a wheel ornament. This idea was also taken by Minami-cho for the yukata design.

Case 2.

Another example is the rope tied to the dashi and used for pulling the dashi along the streets during the festival. Originally dashi were light-brown, but now Minami-cho and other blocks are using tri-colored rope (in the case of Hachioji white, red and green). The tri-colored rope was borrowed from the Kawagoe Matsuri. Again, Minami-cho leaders, frequently going to see other matsuris all over the country, noticed the tri-colored rope of the Kawagoe dashi, and that was when they thought they might use the same idea of the three colors.

Case 3.

The third example concerns the whole structure of the matsuri. Famous matsuris like Kyoto's Gion and Kishiwada, Saga prefecture's Karatsu Kunchi or Fukuoka prefecture's Hakata Gion attract hundreds of thousands of tourists every year. Each of the matsuris has a high level of management and PR, with commercials, pamphlets and so on. Dashi are not just pulled along the streets. There are special stages and events organized to attract tourists, so-called *miseba* (highlights), and all of them, with the correct time and place, are shown in the pamphlet map. The Hachioji matsuri did not have special *miseba* until 2000, so they were created and put in pamphlets. That is how other matsuri experiences were applied in Hachioji.

To summarize, Minami-cho and Hachioji matsuris are perfect examples for describing how patterns of Japanese Grand matsuris were taken and adapted by local people two hundred years ago, and how "tradition" is recreated and consumed now in order to attract not only tourists, but also Hachioji citizens, to participate in the matsuri.