

# WHO PAYS THE PIPER: JAPANESE POST-WAR LEGISLATION AND THE NEGOTIATION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

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## Introduction

This paper is one in an irregular series touching on the intersection of fandom and traditional culture in Japan.

In this case, we will be examining the first positive steps taken by the post-war academy and government to formalize protection of both tangible and intangible culture.

In the previous papers in this series, we have examined how many different individuals, each with their own personal motivations, are able to enter into a given specific cultural revival movement and negotiate the terms of its existence.

In each case we saw how it is always extremely difficult, if not actually impossible, for a single party to claim executive control over the right to define a specific cultural reality without the support of a substantial majority of the other participants. In this paper however, we set out to examine what happens to a cultural revival which has become fragmented due to disagreement as to which one of two surviving artistic traditions best represents the arts of the region.

Essentially, what is being examined here is the nature of participant authority and just how far a given agent of negotiation can press demands to signify a property without actual reference to their fellows. We will also be looking at the

way in which different negotiators in this specific case react when presented with artistic agents who seem unable to work together within a negotiated reality.

## Honda Yasuji's Classification of Folk Performing Art

Several theories have been postulated over the years concerning exactly why, at the close of the Second World War, the Japanese academy appears to have relinquished much of the control it had achieved over the preservation and revival of native folk cultural properties. Some, such as Adachi Kenji, have suggested that this was due to the fact that the general population, free for the first time to exercise its rights fully in the process of government, had also found voice on other seemingly less important issues and simply reclaimed what was their own, forcing the authorities to acknowledge their concerns through a wide variety of social legislation.<sup>1</sup> Others, for example Gunji Masakatsu, have suggested that amongst the ruins of a rebuilding nation, purely social issues such as the folk revival were largely set aside by authoritarian groups,

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<sup>1</sup> Universal suffrage was only granted in the 1947 constitution; Adachi, Kenji. (1978). *Bunkacho Koto Hajime (文化庁事始)* [Founding of the Agency For Cultural Affairs]. Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki.

much as had have been the case in the early 1900s, while resources were turned to reconstruction and political favour once again settled on “modernization.” These approaches, however, are not really appropriate ways to assess this matter.

Certainly the country was in huge disarray with most social norms under the sort of pressure which resulted from the complete, if ultimately temporary, ideological collapse which followed Japan’s unconditional surrender. However it does seem unlikely that the destabilised nature of society was solely responsible for the emancipation of folk art that took place from the 1950s.<sup>2</sup> Rather, according to the renowned folklorist Honda Yasuji (1908-2001), it is immediate aftermath of the war itself, that one should look for the beginnings of an important, and very necessary popular revival of folk culture in Japan.<sup>3</sup> The conflict had affected almost all aspects of the nation’s daily life, with every person being required to witness the near collapse of personal and national history as the state surrendered to allied occupation.

Thus, when the fear of invasion gave way to the stark realities of post-war life “a great dual sense of loss and survival,” as Sato Yoshikazu puts it “descended on the country, instilling in everyone who felt

the guilt of the conflict they had been party to starting a very personal realization that their own hands had brought their world down around them.”<sup>4</sup> This was felt nowhere more profoundly, or with more guilt than in those areas of the academy that had made it their business to use Japanese social history, as well as cultural development, as a tool of statecraft. Indeed, places such as Waseda, Keio and Tokyo Universities were “both overcome with urgency that our work might go unfinished through, admittedly largely self induced, post-war hysteria, and a very sobering realization that their work had been partly responsible for the damage which had been done.”<sup>5</sup>

It must be remembered that one of the reasons why academic appropriation of folkloric elements of Japanese cultural history had been so successful during the pre-war period was due to the fact that the authorities actively promoted almost any aspect of historical investigation which ultimately aided the larger social aim of re-creating the Japanese as a unified, homogenous people fit to rule Asia. The authorities, through their financial control of the universities which carried out this work, simply supported those whose views were useful and negatively influenced those that were not. Thus, according to Sato, once the war ended, and the political environment swung away from violent nationalism, the scholarly community began to soften, with some people such as Yanagita himself going as far as

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<sup>2</sup> Gunji, Masakatsu. (1958). *Kyodo Geino* (郷土芸能) [Regional Arts]. Tokyo: Sogensha.

<sup>3</sup> 本田安次. One of the first students to join Kodera Yukichi’s Waseda University based Geijutsu no Kai [Folk Art Society], for many years Honda acted as assistant to Kodera both at many of the Kyodo Buyo to Minyo-no-kai and several of his tutor’s noted field trips, including the first Waseda visit to the Chichibu shrine; Honda, Yasuji. (1960a). *Nihon no Minzoku Geino* (日本の民族芸能) [Japanese Folk Arts]. Tokyo: Kinseisha. (page 14).

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<sup>4</sup> Sato Yoshikazu: Archivist. Awaji Ningyō Jōruri Theatre. Interview with Darren-Jon Ashmore, July 15 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Umazume Masaru: Former Director, Awaji Ningyō Jōruri Theatre. Interview with Darren-Jon Ashmore, May 11, 2010. (recalling a conversation with Honda Yasuji in 1985).

denouncing the constraints laid upon them by the pre-war government.<sup>6</sup>

However, as Kawatake Shigetoshi (1889-1967) reminds us, such an attitude can also be interpreted not so much as contrite rejection of an overly authoritarian government, but in embarrassed realization of the fact that personal pre-war academic goals had stymied the creative environments in which folk culture was ultimately produced. In a very damning article, formulated in co-operation with Honda Yasuji, in a 1953 issue of "*Geino Fukko*" he reminded his peers that in the eight years since the ending of the war there had been a remarkable rise in the popularity of modern social diversions and no appreciable rise in public awareness, especially among the younger generations, of the value of more traditional folk cultural practices.<sup>7</sup> This he squarely lays at the feet of the academic community, accusing all, himself included, of being so disinterested in the possibility of contemporary common participation in the field that the creators who would become the historical sources for future scholars were vanishing for want of support from the one group they should be able to automatically expect it.<sup>8</sup> Only by fostering an awareness of what he called the dual nature – past and present – of folk culture as a whole, even though he was speaking

about folk performing arts in particular, would it be possible to guarantee their work's future and that this also required, above all else, acceptance of contemporary common negotiators as the ultimate source of validation for these cultural properties.<sup>9</sup>

Honda himself had said something very similar at the opening of the third of the "silver age" Kyodo Buyo to Minyo-no-kai in 1953, even going as far as suggesting that the 1950s should be regarded as the age in which folklore studies came of age.<sup>10</sup> This he seems to have said, according to Sato, not out of any attempt to denigrate the work of his old masters, Yanagita and Kodera, but simply because it was increasingly obvious that the elite-led academic paradigms of the past had finally been recognized as the inappropriate vehicles of folk culture revival they were. Indeed, he condemned all notions of political manipulation of the folk identity and openly acknowledged the value of folk art's own contemporary plebeian creators.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, much as his old masters had once used the "golden age" Kyodo Buyo to Minyo-no-kai conferences to argue for the creation of an academic discipline of folk research, in the 1950s Honda equally successfully argued for the creation of a systematized framework in which the historical value of non-elite cultural properties would be balanced by an acceptance of the importance of these practices as living customs. In this regard, Honda suggested that two things were necessary to properly establish folk

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<sup>6</sup> Sato Yoshikazu: Archivist. Awaji Ningyō Jōruri Theatre. Interview with Darren-Jon Ashmore, July 15 2001.

<sup>7</sup> 芸能復興 (Performing Arts Revival). The journal of the Minzoku Geino-no-Kai (民俗芸能の会) [the Folk Performing Arts Association] which was founded in 1950.

<sup>8</sup> Kawatake, Shigetoshi. (1953). "Dai Ni Go ni Yosete" (第二号に寄せて) [The Collection for Volume Two]. In, *Geino Fukko* 2:1 (芸能復興 2:1) [Performing Art Revival 2:1]. (pp 6-12).

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. (pp 6-12).

<sup>10</sup> Tsuruzawa Enjiro: Master of the *shamisen*, National Bunraku Theatre, Osaka. Interview with Darren-Jon Ashmore, Aug 21, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Sato Yoshikazu: Archivist. Awaji Ningyō Jōruri Theatre. Interview with Darren-Jon Ashmore, July 15 2001.

performing arts, as well as folk cultural properties in general, as valuable aspects of contemporary Japanese society. First, a working theoretical definition – a classification system in reality – of such art that incorporated its contemporary status and second, further legal protection, such as had already been partly secured in the Bunkazai Hogoho [Cultural Properties Protection Law].<sup>12</sup>

This law, instituted by the authorities on the orders of Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru, was introduced to the country in 1950 as a way of proactively guarding both the historical significance and contemporary value of some of the most important classical, elite cultural activities. In total the law specified four areas of classical performing art, including a number of related arts, which would be supported under it, namely *no*, *kyogen*, *kabuki*, and *bunraku*, citing that all other forms of classical performing art derive from, or ultimately lead to, one of the forms above.

Under it, organizations were directly funded and research into the disciplines subsidised. Among the *bunkazai* [cultural properties] designated under the law were *yukei bunkazai* [material properties] such as physical art, important architecture etc, *kinenbutsu* [monuments] including man-made as well as natural artefacts in the landscape and *dentoteki kenzobutsugun* [traditional building groups] such as fortifications, religious buildings, entire village or town districts etc. Moreover, key experts, styled as *mukei bunkazai*, [intangible properties] whose skills, or knowledge made them both living

repositories of historical wisdom and valuable teaching resources in the battle to preserve these properties for future generations.<sup>13</sup> Once more, the cultural life of the nation found itself under Ministry of Education control with this government organ which, in concert with academics and performers, began the codification of Japanese classical culture, determining which groups in which areas of the state would represent what level of each approved property.

Though some folk arts and customs had found their way into the initial draft of the Bunkazai Hogoho, as a subgroup of the *yukei bunkazai* section called the *minzoku shiryō* [folk material], their place was, at this point considered secondary to the main aims of the law, and where examples of folk culture were considered for preservation they were only included if they were seen as contributing something of direct importance to the overall story of the property that supported their claim. This was especially true of folk performing art groups, which were required to be part of a supporting agency, usually an established performing group, who would act as their mentors. Indeed, as Tsuruzawa Enjiro recalls, this rather perturbed Honda because, far from guaranteeing folk performers the security that he had originally envisaged for the legislation, it placed these properties under the direct control of professional, elite properties to whom these:

“[C]ommon customs represented little more than interesting

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<sup>12</sup> Mainly through the work of the foresighted Honda and Kawatake.

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<sup>13</sup> 無形文化財. This designation also included the more ephemeral applied arts of literature, theatre, the act of painting/sculpture, music and all activities dependent on the skill of living creators.

historical markers, even as living traditions, and were only to be promoted to the point that their existence did not come to overshadow those who supported them. I can't say that it was a fair or equitable way to do things, but you must understand that in the 1950s masters such as those of the Gion *kabuki* theatre or here [at the Bunraku Theatre] considered themselves to be both artistically and socially far superior to the amateur folk artists who they were put in charge of.”<sup>14</sup>

However, as Kanai Seiko informs us, though initially unsuccessful in placing folk cultural properties within the scope of the Bunkazai Hogoho [Cultural Property Preservation Law], Honda did achieve his goal to have his classification system of folk performing arts, loosely based on the format which was codified within the 1950 law, accepted by the academy at large.<sup>15</sup>

Though some, such as Yamanouchi Seihin, have long claimed that tight classification of folk art properties was not only unnecessary but impractical, citing that there existed so much intermingling of form and function within this confused regional arena of cultural expression that to attempt to pack up this art or that art would risk removing them from their correct context.<sup>16</sup> Honda's response was to admit that such a system of classification possibly involved making difficult choices

as to where particular arts belonged, thematically, historically and socially, but the greater risk was to do nothing and let these properties languish under the control of people who cared as little for their ongoing characteristics as had the pre-war academy.

However, Honda did not ignore the worries of his critics and his concern for the different styles, histories and purposes that were represented in the folk arts surviving to his day is clearly reflected in the way that he eventually settled on a descriptive form of classification.

This focussed on creating a loose framework, not explicitly tied to regional, thematic or application concerns, but rather dedicated to reminding scholars that each property in question possessed a contemporary form which was not only defined by issues of history, social purpose or aesthetics. It also focussed on the imperative of continuation which was implied in describing these properties as present day activities, perpetuated by real people and not some imaginary, semi-mythical “folk.”<sup>17</sup>

In Honda's system, there are five main categories of folk performing art, each one representing a very broad style of presentation rather than a specific form, which number *kagura* [spirit entertainment], *dengaku* [field entertainment], *furyu* [floating/drifting], *shukufukugei* [arts of blessing], and *butagaigei* [stage arts].<sup>18</sup> The most

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<sup>14</sup> Tsuruzawa Enjiro: Master of the shamisen, National Bunraku Theatre, Osaka. Interview with Darren-Jon Ashmore, Aug 21, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Kanai, Seiko. (1979). (民俗芸能と歌謡の研究) [Researching Folk Arts and Folksong]. Tokyo: Tokyo Bijutsu. (pp 78-79).

<sup>16</sup> Yamanouchi, Seihin. (1959). *Ryukyu no Ongaku Geino-shi* [The Music of the Ryukyu Islands]. Tokyo: Obunsha. (pp 45-47).

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<sup>17</sup> Honda, Yasuji. (1960a). *Nihon no Minzoku Geino* (日本の民族芸能) [Japanese Folk Arts]. Tokyo: Kinseisha. (pp 33-34).

<sup>18</sup> 神楽. Originally denoting a variety of dances designed to abjure spiritual protection practiced at certain shrine complexes, especially those dedicated to Amaterasu and other imperial

important aspect about this sort of general categorization was that while it essentially placed folk performing arts into an all important classification system, it also allowed for easy placement of individual groups.<sup>19</sup>

Placing the emphasis on the actual performance form rather than on the more intimate mechanics of a particular style, such as “puppets” or “masked dance,” allowed Honda to create not only a very tight “top heading” for his system but also perfectly addressed the concerns that his critics, such as Yanagita himself, had about where particular groups should fit in relation to each other, by suggesting that, as forms evolve, merge, diverge and grow

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founders, Honda’s definition included all forms of performing art which were designed to intercede on the part of humanity with powerful spirits. In this regard it includes some forms of shrine based *ningyō kagura* art; 田楽. Specifically referring to planting and harvesting rituals, Honda uses this definition, as can be seen by his inclusion of secular dance forms, to encompass all types of communal participatory folk dances; 浮流. Similar in vein to *dengaku*, though reserved for grander ceremonial events; 祝福芸. In this category Honda places all forms of folk art, ritual and secular, which place emphasis on objects manipulated within the context of a performance. Most forms of puppet art fall into this category, both theatrical forms and those of the *kaki*, as do some forms of *kagura*, such as lion dances, both of which place greater emphasis on the possession of the object involved by the spirits being abjured; 舞台芸. This is an interesting category the inclusion of which Honda hoped would further demonstrate the undeniable link between common and elite performing arts in Japan, his focus on how the *no* has crossed back and forth between status groups many times over the years, especially regarding the common status of master Zeami, was a telling reminder to the elite practitioners of the day that their arts were entirely reliant on the sort of base customs that Honda represented.

<sup>19</sup> This might be said to be the point at which the system is weakest, for it presupposes a good deal of knowledge of folk arts on the part of the researcher and an ability to accept that a particular property might belong to multiple categories.

beyond the bounds of their historical roots, the only practical way to judge them is on their contemporary state of performance, yet another way of emphasizing the modernity of folk performing art.<sup>20</sup>

Honda’s definition of folk performing art, and the classification system that supports it, remains largely unchallenged in the academic community even to this day, and stands as perhaps the most important interpretive tool for the elite scholar in understanding common culture, a cultural negotiator of the highest order if you will. Indeed, only twice has anyone seriously attempted to oppose this system of classification in nearly fifty years. The first was the system proposed by Gunji Masakatsu (1913-1998), whose classification broke the arts down into two main groups based on Shinto and Buddhist arts. The second, proposed by Misumo Haruo, preferred to view dance and drama forms separately.

Honda’s system brought to light the very flexible and fluid nature of native folk arts and challenged the inadequacies of the Bunkazai Hogoho system when dealing with folk art properties as important expressions of native culture in their own right. Moreover, it finally gave the performer and (sympathetic) academics common ground on which to work on an equitable negotiated restoration of folk performing art as an expression of Japanese society in its entirety, forcing the latter to accept the worth of the performer

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<sup>20</sup> However, it has to be asked how much this was an attempt to create a mirror of the five part elite performing art classification presented in the Bunkazai Hogoho; Honda, Yasuji. (1960a). *Nihon no Minzoku Geino* (日本の民族芸能) [Japanese Folk Arts]. Tokyo: Kinseisha. (pp 77-78).

and requiring the former to acknowledge the insights of the scholar.

However, perhaps the most important achievement of the system was the place it won for its author in the 1975 revision of the Bunkazai Hogoho and the opportunity it afforded to formally give folk performing arts, indeed folk culture in general, back to the people from whom they had been taken over a century previously. Indeed, as Sato Yoshikazu tells us:

“The revision [of the Bunkazai Hogoho] in 1975 can be said to represent the point at which all the main parties which are currently active in the folk art revival community achieved an important degree of parity. The government, though still powerful ‘as the holders of the purse’, had been halted in their political paths by American led revisions of society in the post war period. The academic community, though still important as the validating Agency for the revival, was forced, through the work of some of its best, to accept that folk culture could not be treated as an isolated historical relic. And the common people had finally discovered that their views were important. In a way it was a return to the days of the Edo period, with each faction in constant negotiation with every other party to create these customs as social interlocutors between status groups, constantly trading with each other to establish a reality which ultimately suited all.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Sato Yoshikazu: Archivist. Awaji Ningyō Jōruri Theatre. Interview with Darren-Jon Ashmore, July 15 2001. Reconfirmed with Nakajima Saeko, Archivist. Awaji Ningyō Jōruri Theatre, June 11, 2017.

## The 1975 Revision of the Bunkazai Hogoho

Between 1950 and 1976 many within Japan’s established traditional arts circles had rather come to think of the revival of folk performing arts in terms that reflected and enhanced their own particular prestige. Supported by the original Bunkazai Hogoho, which placed emphasis only on tangible folk properties and requiring that any official support for them came under the umbrella of one of the masters identified under this law as possessing the knowledge to care for folk arts that fell into their overall remit. Although this was, as was hinted at earlier, designed by the authorities to protect fragile folk cultural practices by requiring that the established art world take them under their wing and provide them with the resources they so desperately needed, what was not taken into account was how this establishment “protection” affected such arts, both actively, as discussed above, and passively.

As Barbara Thornbury reminds us, folk art is very fluid, reflecting how the society of a nation continues to change over time.<sup>22</sup> However, when folk arts are effectively handed over to the art establishment, as they were in 1950s Japan, they become, as Kikuchi Sansai informs us, fixed forms, in that they are most often promoted in ways which highlight only their historical connection to the intransigent nature of the classical arts they are pressed into serving.<sup>23</sup> The 1975

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<sup>22</sup> Thornbury, Barbara. E. (1997). *The Folk Performing Arts: Traditional Culture in Contemporary Japan*. New York: State University of New York Press. (page 58).

<sup>23</sup> Kikuchi, Sansai. (1995). *Senju Minzoku to Sen Minzoku no Kenkyu* (先住民族と賤民族の研究)

revision of the law sought to address the way in which folk art had, once again, fallen into a very narrow and equally artificial, niche of representing only, in this case, the history of other more urbane performing art, by creating folk arts and, most importantly artists, as equals with those of the more established art environment, allowing them to practice outside the auspices of parent theatres, free to appoint whomsoever their own boards saw fit to their numbers and, critically, free to appeal directly to the authorities, industry or the public for support in competition with elite art groups.

Moreover, the fact that the 1975 designation allowed groups a great deal of autonomy from external control, allowed the groups that were chosen to portray themselves in whatever form suited their internal negotiators best, whether historically accurate to a single period, or, just as importantly, an example of how customary (rural) folk art practice has become integrated into more modern/artistic surroundings.<sup>24</sup>

This seems to have reflected an important shift in the minds of the government of the period who, influenced by people such as Honda Yasuji it must be admitted, had finally recognized the importance of viewing certain aspects of social history not as a simple evolutionist chain of events, but as a series of important nexuses, from which a wide variety of linked, but distinctive, social conditions have evolved. It may not seem

like much of an admission, but by simply allowing alternate forms of (folk) culture to enter into the canon of Japanese social reality on the back of the 1975 revision to the Bunkazai Hogoho, the authorities and their academic advisors were making some very profound statements about Japanese society as a whole. Firstly, by accepting that particular traditions had not only always existed in many different regional/personal variations, but also continued to exist totally independently of more elite forms, the authorities can be seen as openly accepting contemporary folk cultural practices as being at least as valid a form of social expression as so called developed ones. Moreover, as Umazume Masaru quite rightly points out, by placing such groups so prominently into the foreground the government also made it known that they were ready to invest a good deal of the potential of Japanese society in the process of folk culture revival, even to the detriment of certain elite culture forms that had, from the 1950s, exploited certain folk practices to enhance their own self image.

“When you examine two forms of cultural expression side by side, *Bunraku* and *Awaji ningyō jōruri* for example, it is possible to see why, and I say this without malice, the folk art form better reflects the complexities of Japanese society as a whole. The elite art looks back and with such a narrow focus that, while being a perfect snapshot of nineteenth century Osaka artistic society, it cannot shed much direct light on anything beyond that, not that this is a wholly bad thing in itself, providing a worthy glimpse of an important aspect of Edo/Meiji period urban life. However, the

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[Researching Aboriginal and Outcaste Folklore]. Tokyo: Hihyosha.

<sup>24</sup> Such as the Otome Bunraku tradition, a modern blending of archaic *ningyō kaki* ritual, Edo Yoshiwara style and modern practicality. See Chapter IV.IV.



common art of Awaji ranges over the whole nation and throughout all recorded history, even providing the social/ritual foundations for the aforementioned *Bunraku*. Moreover, and most importantly, the story of Awaji *ningyō jōruri* carries on and, as a living regional custom, directly informs the lives of many people on the island.”<sup>25</sup>

It is important to note that the 1975 revision of the Bunkazai Hogoho was not simply an attempt to insert folk culture into an already existing legal framework. Though the systems that were put into place by the Agency for Cultural Affairs were certainly largely similar to those of the parent legislation, the fact is, as Misumi Haruo reminds us, that in one important detail they were very different, specifically in the way each group added to the overall list was selected.<sup>26</sup> Unlike the role of elite arts preserved under the auspices of the Bunkazai Hogoho itself, a document that is rarely added to, the number of important folk cultural properties given protection under the 1975 legislation changes year by year, with groups (usually) being added and (very occasionally) removed as (perceptions of) their situations change. This has long accorded the act the ability to make selections not based on the rigid forms and strictures of classical drama, but exclusively on an art’s ability to fill out unique, and often completely unlooked for, positions within the nation as public

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<sup>25</sup> Umazume Masaru: Former Director, Awaji Ningyō Jōruri Theatre. Interview with Darren-Jon Ashmore, May 11, 2010.

<sup>26</sup> Misumi, Haruo. (1972). *Nihon Minzoku Geino no Densho* (日本民族芸能の伝承) [The Transmission of Japan’s Folk Arts]. Tokyo: Tokyodo Shuppan. (page 54).

perception discovers them. Indeed, according to Nakajima Eiko, the 1975 draft legislation makes the purpose of the revision very clear.

“[T]o preserve not only those examples of folk culture which gave a clear understanding of how Japan’s social framework had developed in the past, but also examples of native culture that demonstrate how things have changed over the years as well as regionally or thematically unique properties. There is no attempt to discriminate on the grounds of age and no attempt to discriminate on the grounds of environment, urban and rural are treated relatively fairly. Indeed, the general consensus here [at the Agency for Cultural Affairs] is that while focus is the watchword for the elite arts, which must appear unified and complete to the world, with folk culture the guiding principle seems to be diversity.”<sup>27</sup>

### **Diverse or Divisive: Bringing Culture back to the Folk**

Diverse is certainly an appropriate way in which to describe the wealth of properties that have been selected for the Agency for Cultural Affairs’ preservation programmes over the years.<sup>28</sup> The variety

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<sup>27</sup> Maeda Yoshinori: The Agency of Cultural Affairs. Interview with Darren-Jon Ashmore, July 16, 2016.

<sup>28</sup> In addition to the primary records of the Bunkazai Hogoho, both classical and folk, the Agency maintains a number of other resource charts, each one serving as point of reference for the properties included in them, ranging from providing contact details of the nation’s puppet theatres (classical and folk), through giving a temporal/geographical overview of sites of important tumuli, to informing the public when

of properties represented in the overall listing is quite staggering, ranging from those as obscure as an Akita Prefecture revival of classic era *bugaku*, through Nagano's internationally renowned Snow Festival, to the impressive annual Buddhist prayer gathering at Yamanashi Prefecture's Akiyama Temple.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, not only does the selection process take note of the kind of properties which anyone would consider to be examples of classical folk art, but also unique traditions which have evolved from more established folk arts, of which the Nagano Snow Festival is an excellent example.

This seems to stem from the very early days of systematic research into the preservation of folklore in the 1950s, as part of the original folk legislation of that year. In 1951, the Cultural Properties Protection Commission, the predecessor of the Agency for Cultural Affairs, instituted what was intended to be a national survey of surviving folk cultural properties as the most effective way of creating a national register of such activities.

However, these initial surveys were so badly carried out by the universities which were assigned to them that the data being collected were quickly discarded as corrupt. The problems seem to have stemmed from the fact that few, even among the academic folklore community

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historically important cherry orchards come into bloom annually.

<sup>29</sup> The Dainichido Bugaku (大日堂舞楽), Property Number Three of the first selection of 1976, which actually refers to a small number of groups within Akita Prefecture (this is not an uncommon occurrence); The Yuki Matsuri (雪祭), Property Number Thirty Seven of the Second selection of 1977; The Mushono no Dainenbutsu (無生野の大念仏), Property Number One Hundred and Sixty Five of the Twentieth selection of 1995.

to whom the authorities deferred in this regard, knew either what they were looking for or how to encourage common informants to share that information. For example, according to Misumi Haruo, in many cases the data collectors employed were often not acquainted with the locales involved and thus not able to address their samples in anything but the broadest possible terms. This, when combined with an understandable mixture of caution and awe on the part of the people being questioned largely resulted in some of the properties which were sought out being missed entirely, partly because the investigators did not know how to ask about them and partly because the locals felt that their amateurish practices would not be of importance to such important men and women.<sup>30</sup>

It is especially ironic that individuals such as Yanagita Kunio himself were tripped up in this way. However, as Tsuruzawa Tomoji quite rightly points out, many of these people, including Yanagita, had spent so much of their careers focussed on relatively isolated examples of folk culture, either introduced to them through their education, or via happenstance, that they were often unable to effectively explore beyond them.

“We had some professors from Osaka and Kyoto visit here in the early 1950s to look at the Sanjo shrine puppets and I can remember my brother trying to tell them about all the store houses, family collections and small outlying performances which still took place.

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<sup>30</sup> Misumi, Haruo. (1972). *Nihon Minzoku Geino no Densho* (日本民族芸能の伝承) [The Transmission of Japan's Folk Arts]. Tokyo: Tokyodo Shuppan. (page 40).

They did not seem to be interested, as if they could not bring themselves to address anything, which did not appear on their lists. They clearly did not respect our own local knowledge”<sup>31</sup>

The value of local knowledge was not, as Honda Yasuji informs us, recognized fully until the 1960s when a series of “Urgent Surveys of Folk Materials” were carried out at the behest of the government which felt that too much time had elapsed between handing over the control of folk culture revival to the professional artistic community and any serious attempt at surveying the surviving examples.<sup>32</sup>

Partially a dig at the failed work of the 1950s, and partly a recognition of the fact that the classical world was not caring for its common charges as well as the authorities would have liked, the surveys of 1965-1967 were carried out in a very different, and wholly decentralized, fashion. In the first place the country was divided into units along the lines of prefectures before being further subdivided into areas defined by the extent of local government authority. At this level it was ordered that local officers report the number, type and status of every type of festival, performing art group and craft enclave in their small area to the regional government offices. These results were then forwarded to the prefectural office where they were collated and sent on to the capital. In this way, according to Misumi, the authorities were made aware

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<sup>31</sup> Tsuruzawa Tomoji: *Juyo-bunkazai* Master of Music, Awaji Puppet Theatre. Interview with Darren-Jon Ashmore, October 27 2001.

<sup>32</sup> Honda, Yasuji. (1983). *Minzoku Geino Kenkyu* (民俗芸能研究) [Researching Folk Art]. Tokyo: Meiji Shoten. (page 44).

of a wealth of material which might otherwise have been completely overlooked simply because the perceptions of those people looking for them previously had not been able to meet with those who actually practiced them.<sup>33</sup> Though still not a complete national assessment of surviving common culture, the surveys of the 1960s did remind the authorities about the importance of local understanding in defining what was or was not ‘folk’ and encouraged many members of the academy to refine their own understanding of how the definition of the folk identity might vary from person to person.

Thus, when the information from the initial 1965-1967 surveys was finally compiled in 1973 and the authorities began planning what was, by then, a very important revision of folk culture preservation legislation, the role of the common negotiators of local knowledge was to be of paramount importance. Specifically, in 1974 when the revision was being researched in the field it was again left to local authorities to communicate questionnaires and requests for input directly to the artists or practitioners that they were acquainted with and listened very carefully to the concerns that local government officials had concerning the way in which the establishment could not answer regional issues on the national level.

The 1975 Revision of the Folk Properties Law legally acknowledged not only the right of the common Japanese citizen to help in the recognition,

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<sup>33</sup> Misumi, Haruo. (1972). *Nihon Minzoku Geino no Densho* (日本民族芸能の伝承) [The Transmission of Japan’s Folk Arts]. Tokyo: Tokyodo Shuppan. (page 45).

definition and preservation of their own culture, but also the necessity of that involvement. By this age, as Honda Yasuji had long hoped, the authorities had recognized that the preservation of the folk identity was no longer something which could be carried out by any single section of society, but rather required that all parties involved take a metaphorical step backwards into history to learn what, until the Edo period, seems to have been common knowledge.<sup>34</sup> Japanese ‘folk’ culture had always been more than an expression of common cultural ideals; indeed, it was more a social interlocutor and a way for people of different backgrounds to approach each other’s reality in a controlled way. Though times had changed and new status groups had risen to lay their own claim to these properties, including the media, the international community as well as a truly national academy, the fact still remained that for Japanese folk culture to have any future they had to be recognized as, ideally, the property of all.

### **The 1992 Festival Law: The Final Word?**

However, gaining legal acceptance for the inclusion of the common Japanese in the negotiations over the preservation of the folk identity was not a perfect solution to the problems involved with re-signifying folk performing arts for a nation which had grown used to viewing such cultural activities as historical remnants. As Yamaguchi Hiro quite rightly reminds

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<sup>34</sup> Honda, Yasuji. (1983). *Minzoku Geino Kenkyu* (民俗芸能研究) [Researching Folk Art]. Tokyo: Meiji Shoten. (page 49).

us, the government’s recognition of the importance of bringing all interested parties together as the only viable way to improve the relevance of this aspect of native culture had one major flaw: specifically, that the new legislation did not directly provide any method of enforcing its directives at a national level.<sup>35</sup> It was all very well to enhance the place of folk culture’s “creators,” but without some form of forum in which all these groups could debate the realities of the folk revival equally it was feared that those agents who believed that their contribution to the debate was paramount would simply ignore the revision where it did not suit them.

The academy in particular, as Honda Yasuji informs us, regarded the issue of the folk culture revival as their own, and jealously guarded their professional gatherings, such as the National Convention of Folk Dance and Song, as the premiere showcase for research in the field of common culture.<sup>36</sup> It may seem more than a little strange that discussion of the negotiated revival of the folk identity in the modern period keeps coming back to this group, yet in many ways the scholarly community’s defensiveness cannot simply be pushed aside as an irrelevance. First of all, as Sasahara Ryoji writes, it was internal academic negotiation which largely created the folk revival, indeed the notion of the “folk” themselves, in the first

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<sup>35</sup> Yamaguchi, Hiro. (2001). *Geijutsu to Hou* (芸術と法) [Art and the Law]. Tokyo: Shogakusha. (page 33).

<sup>36</sup> Honda, Yasuji. (1990). *Nihon no Dento Geino* (日本の伝統芸能) [Japan’s Traditional Arts]. Tokyo: Kinjoshu. (page 144).

place.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, it was scholars such as Yanagita Kunio who had defined the thematic boundaries of the revival, carefully setting out what should or should not be considered folkloric.

The same might also be said of some other groups which were targeted by the 1975 revision of the cultural properties law each of which appears to have felt that their contribution to the folk cultural revival was important enough to warrant their voice being the leading one in any discussion which occurred following the creation of the intangible folk property law. Professional artists in particular felt, according to Tsuruzawa Enjiro, that putting nationally important folk cultural properties beyond the censure of responsible elite bodies, allowing amateur practitioners to have direct control over their activities, risked serious damage to them.<sup>38</sup> A similar argument was put forward by several private commercial and industrial concerns which possessed a long-standing reputation for subsidising certain aspects of the cultural life of the nation. The Hankyu Corporation in particular, mirroring the views of the their founder, Mr. Kobayashi Ichizo (1873-1957), felt so strongly about maintaining control over the groups they sponsored that the company went as far as issuing quiet reminders to several of the groups it supported that their favour came at the price of satisfying the corporation before

all other considerations.<sup>39</sup> For the media and its backers however, headed by the Asahi Corporation, long associated with sponsorship of the arts, the issue was not something to be masked behind polite courtesy. Rather it was one of practical necessity: locating and securing the sort of financial backing which alone could guarantee the long term survival of any named revival enterprise. Indeed, for people such as Hakoshima Shinichi, president of Asahi News, there was no doubt that what was being purchased with media money was little more than advertising, for which a real return was expected.

Thus in 1984 the government was faced with a very difficult decision. Its attempt to create a consensus between all important parties within the process of folk revival had failed, in part due to the inability of the groups in question to subvert particular ideals to seemingly diametrically opposed ones, and partly due to the way in which certain Diet agents, notably Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro himself, had long attempted to keep the issue as apolitical as possible.<sup>40</sup> However, all that was left for the authorities to do by this stage was to chose a side in this increasingly acrimonious debate, as it was believed that only strong legal intervention could even hope to settle the matter.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Sasahara, Ryoji. (1992a). "Geino wo Meguru mo Hititsu no Kindai" (芸能を巡るもう一つの近代) [Once More into an Age of Folk Arts]. In, *Geinoshi Kenkyu* [芸能誌研究] (The Journal of Art Studies). 119:47-63. (page 51).

<sup>38</sup> Tsuruzawa Enjiro: Master of the shamisen, National Bunraku Theatre, Osaka. Interview with Darren-Jon Ashmore, Aug 21, 2016.

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<sup>39</sup> Maeda Yosuke: Archivist, Hankyu Railways. Interview with Darren-Jon Ashmore, September 12 2001.

<sup>40</sup> The Agency of Cultural Affairs. Ed. (2001). *Bunkazai Hogoho Goju-nen-shi* (文化財保護法五十年史) [Fifty Years of the Cultural Properties Law]. Tokyo: The Agency of Cultural Affairs. (page 474).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* (page 475).

Yet, as Toyoda Hiromi points out, the authorities hesitated over stepping into the argument in this way for a long time because of the fact that every time a government had engaged in this level of cultural re-negotiation it had invariably made matters worse in hindsight.<sup>42</sup> Only when Prime Minister Nakasone addressed the issue to the Diet in the May of 1987, proposing that the Agency for Cultural Affairs be granted authority of administration over folk properties to complement its existing powers, did the government make any move towards a resolution. This came in the form of an acknowledgment that the prime responsibility of the authorities was to preserve folk properties as ongoing aspects of native cultural reality, not as history, not as art, nor even as economic activities, but as socially important narratives for all Japanese. Taking as their example the research which had been carried out for the 1975 revision of the Cultural Properties Protection Law, they approved the largest survey of folk cultural properties that had been undertaken in Japan to that date, the *Minzoku Geino Kinkyu Chosa* [The Urgent Review of Folk Art].

However, this was no simple survey, but an attempt to create a set of national guidelines for the study, preservation and practical development of folk performing art groups which regional agents, be they local government, cultural preservation societies or private individuals, could follow. Moreover, it soon became clear which side the government had chosen in the debate over status of common interests

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<sup>42</sup> Toyoda, Hiromi. (1997). *Oita Ken no Rekishi* (大分県の歴史) [The History of Oita Prefecture]. Yamagawa Shuppansha. (page 85).

in the process of revival, when in 1992 the information gathered thus far was used in the drafting of Japan's most far reaching legislation regarding the revival of folk properties: the *Chiiki Dento Geino to-o Katsuyo Shita Gyoji no Jishi ni yoru Kanko Oyobi Tokutei Chiiki Shokogyo no Fukko ni Kansuru Horitsu* [The Act Governing the Revival of Tourism, Appointed Regional Commercial Activities and Industries Through Events Which Incorporate Regional Traditional Arts, Crafts etc.].

Though this unusual raft of community and culture laws, commonly known, even, or especially, considering the weighty official title, in government circles as the *O-matsuri Ho* [The Festival Law] has become the axis of twenty-first century Japanese folk culture revival, it actually began its life as a 1988 Ministry of Transport internal tourism initiative designed to make prefectural destinations more attractive to Japanese patrons. However, as Takahashi Hideo informs us, by the time it was introduced to the Diet early in 1992, the changes it had undergone in committee made it clear to all concerned that the Japanese government had finally overcome their reluctance to politicise the issue of folk culture and were willing to re-claim leadership of the revival movement.<sup>43</sup>

The law achieved this by largely invalidating the ability of the academic and professional artistic communities to deny common negotiators access to the process of revival through both legally re-

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<sup>43</sup> Takahashi, Hideo. Et al. (1993). "Minzoku Geino to O-matsuri Ho" (民)芸能とお祭法) [Folk Arts and the Festival Law]. In, *Minzoku Geino Kenkyu 17:78-97* (民族芸能研究 17:78-97) [Folk Arts Research 17:78-97]. (pp 89-90).

defining the very notion of folk culture and ensuring that the general population knew about this act. Much of the control that these groups had possessed over the folk culture revival of the twentieth century stemmed from the fact that, after the Meiji government had discarded the issue, it was the scholars of Japan that provided all the important definitions for later generations. By creating a legal, if incredibly vague, definition of all folk culture, the government set their cultural agencies up as an alternative source of artistic, social and intellectual validity for the creators in the field. The simple act of removing the term *minzoku* [folk] from official documentation and replacing it with *chiiki dento* [regional tradition] completely wrong footed the art and culture establishment. In essence it took the debate away from historical issues of who or what the ‘folk’ actually were, and who has the right to represent them to the nation or the world, into the contemporary matter of geography and the right of all who lived in a region to represent its cultural properties. Whether an art or craft or custom was representative of a particular region became far more important, under the Festival Law, than whether or not a practitioner could demonstrate the correct heritage, or possessed the approval of an academic sponsor. As a result, even modern practices found themselves in a position of applying for government support as important regional examples of common culture.

This above all else, as Kojima Tomiko informs us, was what the establishment community feared. Indeed, in all her 1992 articles in the journal *Geino* [Folk Art], professor Kojima roundly attacked the

Festival Law, condemning it as something which would lead to the destruction of folk culture through debasing it to satisfy tourists with short attention spans.<sup>44</sup> Her views were shared by many in both the scholarly and artistic environments, including people such as, Yoshida Bungoro (chief puppeteer at the Bunraku Theatre) and Ganjiro Nakamura III (senior actor of the Gion Kabuki Theatre), who jointly expressed the view that the law was fundamentally flawed. This, they argued, came from the fact that it not only deprived academic and artistic professionals of important input into the preservation of folk culture, but also gave the authorities real leverage over practitioners who might be more easily swayed by the government, hinting at “money in exchange for compliance” relationships developing.<sup>45</sup>

However, as Umazume Masaru has noted, the academic argument in this case was greatly weakened in the eyes of the public due to the fact that the language being used to condemn the law’s treatment of the academy was very much the same as that which the common curators of folk culture had used against scholastic bias for years.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, added to fact that the academy could not present a very cogent argument in the condemnation of the bill,

<sup>44</sup> Kojima, Tomiko. (1992b). “Atarashii Shakaki de no Minzoku Ongaku, Geino” (新しい社会での民族音楽、芸濃) [Folk Song and Art for the New Society]. In, *Geino* 34(5) (芸濃 34(5)) [Arts 34(5)]. (page 60).

<sup>45</sup> Takahashi, Hideo. Et al. (1993). “Minzoku Geino to O-matsuri Ho” (民芸能とお祭法) [Folk Arts and the Festival Law]. In, *Minzoku Geino Kenkyu* 17:78-97 (民族芸能研究 17:78-97) [Folk Arts Research 17:78-97]. (pp 85-96).

<sup>46</sup> Umazume Masaru: Former Director, Awaji Ningyō Jōruri Theatre. Interview with Darren-Jon Ashmore, May11, 2010.

was the fact that internally most institutions were actually divided as to whether or not the Festival Law was truly all that bad.

For example, the Society for Folk Performing Arts called a symposium in Tokyo late in 1992 to discuss the problems raised by the Festival Law. At this event a good many of the delegates openly spoke out in opposition to the hard line which people such as Kojima proposed taking, citing that the law only recognized what had been taking place in the commercial sector for years, suggesting that the interaction of “folkloric tourism” was what gave the academy its first break into the field, even citing the famous 1926 Waseda University “day-trip” as an example of this.

Though criticized by their peers, their points were well made: What makes government control of folk culture unacceptable and academic control acceptable to the academy? Of course, this question automatically begs the counter-question of what makes corporate sponsorship and government control acceptable to the authorities? Certainly, the government might have wanted to create legislation which addressed the fundamental inequities which had come to inhabit the process of folk culture revival since its inception in the 1920s. However, as the years since the ratification of the 1992 Festival Law have shown, at some levels all the government have succeeded in doing is replacing one type of autocratic control with many others, and ones that are potentially much more abusive.

Barbara Thornbury suggests that the 1992 Festival Law has not changed the overall status of the folk cultural revival as set out by the practical terms of the 1975

act, citing that their position as cultural properties has only been confirmed by the tenets of the law. This I cannot agree with. When the authorities finally chose to act politically, imposing regulation and definition on the process of revival in 1992, their actions changed everything about the way in which the whole nation (world?) interacted with those fragile properties. The academy, for example, has become divided in a way it was not prior to the bill, and not just in negative ways. Certainly some scholars, such as Kojima, have never been able to let go of their disdain for the new legislation. However, others, such as Sasahara Ryoji, have taken a more pragmatic view and begun exploring the impact of the new legislation as a way of understanding the creation of reality through perception and truly negotiated ideals.<sup>47</sup> The professional artistic establishment has also been forced to re-assess its connections to the folk culture community. While some, such as the *No* Association, have chosen to sever all links to the folk properties they had once manipulated to enhance their own greater standing, others, such as the National Bunraku Theatre have recognized the finality of the situation and elected to maintain their standing through actively supporting the folk cultural groups they had once thought of as inferior. I am sympathetic to Thornbury’s belief that the Festival Law has highlighted the great differences which had developed between groups which at one time willingly came together to negotiate the social reality that

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<sup>47</sup> Sasahara, Ryoji. (1992a). “Geino wo Meguru mo Hititsu no Kindai” (芸能を巡るもう一つの近代) [Once More into an Age of Folk Arts]. In, *Geinoshi Kenkyu* [芸能誌研究] (The Journal of Art Studies). 119:47-63. (pp 50-52).



folk culture represents. Nevertheless, I cannot agree with her conclusion that the law itself is not as important as the drive to determine to what degree common culture can be contained and protected by external social boundaries. Such constraints have always been part of the evolution of folk culture, whether by pollution controls imposed on *kaki* puppeteers by civil morality codes in Edo period cities, or by academic definition.

There is a well worn Japanese saying which goes “the village which shines in the moonlight leaves a different impression on everyone” and I feel that this goes a good way to describing the situation that we find ourselves facing as social scientists trying to make sense of the contemporary Japanese attitude to the revival of folk culture. In this part of the thesis it has been shown that every Japanese person has something to bring to the debate on the survival of common native culture because, historically, every status group in society has been involved with the creation, definition and development of these social interlocutors.

It has been clearly demonstrated that they have always existed as fluid and reflexive mirrors of social reality because, as times change, the requirements of people involved with them have also changed. Moreover, it has also been explained how, in the modern period, this debate has long since moved away from its original purpose, as the interface between status groups, and become inextricably linked with an artificial sense of the creation of the self for groups which are attempting to find a sense of historical perspective within a confused and partially eroded social framework.

The difficulty in reconciling each of the contemporary participants in this revival process is that their positions have become so removed from the concerns of the other participants that, from the narrow viewpoint of the agents involved, they might seem perfectly reasonable. However it is not enough to speak of rights and wrongs in a situation such as this, as to attempt to find ‘an easy solution’ to the problem would be to ally one’s views to the perspective of one of the parties involved, disregarding the needs of the others.

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Figure 1: Oe Minosuke (1907-1997), puppet maker, whose work between the boundary of elite and popular art helped define today's current "folk law(s)."