

### **Session 3 :**

#### **Local region and Folklore: Regarding a video documentary about "Hachigatsu Odori of Amami Oshima" produced by National Museum of Ethnology**

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#### **Outline**

1. Production of a long video documentary "Hachigatsu Odori of Amami Oshima"
2. How to capture Hachigatsu Odori on video
3. History of performing arts as "folklore"
4. Hachigatsu Odori for the people of the island
5. The gap between insiders and outsiders
6. New theory of performing arts
7. New theory of performing arts and Local study
8. Records of local region as a better concept
9. People who watch the documentary
10. Standpoints of New theory of performing arts

#### 1. Production of a long video documentary "Hachigatsu Odori of Amami Oshima"

National Museum of Ethnology (abbreviated to Minpaku hereafter) had interviews about Hachigatsu Odori, which descends in all over the island of Amami Oshima in Kagoshima prefecture, between 2004 and 2005 and, based on those interviews, produced a long video documentary about "Hachigatsu Odori of Amami Oshima" (abbreviated to the documentary hereafter) in 2007. Hachigatsu Odori is one of the most important traditional performing arts of the Amami islands, located between Kyushu and Okinawa, and continues to be performed to this day in the northern three islands: Amami Oshima, Kikai Jima, and Tokuno Shima.

In the following, I would like to explain why we, Minpaku, interviewed and produced the documentary and then express my personal opinions about how researchers should establish relationships with local societies and people for the investigation research of local cultural phenomenon.

#### 2. How to capture Hachigatsu Odori on video

In order to have interviews and produce the documentary about Hachigatsu Odori, the first issue was how we should understand Hachigatsu Odori as performing arts, because it would make differences in the process of interviews and production. Therefore, we selected some characteristics based on the pre-research on the traditional Hachigatsu Odori and decided to focus on these for the interviews and production.

The first characteristic is the form of performance. Hachigatsu Odori has a unique form which is different from other performing arts of other area. It is a group performance in which everyone participates as dancer regardless of age sex and makes circles divided into men and women and a trinity of song, dance and drums performed by the participants. The songs are arranged in 8-8-8-6 syllables, which is also the common style of Okinawa, and sang with five musical scales, which is the common style of Kyushu and Honshu. The first word of each number is always the same but the following are chosen from more than 100 common words to make improvisational communication. It is normally performed between men and women.

The second characteristic is its history. In "Nantou Zatsuwa" written by an officer of Satsuma clan who was assigned in Amami Oshima from Kagoshima in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the lives of people in Amami of that time are described in details with drawings and writings. As it also explains about Hachigatsu Odori, we can understand that it was already performed in the trinity of song, dance and

drums in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The third characteristic is the variety. Hachigatsu Odori is performed in all over Amami Oshima. Even in some villages where they do not perform today, they used to do as well as the other villages. However, the performance is not the same in all the regions. There are differences in styles especially between the north and south. For example about songs, although men and women communicate in both areas, they sing with the same melodies but different keys in the north but both men and women use the same melodies and keys in the south. The mode of singing is also different: they start singing before the others finish and the tempo also increases in the north, on the other hand, they don't sing at the same time or there is no increase in the tempo in the south. Other than songs, there are also differences in drums of men and women between the north and the south. Moreover, if we take a look at styles within the north and south in details, there are also differences in numbers and programs of performance between villages. Hachigatsu Odori has a large variety of styles depending on regions.

The fourth characteristic is the ritual. Basically, Hachigatsu Odori is performed at annual events. In Amami Oshima, August of the lunar calendar is called Mihachigatsu and, as it is a seasonal change, there are more annual events than other time of the year. Hachigatsu Odori is performed at these events (e.g. Arasetsu, Shibasashi, and Donga) in many villages. It is also performed at Festival for a plentiful year especially in the southern region. It is also considered as a ritual performance because Noro (female oracle) has an important role: the performance starts from her home and she divines the program of performance.

We started interviews and production of the documentary based on these characteristics (form, history, variety, and ritual). However, when we contacted with local people more deeply, I started to wonder if these characteristics are enough to understand Hachigatsu Odori.

### 3. History of performing arts as “folklore”

The history of performing arts by Shinobu Orikuchi would help me define my question more clearly. Orikuchi considers the performing arts as a historical presence rather than fixed idea. He does not mean a chronicle in a chart in which explains the progress of a certain performing art according to the time. He says: “it is difficult to review a performing art of a certain historical period “by sorting into time”” and “even Kabuki and Noh collected all kind of elements of performing arts and it is not easy to say what comes from a certain performing art (Shinobu Orikuchi, “Nihon Geinoushi Rokkou,” 1944).” In fact, the history of performing arts is a complicated process of continuous changes that new performing arts are repeatedly born under the influence of different kinds of performing arts in the previous time period. Therefore, as the performing arts always change with the time, it is difficult to understand the “ideal form” of a performing art of a certain period of time. How and who should define the ideal form in the first place? Although the “tradition” is often compared with the ideal form of performing arts, the question still remains: the form of which period should be defined as “traditional?” How and who decides “traditional?” If we consider the form of a certain period of time is “traditional,” it would deny the historical presence of performing arts. If we do, would it be an appropriate concept? In sum, the “tradition” is a prejudged ideology regardless of actual conditions rather than the definition based on the reality.

By reviewing these ideas, I came to the conclusion that the performing arts carried on by people of the region should be considered as “folklore” instead of “tradition.” The “folklore” here does not include those carried on without changing the previous forms and contents. “It is recreated very moment based on the previous performances as references, changes its form and contents, and is performed repeatedly according to the time period and changes of the social circumstance. (Ryoji Sasahara, “Sanbikishishimai no kenkyu,” 2003)” Indeed, the “folklore” is performed with changes according to the time and circumstances and this also coincidences with what Orikuchi explained about the history of performing arts.

However, if the performing arts are carried on in this way, another issue can be raised: the group of carrier, in other words, who has carried on the performing arts. In case of Hachigatsu Odori, it is how the performers actually feel and think about having carried on their performance.

### 4. Hachigatsu Odori for the people of the island

Yoshimori Ebara, a folklorist from Amami Oshima, wrote about Hachigatsu Odori based on the

experience of his own childhood:

“When I was a child, I was waiting for Hachigatsu Odori more than any other event and it was the most pleasant moment of the year. When the fire of Sakizare passed by Takakura, my family said “here they come!” with excitement. We became busy in the house and screamed “prepare sake” and “prepare flowers.” As my mother liked the song named “Imono hano tuyu,” the performers always sang it even we didn’t ask them. It has full of joy like an ecstasy, and if you experience it once, you will subconsciously miss it when the season comes and participate in the performance to look forward the ecstasy. (Yoshimori Ebara, “Hachigatsu Odori of Amami: Sono keitai to hassei no kotodomo,” 1982)”

These descriptions helped me realize that there is another issue different from what I previously explained such as the form, history, variety, and ritual. That is to say, it is the issue of how the participants actually think and feel about the performance. So, we also decided to reflect it on our interviews and production of the documentary. To be more specific, we started to have interviews with the actual participants and showed them in the documentary.

In one of the interviews shown in the documentary, an old woman says: “The songs are about love. I could learn them because I like both singing and dancing. If you don’t like them, you can’t remember them.” In another interview, a young woman says: “Nobody taught me how to dance. I learned it by watching our grandmothers and dancing like them. Now, I think I am lucky to be born where this performance has been carried on.” Some interviews were not shown in the documentary. A man commented at the end of the interview: “I was out of the island for a long time and recently came back so I don’t know much about the performance.” Although his comments were not for the documentary, he gave me a strong impression because I realized that participants have different backgrounds and involvements in the performance and there are different voices and feelings between them.

#### 5. Gap between insiders and outsiders

Although we collected opinions of many different people, an issue still remains: there is a gap between ideas and passions of the parties who actually carry on the performing arts and opinions of researchers and cultural heritage protectors who involve in it from outside through research investigations, interviews and productions of documentaries.

Jyunzou Kawata discusses about it as following by taking an example of local history: “The meaning of history for the parties who live in it is always different from its observers.” He also says: “from the parties’ point of view, the quality of their interpretation from the inside is more important than the range of references” and “the chance of integration” of insider and outsiders is low but “we cannot say that I, who observe it from outside, am correct and the insiders are wrong” (Jyunzou Kawata, “Symposium Rekishi to Minzoku no Kousa,” 2004). I think his opinion is reasonable. But it does not mean that it is not necessary to consider ideas and passions of participants for research investigations even if the chance of integration is low. Of course, I wonder if we can say that we understand it enough by concluding it without concerning ideas and passions of the participants. I think we should at least try to integrate our ideas and opinions even if it is difficult.

#### 6. New theory of performing arts

Taking these into consideration, I have suggested “New theory of performing arts” to review the performing arts. This theory borrows the idea from “New theory of language” suggested by Kunio Yanagita. According to New theory of language of Yanagita, there is nothing more variable than languages and not all the words have remained the same since the past, however; languages are consisted of “new words” created and adapted for “necessities” in the daily life at a certain period of time in the past and, as a result of taking root and being used or sometime disappearing after being experimented and approved by the “group” of local people and social aggregations, languages used in the daily life of local people is established and various dialects of different regions are born (Kunio Yanagita, “Sadamoto Yanagita Kunio Shu No.18,” 1969).

I thought New theory of language suggested by Yanagita would also help us to understand the performing arts. In “New theory of performing arts,” I suggest that there is nothing more variable than performing arts and not all the performing arts have remained the same since the past, however; the performing arts are consisted of “new performing arts” created and adapted for “necessities” in

the daily life at a certain period of time in the past and they are used and established in the daily life of local people, and as a result of taking root and being used or sometime disappearing after being experimented and approved by the “group” of the local people and social aggregations, the performing arts performed in the daily life of local people are established and various performing arts of different regions are born (Ryoji Sasahara, “Can we record the traditional performing arts?” 2009).

Similar to New theory of language suggested by Yanagita, New theory of performing arts also gives the prior right of making voluntary decisions about how their culture should be to the local people who actually carry it on. In New theory of performing arts, the concept of outsiders including researchers cannot be considered superior to voices and feelings of local insiders even if it is for academic investigation research. In addition, it also allows us to accept actual conditions of various folk performances in all over the country as performing arts created and changed by voluntaries of local people.

#### 7. New theory of performing arts and Local study

New theory of performing arts has also similarity to “Local study” suggested by Kunio Yanagita as well as New theory of language. Yanagita states about “Local study” that he “did not try to study local regions but “something”, including “life of Japanese people especially the history of people as group,” in local regions” and “tried to restudy it in local regions or through ideas and feelings of local people (Kunio Yanagita, “Sadamoto Yanagita Kunio Shu No.24,” 1970).” In other words, Local study of Yanagita is to study histories and cultures “through ideas and feelings” of local people in local regions and, by studying them “in local regions,” he respected the prior right of local people. If you apply it to the case of performing arts, it is an intention to understand the performing arts “through feelings and consciousnesses of the life” of local people who have actually performed.

The final goal of both New theory of performing arts and Local study is a better concept of object. Then, what is a better concept of culture which has been carried on by local people like Hachigatsu Odori? It is still difficult for me to answer clearly, but this is what I am always wondering about. I know it must be the result of listening to voices of many people with different points of view inside and outside of local region. It must give a chance to exchange ideas and opinions of many people with different points of view inside and outside of local region: those of researchers outside will be one of them. It must also give a chance for local people to review their lives, histories, and cultures by knowing it. For these, it is important and essential that the concept is based on accurate records of current situations. It must help local people to review and think their own history in the future as well as now. Finally, the concept must not be fixed as a common myth but continuously updated. By doing so, it will realize the attitude of giving the priority right to local people to decide voluntarily how their culture should be and what their history is.

Nonetheless, Local study is not perfect. Yanagita also points defects of Local study at the same time with insisting the importance. According to him, there are “common mistakes” in Local study: “emphasizing too much on unusualness of what only exists in the region” and, in contrary, “not paying attention because of considering it something very usual.” He also suggests that “Local study must be done by local people of each region” because “it does require dividing into small areas but it is not effective if it is isolated (Kunio Yanagita, “Sadamoto Yanagita Kunio Shu No.25,” 1970).” The perspective tends to be narrow in Local study; as a result, it might lead a centrism of its culture, local egoism, and lack of attention and understanding. To avoid these, it is necessary to cooperate with people who dedicate in Local study in other regions to refer and compare with their studies and concepts. These are also essential in order to generalize fragmental concepts of Local study.

According to Yanagita’s opinions, our interviews and production of the documentary could be also a reference and an object of comparison as a concept of outsiders about Hachigatsu Odori in order to avoid “common mistakes” of local people and lead a better concept of Hachigatsu Odori.

#### 8. Records of local region as a better concept

New theory of performing arts and Local Study of Yanagita also relate to “Records of local region” which was suggested by Yanagita. Yanagita states that “in records of local region, we must demonstrate how the local region has developed until today, what kind of restrictions and routes they have, and with what conditions they exist and, when someone refers them, they must help him/her to

think about what he/she can do so that the village will be able to stay in the happiness (Kunio Yanagita, "Sadamoto Yanagita Kunio Shu No.25," 1970)." In other words, records of local region must be a material which gives opportunities to realize a better life of the local village in the future for someone who reads it as well as an observation of local people's lives and history.

In case of Hachigatsu Odori, it must be the records of Hachigatsu Odori that helps the local people to improve their Hachigatsu Odori in the future by referring it as well as the observation of how they have performed in each region. As I also explained earlier, this was the goal of our interviews and production of the documentary. Therefore, we showed the documentary to the local people who actually perform and asked their opinions and impressions. We tested if the documentary is satisfied as records of the local region, which is suggested by Yanagita, in other words, if the local people would revalue their performances and start to think about how their performance should be in the future after watching the documentary.

We showed the documentary and asked their opinions in Amami Oshima, where we had interviews, and places nearby such as Kagoshima city, Kikai Jima, Tokuno Shima, and Okinoerabu Jima. I would like to introduce opinions and impressions of people in Amami Oshima in the following. I also included them in "Recording Hachigatsu Odori in video (Sasahara, 2008)."

## 9. People who watch the documentary

### (1) Passion for Hachigatsu Odori

After watching the documentary, many people talked about their passions for Hachigatsu Odori from their hearts.

I like Hachigatsu Odori since I was a student and I have very good memories of beating washbowls to dance on the beach every time I came back to the island for vacations.

A young girl in the documentary said that she learned the dance and songs by listening and watching but, this is the ideal way to learn the performance for us too.

The story of an old woman is the most valuable in the documentary. I want all the successors in the island to listen to it and learn the performance.

It is our responsibility for our ancestors to study and carry on old traditions. "Shimaguchi," a number of Hachigatsu Odori, must be really respected.

When we showed the documentary in Amami Oshima, the audience was those who were especially interested in Hachigatsu Odori. Therefore, the opinions were mostly positive. They reconfirmed their passions for Hachigatsu Odori by watching the documentary. Many of them also sympathized especially with the stories of women in the documentary and they even gave applause for some of them while they were watching.

### (2) Differences of performance

As Hachigatsu Odori is performed at the same time of the year in all regions, there are not many chances for them to see the performances of other villages. Indeed, many of them watched them for the first time in the documentary.

Hachigatsu Odori has many common numbers across regions but, if you watch the documentary, you will find that not all the words are the same in other regions.

Details of the performance are not the same. It is amazing how they are different even though all the villages are geographically close to each other.

Today, I saw the performances of Kasari and Tatsugou for the first time but I understood the differences because the documentary explanation.

The differences in dances and songs of each region are a big problem to carry on Hachigatsu

Odori. Now, I am concerning how we should carry it on in the future.

From these opinions, we understood that they started to think they should protect the identity of their performances when they found the differences between regions.

### (3) Critiques

Some people also criticized the documentary.

In my village, every single person participates and it has very important role of respecting old people. I also wanted you to talk about it in the documentary.

The narration bothered me. The pronunciation wasn't good. I am very concerning that this will lead misunderstanding if it stays in the video. The expression of local dialect is very difficult.

We haven't thought about the relationships between Hachigatsu Odori and old people until this person criticized even though we had seen them many times during the interviews. I regret it more than anything in the documentary.

There were many critiques about the language. I think the local people who actually speak the dialect felt it very strange because we also added explanatory titles with the narration in the documentary. It was hard for us to find an appropriate way to express specific expressions and pronunciations of the region. I think it will be our assignment for the future

### (4) Concerns

Those who visit the island from other places might think that Hachigatsu Odori is actively performed all over the island but, you will realize that it is not true if you listen to the concerns and difficulties of many local people in order to continue the performance.

I think many of you here actually perform but, if anyone knows procedures to learn dancing and singing well, I want you to teach me.

They teach Hachigatsu Odori in schools but there is also a problem. They can't teach love songs or sexual songs between men and women. We are trying to think of a way to support them in the community to carry on the performance.

In my village, women are good at playing drums and dancing but not singing. There are not many men. We organize an activity club to practice them periodically and feel our way for finding a solution. We want to continue the performance anyhow.

These concerns and difficulties show that it is not easy to keep the local community itself as a result of the depopulation, aging of society, and low birthrate in all regions.

### (5) Ideas

People are not only accepting their problems but also trying various measures to solve them. Some people introduced their ideas and challenges after watching the documentary.

In our village, we write words of songs in Kanji and Hiragana and add ruby to the dialect of Amami. The dialect is easier to understand in Kanji. If we use a text in Kanji, we all can learn the same words regardless of age.

It will be easier to learn if we make a DVD to show how to perform and practice with watching.

I teach the performance to women married into families in our village from other villages once a month. If they learn songs first, it will be easier to learn drums.

If we let young people be responsibility of all the performance, they will learn it very quickly.

From their opinions, I understood that many people are actively trying new methods to continue the performance instead of persisting traditional ways. Some of them were people who came back to their villages after retirement.

#### (6) Suggestions

It was also very interesting that people of different regions suggested specific ideas of communicating each other and carrying on Hachigatsu Odori in the future.

If we record the words of songs of every village in a book and keep it in a library or periodically communicate each other to learn the performances of other places, I think Hachigatsu Odori would be more exiting in all over the island.

I want you to sell this documentary so that other people out of the island can learn about Hachigatsu Odori.

The suggestion to establish a network between villages is interesting. Since Hachigatsu Odori is not designated as a cultural heritage by central or local government, there is no preservation organization in each region. Therefore, performers of different regions had never gathered in one place in the past. After watching our documentary and exchanging their opinions, I think people felt it is beneficial for their Hachigatsu Odori if they establish a network to exchange information.

We are not able to sell the documentary because of complicated problems. However, we sent DVDs to libraries and museums in the island so that everybody can watch them for free. One of the libraries told us that many people came to watch it when Hachigatsu Odori was performed.

In conclusion, by reviewing these ideas and opinions of local people after watching the documentary, I would consider that our goal of producing the documentary as a concept of Local study, which I explained earlier, have almost accomplished.

#### 10. Standpoints of New theory of performing arts

Finally, based on Minpaku's work of interview and the documentary production about Hachigatsu Odori, I would like to show three subjects from the perspective of my New theory of performing arts in order to reach a better concept of local performing arts like Hachigatsu Odori.

First, why don't we try to be stoic like "vagabond Tora-san?" Our way of understanding performing arts is not certainly natural and obvious because we always build a concept based on some frameworks we set. As I have explained earlier, "cultural heritage" and "tradition" are sorts of ideologies that are not sure and reliable as frameworks. Therefore, when we want to state that a performing art is "cultural heritage" or "tradition," we should remember the famous words of Tora-san: "It will be over if you say that" and face to the performing art without these ideologies. Then, we have to use all our sensibilities with our eyes and ears to understand it with our own wishes and responsibilities. I think we will be able to reach a better concept of the performing arts by doing so. In order to achieve a better concept of subject, it is necessary to understand base frameworks clearly and make them relative.

Second, don't hate changes. Kunio Yanagita also says that it is unavoidable that languages change so they should be changed for the improvement in the future rather than avoid changing. This is why it is important to analyze history of language. Understanding history of language, rules of its changes and linguistic abilities of people who make changes, is very beneficial for realizing better changes of the language in the future. This could be also applied to performing arts: it is unavoidable that local performing arts change so they should be changed for the improvement in the future rather than avoid changing them and understanding history of performing art, rules of its changes and performing abilities of people who make changes, is very beneficial for realizing better changes of the performing art in the future.

Yanagita says that knowing about the past or understanding history does not necessarily mean the conservatism and "the society will be able to become wiser as much as they want." In fact, he expects possibilities that things would get better according to the time.

Third, for whom performing arts exist. The other day, I had a chance to see a festival in Okinawa. Various performances were presented in the festival for three days. In addition to folk dances and

classic performing arts of Okinawa, children's plays and dances with pop music were also performed and received same applause or even more cheering from the audience. Although this festival is designated as a national cultural heritage, I guess only the folk dances and classic performing arts are included in the subjects of designation but not the children's plays and pop dances. This made me realize an important issue about how local performing arts should be: for whom local festivals and performing arts as cultural heritage exist. Generally, it will be the same issue if a festival and performing art is designated as World Heritage. In most cases, those who value performing arts and make decisions about designations of cultural heritage or World Heritage are not the local people. Then, who makes decision based on what reasons? Does it have legitimacy? If a performing art is valued without involvements of the parties, then for whom the performing art primarily exist?

What I wonder more than anything is if the local people can really enjoy performing and watching a performing art designated as cultural heritage or World Heritage by outsiders. If we observe local performing arts, people also seem to enjoy the traditional way of annoying and tiring preparations and arrangements of their performances even though they complain at the same time. Anyway, they have some pleasures and amusements for their performing arts that have been repeatedly performed.

In case of Okinawa, if only the folk dances and classical performing arts are preserved as cultural heritage in the future, do the local people really enjoy and satisfied with the festival and performing arts? In my opinion, if the local people who actually participate cannot enjoy, then it is not sufficient as performing arts.

For whom local performing arts exist; in other words, who has the priority right to decide rules of performing arts. How they should be valued, enjoyed and performed and if they should be continued, changed or not changed, stopped or renewed. I think it should be primarily the local people who actually participate. This is the most fundamental reason why I suggested New theory of performing arts.