

Preserving Intangible Heritage in Japan: the Role of the *Iemoto* System

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ABSTRACT

Many forms of Japan's intangible heritage, including its three 'Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity', are headed by hereditary masters called *iemoto*. This paper examines the *iemoto* system as it relates to the exclusive rights of the *iemoto*. Through case studies taken mainly from the traditions of the tea ceremony, *Nōgaku*, and *Kabuki*, the state of Japanese art traditions under the said system is also discussed. Although the *iemoto* system is shown to be authoritarian in various ways, it has also played a crucial role in the preservation of intangible heritage in Japan.

Introduction

In early May 2007, many of Japan's national and regional newspapers carried news that was startling to practitioners of *Chadō*, the Japanese 'Way of Tea,' otherwise known as the tea ceremony. The head of the Urasenke school, the largest and most extensive of the three main schools of Tea¹, announced a new form of tea service, where both host and guest(s) may sit cross-legged, on a carpeted space or on the more traditional *tatami*² in a tearoom [Figure 1]. Those acquainted with the Way of Tea may have seen tea gatherings held in stark and staid tearooms, where everybody sits in *seiza*, the formal Japanese style of sitting, with the lower legs neatly tucked under the thighs. Other gatherings feature the host and guests seated on more conventional, European-style benches or stools, in front of low tables

[Figure 2]. However, the new type of tea service introduced in May, named *Zarei*, was unusual not only because of the leg positions, but also because it required the use of low tables, the tallest of which was a mere 18 centimeters high; news photos also showed both host and guest wearing pants and unbuttoned dress shirts, instead of the usual kimonos, perhaps to better show the newly approved style of sitting.

In explaining the new style, Zabōsai, the 16th-generation head of Urasenke, said that some people are more at ease when sitting cross-legged instead of *seiza*, and emphasized the importance of a relaxed mood in the tea ceremony. Reactions from media and the general public, including Way of Tea practitioners, ranged from amusement to amazement. Many comments were posted on blogs and websites, saying

that recent changes in tea ceremony styles were a cause for concern, for example, or that women would probably have problems with crossing their legs in the new style. Several news articles, however, carried comments informing readers that the tea ceremony style of serving tea using chairs and tables, called *Ryūrei*, was itself an innovation introduced by Gengensai, Zabōsai's ancestor and the 11th-generation head of Urasenke. The information probably came from the Urasenke school itself during its press conference for *Zarei*, but it brought attention to a historical note, when Gengensai first 'invented' the use of chairs and tables to enable foreigners visiting Kyoto during the international 1872 Kyoto Exposition to enjoy tea without having to sit in the formal, and sometimes painful, Japanese way. In many tea gatherings held in Japan and abroad today, the *Ryūrei* form is used frequently, with hardly any thought, much less comment, from organisers or participants about the style's 'non-Japaneseness' or unorthodoxy.

The present Urasenke head has also introduced other

styles and utensils to the tea ceremony in recent years, including a compact *Ryūrei* set of tea furniture that could alternatively be used as side tables or decorative stands in a modern home. Whether his innovations and inventions will stand the test of time is a question only future tea ceremony practitioners will be able to answer, although if recent history is the judge, they will probably remain. His roles as innovator and inventor, however, are hardly questioned, so that with this recent innovation of sitting style, most reactions questioned the form itself, rather than the authority of its creator.

This innovation in the tea ceremony reflects the inventiveness that defines and characterises tradition in Japan, as in other parts of the world (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). Moreover, underlying the roles of innovator and inventor is one other role that is more significant: that as the sole creator, as the only holder of the right to introduce new things or forms to the tradition. This right is his as the recognised head of his tradition, or *iemoto* in Japanese, and is one of several rights that the *iemoto* are deemed to hold.



Figure 1
The traditional type of tea service



Figure 2
The new type of tea service

However, the *iemoto* system, together with the many Japanese cultural traditions that embody it, have endured thus far. In fact, well-known forms of Japanese intangible heritage, including the three UNESCO designated *Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity* in Japan, namely, *Nōgaku* Theatre (designated 2001), *Ningyō Jōruri Bunraku* Puppet Theatre (designated 2003), and *Kabuki* (designated 2005), were all established under the framework of the *iemoto* system; they also owe their longevity to it.

The historian Nishiyama Matsunosuke (1982a) pioneered research into the *iemoto* system that defines the organisational structure of most of the readily identifiable and recognised cultural traditions of Japan, for example, flower arrangement, many forms of martial arts, the incense ceremony and the tea ceremony, among others. He identified six sets of absolute rights that were monopolised by the *iemoto*, as follows:

- (1) Right to the techniques of the tradition, such as control and revision of secret techniques, performance rights, repertory, forms/styles, etc.
- (2) Right to its teaching, transmission, and certification
- (3) Right to expulsion and punishment, etc., of members
- (4) Right to costume and stage/professional names, etc
- (5) Right to the control of facilities and equipment
- (6) Right to monopolise the income arising from the exercise of the above rights (p. 16)

These are extensive rights, indeed, which led Nishiyama (1982a & 1982b) to call the system 'feudal' as it could also be 'anachronistic.'

In 1975, Francis Hsu also published an anthropological treatise on the *iemoto* system. In his study, he enumerated the characteristics that he considered intrinsic to the *iemoto* system, as based on previous research. There were four: the master-disciple relationship, an interlinking hierarchy, supreme authority of the *iemoto* and the fictional family system (p. 63-68). These main characteristics are all incorporated and find form in the rights of *iemoto* that are discussed above.

This paper will thus introduce the *iemoto* system as it relates to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage in Japan, with reference to the Way of Tea, *Nōgaku* and *Kabuki*. Through a discussion of *iemoto* rights and characteristics as enumerated above, including the history and present state of the said system, this study also seeks to provide hints and

points of reflection for considering the issue of the preservation of intangible heritage in general. Implications of the *iemoto* system for other aspects of intangible heritage in Japan, through the example of one such heritage, *Gujo Odori*, are also discussed.

The *iemoto* System

The term *iemoto* is a combination of two words in Japanese, *ie* meaning 'house or household' and *moto* meaning 'origin or source.' Nishiyama (1982a) traces the initial use of the term to 1757, in Edo-period Japan. From this time in Japanese history, heads of art organisations began to be called *iemoto*, as they represented the house or family that was acknowledged to be the source as well as the keeper of specific art traditions. Ikegami (2005) points out the paternalistic overtone of the term *iemoto*, especially as it refers to the *pater familias* and relates to parental authority and kinship. From the Edo period to the present, the term *iemoto* has referred to the, usually male, hereditary head of the family that represents a tradition; at the same time he is the 'grand master' and sole arbiter of the said tradition, the top of a pyramid of teachers, followers and practitioners.

Yano (1992) identifies the parallels between the *iemoto* system and the traditional Japanese social structure of the *ie*, or household (p. 74). For one thing, both *iemoto* and *ie* systems share similar types of vertical relationships, such as the master-disciple relationship in the tradition that is translated into that of head-successor in the same tradition: in the family the eldest son as chief disciple is the preferred successor. There is also an emphasis in continuity in both *iemoto* and *ie* structures: the role or positional succession enables the disciple eventually to succeed his master. Furthermore, both systems assume that certain emotional ties are shared by members, who also share the ties of obligation that bind the structure together across space and time. Morishita (2006) suggests that this network of relationships corresponds to Pierre Bourdieu's cultural field, where members in the same art tradition share a world with its own autonomous laws. That is, any student of a tradition usually considers members in another part of the country (or elsewhere in the world) as sisters or brothers in the tradition who all belong to the same 'family,' with the *iemoto* as their acknowledged 'father.' Each member acts and is expected to act accordingly, in the ways of the house.

However, Yano (1992) also emphasises one big difference between the *iemoto* and *ie* systems: the different role and position of the wife. Whereas the spouse of the *iemoto* is relegated to a supportive role, the wife in the family structure is revered and is obliged to reproduce members for the organisation (p. 74). Ikegami (2005) also points out another difference: membership in the *iemoto* system is voluntary, since it is the disciples who seek out the masters instead of the other way around, unlike in the biological family where one obviously never chooses the family one is born into.

Among the various cultural traditions in Japan today which have incorporated the *iemoto* system, and which were previously listed in an old 19th-century pamphlet of *iemoto*-type organisations, Moriya (1992, cited in Ikegami, 2005) mentions that the tea ceremony, flower arrangement, the incense ceremony, and *utai*³ singing particularly represent the system in its fullest form. But how did the *iemoto* system come about? The pioneering work of Nishiyama (1982a & 1982b) is too extensive to be digested here, but the history of *iemoto* may also be sufficiently understood through Ikegami's (2005) brief discussion concerning the autonomy of the arts that developed through the *iemoto* system.

In the Edo period (1603-1868), particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries, the arts and literature of Japan followed a distinctive path of development (p. 163). That is, until then many of Japan's cultural forms enjoyed the exclusive patronage of the elite and the rulers of the country, but due to the emergence of a progressively more affluent audience and a mass market that could provide financial support, experts were able to establish schools where they could earn a living independent of patrons, that is, on their recruitment and instruction of students alone. The result was a conglomeration of *shared aesthetic universes* (p. 163) of professionals around which gathered audiences and aspiring students who held the same convictions concerning the particular art tradition. It was in this atmosphere that the *iemoto*-type of teaching method was developed, in which a master at the top tier would hold together a hierarchy of professionals, semi-professionals, and amateurs; this method Ikegami calls an *intelligent adaptation of those arts of the newly expanding art instruction market by utilizing some idioms of feudalistic authority* (p. 163).

Other types of teaching also emerged, but it was the master-disciple method of the *iemoto* system that became entrenched in many of Japan's art and cultural

traditions and remained strong: the 'true' lineage represented by the *iemoto* and his followers, as well as the standard curriculum, appealed to new entrants to the tradition, as explained below. As the *iemoto* gained power in accordance with the exclusive rights that he came to monopolise, the continuity of traditions - intangible heritage - was assured. *Kabuki* actor and author, Nakamura Matazō, mentions that the 600-year-old *Nōgaku* repertory and the 400-year-old traditions in *Kabuki* have been preserved and refined precisely because of the *iemoto* system (p. 38). A discussion of the *iemoto*'s monopoly of rights as enumerated above will give a clearer view of the role of the *iemoto* system in relation to the survival of traditions as they function today, as well as explaining some of the implications concerning issues of intangible heritage preservation in general.

The Rights of *iemoto*

The right to the techniques of the tradition.

This right is powerfully illustrated in the tea ceremony innovations involving cross-legged and chair-seating styles as mentioned in the Introduction, as both styles gained acceptance only after sanction from the *iemoto* himself. In the *iemoto* system, there is no room for deviation (Yano, 1992), and access to the most advanced and secret techniques is restricted (Yano, 1992; Bodiford, 2002; Rath, 2004). This does not mean non-advancement for the practitioner, however, as students normally rise through the ranks the longer they receive training and instruction in their particular art tradition. Each level is defined within more or less clear parameters, and the student normally progresses to a subsequent, higher level of advancement. The clear parameters are, in fact, set standards for the techniques in the tradition. Standardisation of the curriculum was necessary in the development of the tradition, as explained by Rath (2004), citing Larson (1977): *The standardization or codification of knowledge is the basis on which a professional 'commodity' can be made distinct and recognizable to the potential publics* (p. 247).

However, the authority wielded by the particular tradition's keepers, especially in terms of control and standardisation of techniques, made it necessary to emphasise the 'true' lineage of the tradition (Ikegami, 2005), that is, a basis for the authority had to be firmly delineated. Hence, the emphasis on heredity. Descent

from a tradition's great patriarch gave the main family the right to its 'true' practice, as well as to secret knowledge that it could withhold or divulge to a select few at will. In other words, there was a need to prove the source of the *iemoto*'s authority, and this was conveniently fulfilled through the matter of bloodline. Throughout the history of the Way of Tea, almost all of the hereditary successors from the 17th century to the present, in the three main schools, have been eldest sons; they all trace their lineage to the legendary founder, Sen Rikyū (1522-1591). Similar phenomena occur in *Nōgaku*, *Kabuki*, flower arrangement and in the other traditions.

Although the hereditary succession inherent in the *iemoto* system has been criticised in many instances - such as in occasional cases when incompetent eldest sons inherited the family tradition - Nakamura (1990), citing the situation of *Kabuki* actors who are also potential heirs to the family tradition, says that some children of the major actors *possess abilities ordinary people do not have - because since birth they have breathed the air of the kabuki world as though it were the most natural thing in the world* (p. 44). He adds that he has seen the difference between such heirs and other performers with his own eyes.⁴

The right to the teaching, transmission, and certification.

Nishiyama (1982a) refers to this right, particularly that concerning certification, as the main difference between the *iemoto* method in the Edo period and its previous counterparts. Since the certification or licensing of teachers was limited and the curricula extensively standardised, quality control was made possible, and 'brands' came to be built. Ikegami (2005) likens this development to the modern restaurant franchise, whereby the *iemoto* as the main franchise owner hands out licenses for the operation of branches to teach the art or practice to set rules and standards.

The certification system did resolve the dilemma concerning the marketing of the tradition, as in the case of *Nōgaku* (Rath, 2004): the standard curriculum helped to attract students and sustain their interest. At the same time, the certified schools were empowered, equipping them with the authority and the means to disseminate knowledge, in some instances including secret techniques. More importantly, certificates became a steady and huge source of income, as these were, and still are today, sold to students who received the appropriate level of training and who could afford to pay for them.

The right to expulsion and punishment of members.

In the introduction to Rath's (2004) work on *Nōgaku*, he tells the story of Takabayashi Ginji, a *Nō* actor who, in Takabayashi's own words, was *dealt a death sentence - prevented from taking the stage and prohibited from interacting with other performers* (p. 2). His punishment came after the actor was said to have made 'impertinent' and offensive claims on the *Kita school of Nōgaku* and the family of its *iemoto*. This happened half a century ago, in 1956. Although today reports of the expulsion of members from traditional art organisations in Japan are rare, the widely-reported controversy surrounding Izumi Motoya, self-acknowledged *sōke* (*iemoto*)⁵ of the Izumi branch of *kyōgen* (comedic play in *Nōgaku*), deserves a brief mention.

Motoya assumed the *sōke* title in a naming ceremony hastily arranged just before his father Motohide, the 19th-generation *sōke* passed away in 1995. Motoya was then only 20 years old, but had been receiving extensive training in the *Izumi* acting repertoire since he was three years old. Motoya's assumption of the title, however, was not sanctioned by the *Nōgaku Sōke Kai* (Association of *Nōgaku Sōke*), and was opposed by almost all its members, who declared that Motoya's technique was not developed enough, owing to his relative youth. In turn, Motoya, with his mother's public support, insisted on his right to the title. The controversy dragged on for several years until in 2002, after Motoya was reported to have reneged on his performance commitments, among other problems, the *Nōgaku Sōke Kai* moved to have his name (and his family's branch) removed from the Association. At present (2007), Izumi Motoya continues to use the *sōke* title, while the *Nōgaku Sōke Kai*, as well as the powerful *Nōgaku Kyōkai* (association for the major schools of *Nōgaku* in Japan), refuse to support and recognise his work.

The right to costume and stage/professional names.

In *Kabuki* and *Nōgaku*, for example, actors inherit family and first names that are passed through the generations, such as the Nakamura, Ichikawa, and Kanze, names that are familiar today. In the Way of Tea, the hereditary heir takes on the Sen name, while the school itself, under the *iemoto*'s authority, grants *chamei*, or 'tea names,' to the duly recognised and accomplished practitioners of the tradition. The tea name is normally a combination of the character for 'sō'⁶ indicating membership of the main house, and one or

two characters that are used in the practitioner's legal name. In Japanese traditional music and dance schools there is the *natori*, or 'name-taking' ceremony, whereby a disciple who has been recognised by his or her master for mastery of the tradition is conferred a rank and a name in accordance with the level of accomplishment. Yano (1992) describes the *natori* as a *symbolic shift away from the natal family to the professional family to the paralleling other rituals of inviolable ties, such as weddings* (p. 76).

These are but a few examples of the naming tradition in *iemoto*-style cultural forms in Japan. They each imply, however, the creation of a 'mythic family' (p. 75) for the recipient of the name, as well as the significant option of an alternative identity through which he or she temporarily becomes [an] individual [artist] with social recognition (Ikegami, 2005: p. 169). The new name actually reinforces the quasi-familial relationship to the *iemoto* line, as well as the image of the *iemoto* as parent. Ikegami (2005) further observes that the use of familial terms and ideology in organisations that are not based on kinship frequently emerges in social organisation patterns in Japan. They serve as a *ritual technology for enhancing cohesion and esprit de corps of a group* (p. 169). In fact, Nishiyama (1982a & 1982b) draws parallels with several such units in Japanese society, naming organisations as diverse as university laboratories and religious groups. Hsu (1975) particularly pointed out an *iemoto* pattern in Japanese religion.

The right to the control of facilities and equipment.

This right is closely related to the first right concerning the techniques of the tradition. Its practice is illustrated in the example of the new style of serving tea above, with the use of furniture specifically developed for the said style.

The right to monopolise income.

Art traditions such as the tea ceremony and flower arrangement attract students by the million in Japan. Owing to their tight organisation, all of the schools and instructors under these art traditions' umbrellas pay royalties and license fees to the main organisation centered on the *iemoto*. Even the performing arts of *Kabuki* and *Nōgaku* are said to depend on the revenues earned from the ranks of their amateur students (Rath, 2004), which are in turn used to support the schools run by the *iemoto*. However, there seems to be a general

consensus that all of the schools in these different art traditions are run like commercial enterprises (Yano, 1992; Rath, 2004; et al): certificates, ranks and names are granted, but with steep fees; the schools' products and equipment are licensed and sold only in authorised shops, while some organisations own publishing houses that regularly release training manuals and books for sale to the general public, among other business endeavours.

Any discussion of the rights of the *iemoto* prompts accusations of authoritarianism and autocracy in the system, not to mention nepotism. Indeed, these rights are not only exclusive, but also absolute, so the charges are unfounded. Morishita (2006), citing Maruyama (1996), correlates the power of the *iemoto* with that of the Emperor in modern Japanese history, especially since each occupies a unique position that is not based on his quality, but rather on patriarchal lineage. Moreover, both are considered infallible and have been deified: the *iemoto* is not merely a protector of tradition, but more so, *divinity embodying omnipotent power and eternal tradition* (Morishita, 2006).

The supposedly divine authority of the *iemoto*, however, is tied to notions of achievement, as the *iemoto* is presumed to be the supreme practitioner of his tradition, the ideal to which everyone aspires. In the performance arts, including *Nōgaku* and *Kabuki* where skill is on view and easily judged, the *iemoto* could be said to be in a precarious position, as he must at least possess the same level of technique as any other student, professional or amateur. *Nōgaku*, *Kabuki*, and the other performing arts take care of potential repercussions by exercising the rights exclusive to *iemoto*: certain - usually the most important - roles are limited to *iemoto*, for example. No comparison is then possible as there are no other performers acting the same role anywhere else.

The situation is different in the other art forms such as the tea ceremony and flower arrangement. Since dexterity is less easy to judge - there can only be so many ways of whisking tea or inserting flowers in a container - so that limited access to certain practices holds greater significance. The Way of Tea, for example, has certain tea serving styles that are never printed in textbooks, neither are they shown publicly except in small and limited groups of senior and advanced practitioners.

Not all is authoritarian, however. As Yano (1992) pointed out, there is in fact more democratisation in the *iemoto* system than in similar art traditions in the West.

Anyone who enters an art tradition in Japan is deemed artistically inclined and educable, and the longer one studies, the higher one climbs up the rungs of the achievement ladder. Everyone starts as an amateur, in other words. (One must realise, however, that the length of study and rank can also depend on the student's ability to pay for the lessons and for the certificates.) The fact that membership in the system is voluntary is another important point: the student, by choosing his or her school and teacher, has chosen to submit to the rules of the game, and therefore, to the rule of the *iemoto* and his tradition's laws.

Granting that the system could be described as authoritarian, a careful study of the history of each art tradition will reveal that it was this authoritarianism that prevented those traditions from being wiped out (Nakamura, 1988/1990; Rath, 2004; Ikegami, 2005; et al). A dictatorial hold on the tradition, coupled with a deified form of authority, ensured the continuity of practices in the tradition that were not challenged for authenticity - if they were challenged at all the accuser risked expulsion. In any case, accusations of the lack of democracy in the *iemoto* system may be misplaced, since it is a system that is characterised and was developed exactly from a legacy in which democracy played little part.

Implications

The *iemoto* system appears in several variations, not only in the traditions described above, but in other cultural traditions in Japan. In this author's study of a festival, *Gujo Odori* in Gifu Prefecture, he has found

characteristics in its system that are parallel to those already discussed [figure 3].

Gujo Odori is an annual summer *bon* [festival for the dead] dance festival held during a two-month period in Hachiman town, Gujo City, Gifu. From July to September, around 30 days of dancing are scheduled on dates that are deemed auspicious, including four days of all night-dancing, *tetsuya odori*, that is held on four nights from the 13th to the 16th of August. *Tetsuya odori* coincides with Japan's *bon* season, and is the peak of *Gujo Odori* (Cang, 2007).

In the festival season, an average of 300,000 visitors (*Gujo odori hina-re*, 2007, 1) comes to Hachiman (population less than 17,000). It is a considerable source of revenue for the town. Many come to join in the dancing, as it is open to all regardless of age or sex. The dancing crowd forms a huge circle around the *yakata* [raised stage], on which *taiko* [Japanese drum], *fue* [Japanese flute], and *shamisen* [three-stringed Japanese guitar] players and singers sit and perform the music of the *Gujo Odori*.

Official publications, government pamphlets and websites that introduce *Gujo Odori* all refer to its 400-year history. These accounts attribute the origin of the dance to Endō Yoshitaka, castle lord of Hachiman in the 1590s, who was said to have ordered the town residents to perform dances to celebrate victory in war, or to unify the different social classes - the reasons vary.

Gujo Odori, however, was not formally named until 1923, when the *Gujo Odori Hozonkai* [*Gujo Odori* preservation group] (*Hozonkai* below) was formed. This preservation group took its name from the dance



Figure 3
Gujo Odori in Gifu

performed in 1914, *Gujo kyokka no miyoshi no*, during the opening of the Hachiman town hall. *Hozonkai* subsequently incorporated this dance and recreated other songs and dances that were considered indigenous to the region, developed and then formalised these into the *Gujo Odori* repertoire. At present there are ten song-dances in *Gujo Odori*. Its most representative dance, *Kawasaki*, was newly created in 1914, and is a collaborative effort between the then town mayor of Hachiman and a teacher in the Nishikawa school of traditional dance in the Gujo area.

The *yakata* stage is also an innovation. Although it is the most recognisable and central element of *Gujo Odori*, it is a rebuilt structure and was incorporated as a regular component of the festival only around 1953. Before the *yakata* occupied this central role in the festival, anyone with a clear singing voice could sing the songs of *Gujo Odori*, and people would spontaneously form rings around the singer and dance to the song. The *yakata* was introduced because of the influx of tourists (Adachi, 2004). As the popularity of *Gujo Odori* spread and visitors came in droves, the *Hozonkai* decided to control the crowds by limiting the dancing to music that henceforth would come only from the *yakata*.

The stage in effect standardised the music, as well as limited its performance only to members of the *Hozonkai*. Today, only *Hozonkai* members play and sing the songs of *Gujo Odori* - officially, that is. The dancing, too, has been standardised. Aside from public demonstrations in places such as the town museum, each dancing night during festival season, *Hozonkai* members perform the dances for participants to follow. (The *Hozonkai* are readily identifiable as they are the only ones who wear the official costume, a *yukata* or summer kimono that is decorated with symbols⁷ associated with the history of Hachiman. The *yukata* became official *Hozonkai* wear only in the 1950s, although its symbols are a few hundred years old.)

After one hour or so of the *Hozonkai*'s performances, the members go around the dancing crowd and choose about 15 people to receive certificates, called *menkyojo* [licenses], attesting to their 'expertise' (Cang 2007). These certificates are coveted - they are proudly displayed in homes and shops not only in Hachiman, but also in the neighbouring areas and prefectures. They are also announced on public and private websites, and in personal blogs. The main consideration for the certificates is the faithfulness that the dancers show according to the form demonstrated by the *Hozonkai*.

The music and dancing are taught in private classes, too, although the number of students is very limited; it is one-to-one teaching, in fact. This is the teaching style in Japanese tradition that is known as *isshi sōden*, literally 'to one child all inheritance,' which means the transmission of all learning by one teacher to only one disciple or heir. It is this exclusive style of teaching that led Adachi (2004) to explore the development of *Gujo Odori* as *iemotoka* [transformation into *iemoto*] in his research.

The teaching style is not the only *iemoto*-like aspect of *Gujo Odori*, however. The means by which the *Hozonkai* has created the song-dances and defined its central elements - their absolute rights over the tradition - as well as their monopoly over the costume and certification, among others, are characteristic of the *iemoto* system.

One main difference is in the matter of lineage. As many leaders of traditions in Japan today have descended from their founders through bloodline, their authority as the main conduit of the tradition is acknowledged and accepted, if sometimes grudgingly. Unlike these *iemoto* systems, the *Hozonkai* for *Gujo Odori* do not have a familial lineage that could function as a source of legitimacy. In this situation, however, they have a convenient and powerful substitute: the Japanese government in its role as *pater familias*. This is due to *Gujo Odori*'s recognition as 'official heritage', since it has been designated by the national government as an *Important Intangible Folk-Cultural Property* since 1996. The designation is what one *Hozonkai* member has referred to as *osumi tsuki*, or an official seal of approval.

The recognition does not stop at the designation, however. Especially for intangible cultural properties in Japan, particularly those under consideration for designation in the folk-cultural property category, the government first requires that the tradition has holders - one or more *Hozonkai* - who are in charge of their practice and its preservation (Cang, 2007). These holders are then recognised together with their tradition, which may then be designated as official cultural property. This recognition of groups that preserve heritage is tantamount to a government seal of approval, and implies government support for the preservation of a tradition that is in many ways an *iemoto* system except in name.

As of March 2008, there are 252 designated *Important Intangible Folk-Cultural Properties* in Japan, each of which is looked after by one or several legitimised *Hozonkai* and preservation groups. Most likely, these groups have also reinvented and recreated their traditions, and control their

transmission, practice, facilities, costume, etc. as would *iemoto* in other traditions.

Conclusion

In one recent study concerning women's empowerment in the tea ceremony tradition, it was observed that its *iemoto* system was mirrored in Japanese society at large (Kato, 2004). Morishita's (2006) research also draws strong comparisons between early twentieth century avant-garde art in Japan and the *iemoto* system. However, the analogy goes beyond art and cultural traditions, as already mentioned (See Hsu, 1975; Nishiyama, 1982a & 1982b).

In his study, Hsu (1975) did not merely draw an analogy between the *iemoto* system and the social structure of religious organisations. He also directly stated that:

It is only necessary to state here that iemoto characteristics are to be found in all aspects of Japanese society, in religion, in business, in schools and universities, in workshops and offices. [p. 69]

In making this statement, Hsu (1975, 70) was aware of the criticism that he would attract, particularly in what might be seen as his *improper use of the term iemoto*. He defended his position, nonetheless, and used the anthropological standpoint to point out how social science has consistently and successfully used general terms to denote the specific. He gave the example of money, which in some societies would be made of paper or metal, and in others, take the form of cowrie shells or stones. It is the same with the term 'family', which could denote various types of groupings depending on the society in which it is located.

Hsu further stated that:

There is no scientifically valid reason for not using the Japanese term iemoto to designate a certain form of human grouping, provided that we clearly delineate its intrinsic characteristics. (1975, p. 70)

Hsu was clearly referring to the process of referencing the Japanese term *iemoto* to indicate social groups that may not necessarily be Japanese. It must be noted, however, that it would require a rather big stretch of the imagination and considerable intellectual dexterity

to identify some social or human groupings as *iemoto* systems - political parties in countries like Taiwan or the United States, for example.

It does not actually take much imagination or intellectual maneuvering to discover parallels between the *iemoto* system and many social groups in Japan. Indeed these similarities become even more obvious in the case of social groups located in the heritage arena, especially those that can be clearly identified as traditions. Such is the case for the *Hozonkai* in *Gujo Odori*, as we have already seen.

By and large, the *iemoto* system has been successful in preserving much of Japan's intangible heritage. In recent efforts to preserve intangible heritage elsewhere, it can serve as a model, or at least a reference. However, its qualities may not appeal to everyone who buys into the system - *caveat emptor*. 🇯🇵

NOTES

1. The other two are Omotesenke and Mushanokojisenke.
2. Woven reed mats used in a traditional Japanese room.
3. *Utai* is the generic term for the songs in *Nōgaku* and *Kyōgen* (comedic *Nōgaku*), as well as other related art forms.
4. In describing Matsumoto Koshiro IX, of the notable Matsumoto family of *Kabuki* actors, Nakamura uses the term 'thoroughbred' p. 44.
5. The heads of the different schools in *Nōgaku* are customarily called *sōke* rather than *iemoto*, although both terms are used interchangeably.
6. 'Sō' is the same character for 'sō' in 'sōke,' literally meaning 'main house' (cf. Bodiford, 2002).
7. One symbol, a chrysanthemum crest, is particularly significant, as it is the same crest used by the Aoyama family, one of the richest and most powerful clans that ruled (Gujo) Hachiman in the Edo Period (1603-1868).

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