

Tanedor of Taketomi Island:
Intergenerational Transmission of Intangible Heritage.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines performing arts as Intangible Cultural Properties, and considers their transmission, focusing on the case of *Tanedori* of Taketomi Island (hereafter *Tanedori*) one of the Important Intangible Folk-cultural Properties of Taketomi-cho in Okinawa Prefecture. In particular, it focuses on the importance of the mutual relationship between local communities and schools. *Tanedori* refers to the ritual of planting rice or millet. In the past this ritual was performed all over Okinawa Prefecture. *Tanedori* faces the same sort of challenges as many other intangible heritage activities - lack of people to carry on the tradition and a declining and aging local population. This paper provides a case study on the role schools can play, through the active engagement of teachers and principals with the local communities, in the transmission of ritual performances

Keywords

intergenerational transmission, performing arts, school education, *Tanedori*.

Introduction

Tanedori is a ritual for sowing seeds of rice and millet and praying for a good harvest. This event was held in several places in Okinawa in the past. Today Taketomi Island has one of the best safeguarded *Tanedori*. This article examines the transmission of *Tanedori* by the local people in partnership with the local school.

The declining and aging population in Japan is endangering many arts designated as intangible cultural assets due to lack of people to carry on the traditions. In recent years, it has become so vital to safeguard the performing arts that women in their fifties have had to perform roles which are traditionally played by young girls, especially in dances at festivals. The survival of whole communities is endangered. (Hoshino, 2008).

Some efforts have been made to introduce local traditional arts into elementary and middle schools across the country. Dates for traditional events have been shifted to weekends and public holidays so as to increase public exposure to, and knowledge of these art forms. There is a clear commitment to safeguarding intangible cultural assets, but the transmission from holders or carriers to the next generation needs to be examined further.

There are some unique aspects to the flourishing of *Tanedori*. The self-governing organisation of the practice by local residents is one of them. School principals and local post offices have become involved, taking on responsibility for participating in and managing *Tanedori* and playing important roles in the annual event. This article will focus on schools and education. It will examine how the succession of this ritual performance has been accomplished through local society and education in schools.

Taketomi Island

Taketomi Island is one of the Yaeyama Islands and comprises the self-governing island group of Taketomi-cho, together with Iriomote Island and Kohama Island.

As for the landscape of the local village, one visitor suggested that the whole island looks like a theme park. *Tanedori*, the biggest annual event on Taketomi Island, was designated as an Important Intangible Folk-cultural Property by the Agency for Cultural Affairs in 1972, and later by the Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings of Taketomi Island in Taketomi-cho in 1987.

Taketomi Island has a population of 314 people (as of March, 2010). As described in chart 1, the population peaked at 1054 in 1955. This increase, however, was due to repatriations from Taiwan. Since then the population decreased to 297 with 132 households in 1999. The population fluctuated between 2000 and 2010, sometimes exceeding 300 persons, and in 2005 the population was 344 persons in 173 households.

It is also common for young visitors to come and stay on the island as helpers at guest-houses. In addition, the number of women from outside the island who marry male residents has been on the increase each year. According to the principal of Taketomi Elementary and Junior High School, only four out of the thirty-eight students had parents who both came from the island, and two thirds had one or both of their parents coming from elsewhere (in 2010).

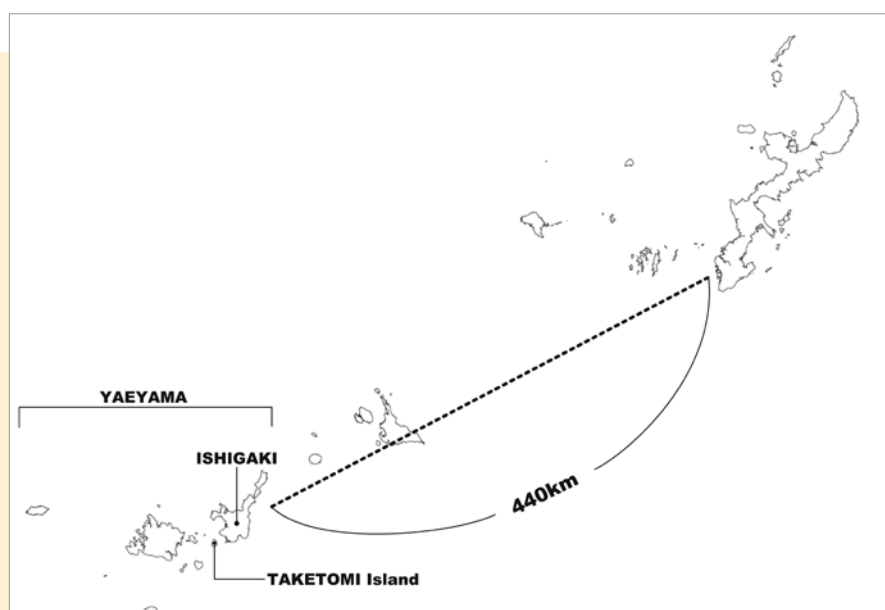


Figure 1
Map of Taketomi Island. Taketomi Island is located 440km south west of Okinawa.
Drawn by Goya Junko

Chart 1
Population of Taketomi Island

	Population	Household
1955	1,054	-
1960	789	-
1965	480	-
1970	336	122
1975	352	130
1980	356	143
1985	308	144
1990	234	108
1999	297	132

Source: Ishihara Seminar, 1990, p.93 (from 1955 to 1990), the Community Centre on Taketomi Island (for 1999)

Chart 2
Demography of the population by age in Taketomi District (for March, 2010)

Age	Population	Age	Population
0-4	11	55-59	19
5-9	21	60-64	22
10-14	20	65-69	19
15-19	5	70-74	26
20-24	6	75-79	14
25-29	14	80-84	23
30-34	17	85-89	6
35-39	27	90-94	4
40-44	23	95-99	2
45-49	17	100-104	0
50-59	17	Total	313

Source: (<http://www.taketomi-islands.jp/?p=352>)

Chart 2 shows that one third of the population is over the age of sixty-five, and children of school age or younger comprise just one sixth of the population. Young people over the age of twenty, who can be considered the primary demographic for the ritual form, are few in number; there are only twenty between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine. Given the fact that a local young men's association has found that the majority of its members come from the mainland, this figure indicates how many of the young islanders are leaving, and as a consequence there are significant issues about who will carry on the art of *Tanedori*. It may be people from outside the island who continue the form.

***Tanedori*, an Important Intangible Folk-cultural Property**

According to the database of cultural properties of

Japan, *Tanedori*, designated as an Important Intangible Folk-cultural Property in 1972, is a nine day long festival to pray for the prosperity of the community with rituals that relate mainly to sowing seeds. For two days, *Kanoetora* and *Kanotou*, all the residents of the island participate in the festival. *Tanedori's* successful continuity is part of the story of the foundation of Taketomi Island. In *Tanedori*, approximately seventy to eighty performances take place over the two days. Fieldwork showed that *Tanedori* programmes are presented by three dance institutions and programmes are composed by school dancers from these institutions. Participation has increased through a growing number of dedicated programmes. Promotion of *Tanedori* beyond the island, and its designation as an Important Intangible Folk-cultural Property, has raised the residents' consciousness of its significance. On the other hand, its meaning as an agrarian ritual has faded. Instead, praying for the health of residents and the prosperity of the island has become a dominant part of the ritual, encouraging the participation of ex-islanders from the mainland (Karimata, 2003, p.358).

The scale of the festival and its cost has expanded to the extent that it is now dependent on the co-operation of outside organisations of ex-islanders (Tamaki, 1999, p.69). Besides residents of the island, *Tanedori* is managed by a countrymen's association of ex-islanders and dance institutions from Ishigaki, Okinawa and Tokyo. However, people in management positions in public institutions on Taketomi Island, notably in the school and post office, who are not originally from the island, also play important roles in events on the island and are incorporated into the self-governing body.

The nexus between residents and associations of ex-islanders is important in understanding the characteristics of the island's social and cultural integration since *Tanedori* is based on a complex and multi-layered organisation (Tamaki, 1999). This indicates that the community of Taketomi Island is more than an administrative unit.

Case study: Taketomi elementary and junior high school

The school is located in the centre of the settlements and is managed by the town. The elementary school is a hundred and nineteen years old and the junior high

school is sixty-two years old. Today, thirty-eight students are enrolled and there are twelve staff, including local part-time teachers and cooks at the school. Due to housing shortages some local teachers commute from Ishigaki Island by boat. The administrative staff live in houses close to the school.

Residents of Taketomi Island hand down various traditional rituals and performances and form a community called *Utugumi* which is based in the island community centre. The centre has its origin in a friendship society formed in 1917, called *Burakukai* (hamlet group) and *Kōminkan* (community centre) in 1963. (Nishiyama and Ikenoue, 2004) It was incorporated as *Chien Dantai* (a neighbourhood association) in 2001, with the membership of the entire local population. The director, executive board, and general assembly are located in the community centre; their job is to organise rituals and events, build consensus among residents and co-ordinate with the town office, as well as look after many aspects of life on its behalf as the office is located out of town (Ishigaki City).

The director of the community centre is responsible for rituals and events in liaison with the executive board members. Taketomi Island has three settlements and the director co-operates with officers from each settlement. They have regular meetings called *Mura-moai*, collecting dues of 110 yen from local residents each month. The general assembly as a decision-making and executive body consists of a leader from each settlement, representatives of the senior citizens' club, the women's association and the youth organisation, and the principal of the school.

Interviews with the school principal established that he is frequently involved and is committed to working with the local government. He understands the island and by participating in local affairs can raise the cultural profile of local youth. The plan is to introduce *Tanedori* into the official curriculum.

The school and *Tanedori*

Tanedori on Yaeyama Island is a ritual to pray for a rich harvest. Although the ritual has been adapted it is



Figure 2
People beating drums and gongs and conducting the morning *Yu-kui*. One of the men is the principal of Taketomi primary school.
Photo. Goya Junko



Figure 3
People go to their villages and conduct *Yu-kui*, visiting each house in each village before sunrise.
Photo. Goya Junko

still held on each island. In addition to prayers for a rich harvest by a priest called a *Kamiyaku*, *Tanedori* includes many performances. It is held during the autumn every year; over ten days from *Kinoesaru* day to *Kinoeuma* day which fall in September and October in the lunar calendar. During this period, performances, reflecting the life and environment of each locality, are offered to the deity and the whole island comes alive.

However, only *Tanedori* has been selected as the Intangible Cultural Property of the Yaeyama Islands. The number of performances which are offered tends to increase from year to year and the form of the ritual has been passed down without simplification. The schedule of events of *Tanedori* over nine days is as follows:

- On the first day (*Kinoesaru*), elderly people and officers of the island community gather and plan the *Tanedori* and decide on the role each person will play.
- On the second day (*Kinoetori*), the third day (*Hinoeinu*), and the fourth day (*Hinotoi*), there are no particular events. People just practice the performances.
- On the fifth day (*Tsuchinoene*), some events are held

in each family. The head of the family sows seeds in his fields and the women make food for the ritual called *Iiyachi*. In Taketomi, the day of *Tsuchinoene* has traditionally been considered as the most important day for sowing seeds. On that day the stage for the performances is prepared at *Utaki* (a sacred place). From that day, the prayers for *Tanedori* begin, conducted by the six priests (*Kantsukasa*).

- The sixth day (*Tsuchinotoushi*), is for abstinence. Making a lot of noise, speaking loudly, having seasonings and teas with strong flavours and eating deep green vegetables are forbidden on that day.
- The seventh day (*Kanoetora*) is when you pray for the seeds to germinate.
- The eighth day (*Kanotou*) is the most active and vibrant part of the festival. The performances take place on the seventh and eighth days. On the eighth day elderly people and officers, including the school principal, conduct the *Miruku-okoshi* which is a parade that takes place before sunrise to pray for the happiness and good health of the village. At the same time, the six priests called *Kantsukasa* pray at *Utaki* near *Miruku* shrine where *Tanedori* is held. Both groups join at *Utaki* and conduct the ritual of

Hoshidai to pray for happiness and good health on the stage set up before the god.

After the ritual, they beat drums and gongs and conduct the morning *Yu-kui*, which means 'to ask for a rich harvest'. Following the *antsukasa* they march about the island singing songs and visiting the houses of the village officers led by the women who present greetings. After singing and dancing in the garden of each house, they enter the drawing room and sing a song called *Inigataniayou* to pray for the rice to grow well and then they go back to *Utaki*.

The performances during the day are followed by the ritual of *Iban*. Here young branches called *Funiu* are distributed to the participants. Receiving them means they promise the god they will participate in the *Yu-kui* ritual all through the night and no one can leave until the ritual to replace *Iban* finishes the next morning. It is said that *Iban* has the power to propagate and an amazing ability to survive so this is the ritual to pray that the crops will grow well. After *Iban*, they conduct the *Yu-kui*, beating gongs and drums. They first visit the house of the lineal descendent of the god who started the *Tanedori*,

after that they go to their own villages and conduct *Yu-kui* there, visiting each house in each village until sunrise.

- On the ninth day (*Mizunoetatsu*), the cost of the *Tanedori* is announced, and a thanksgiving ritual takes place at the *Miruku*-god's shrine.

In the past there was also a tenth day (*Mizunotomi*) which was called *Tanaduimunun* – the day to purify *Tanedori*. It was the day to put the leaves of Japanese pampas grass in each field as a charm and to pray that harmful insects will not damage the crops. However this part of the ritual is now omitted.

From the above schedule, we can see it takes considerable time to hold this ritual, because it lasts from early morning to midnight or to the next morning. Not only the residents but also the teachers who work at the school participate in the ritual, and they practice at night-time. It is a lot of work for the teachers as well as for the residents. Nevertheless, the very fact of performing a complex version of *Tanedori* shows that the life of the people who live on the island is still governed by religious rituals. When the school principal participated in the



Figure 4
Teachers and children march wearing their headbands.
Photo. Goya Junko

rituals for the first time he commented that it was physically tough - but that it was necessary for an educator to take part in local events.

The school used to be regarded as separate from village organisation, but it is now involved with the *Tanedorí* ritual as the villagers asked the principal to take an active role. With the participation of the school, the children understand that they are part of the community and are 'protected by god'. All the male teachers now participate in the drum parade that is dedicated to the god. Teachers and children wear special headbands and walk two abreast to the beat of the drum. They spend two days being trained for this by the local people. All the island residents practice the march in the school gymnasium.

About ten children – a third of the entire school –

perform in the ritual. They dance on stage or beat drums and ring bells to accompany the adult dances. In this way, children are treated as members of village society from their earliest years. Involving children in ritual events also provides the opportunity for them to learn about the island's traditions.

Even the children who do not perform are involved. The principal and all the children watch the performances – special places are reserved for them alongside the stage for the rituals that take place on days seven and eight. They are all expected to attend, along with their teachers, for the full school day, 8.15am to 3.00pm, and to sit together with their classmates rather than with their parents. This all requires a degree of planning to ensure that it does not interfere with the normal school curriculum, but the ritual is considered sufficiently important to make this worthwhile.



Figure5
Children dance and play music alongside adults.
Photo. Goya Junko.

The performances learnt for *Tanedorī* by the pupils are also demonstrated at other events. Elementary and junior high school students do projects and write about the performances and how they are taught. It is all part of a policy of making students aware of their cultural heritage. This is outside the curriculum as laid down by government, but it is felt to be appropriate for children in the region and the hope is that it will enable them to continue the ritual in the future.


Conclusion

This paper highlights the educational role of schools in safeguarding intangible heritage. Young people have to leave the island after graduating from junior high school to go on to high school. Learning about *Tanedorī* in school on the island gives them a unique chance to learn about their culture. In one memoir, a man who learnt drumming in third grade and only participated in the ritual once was inspired to take part in organising *Tanedorī* in later life. People who are now in their fifties have known the ritual since they were children but did not have the opportunity to learn it at school. As the islands become more and more depopulated, the involvement of school children becomes increasingly important. Hopefully some of them will return to the islands and carry on the ritual.

Today, *Tanedorī* is the biggest of all the island events and has become popular. In order to preserve the festival, Taketomi residents as well as out-of-island organisations co-operate and support the event. In particular, the external appraisal of *Tanedorī* as a significant Intangible Folk-cultural asset has attracted tourists. The school, the principal, the teachers and pupils deserve more recognition than they get for the role they are playing in preserving and transmitting the ritual of *Tanedorī*.

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