

Reviving Intangible Cultural Heritage in Disaster Affected Communities: Benefits and Limitations - Case Study of Ogatsu (Ishinomaki, Miyagi)

Florence LAHOURNAT

The aftermath of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami has seen a wave of folk performance revival in affected areas, notably in the Miyagi and Iwate prefectures, simultaneously hinting to the importance of and attachment to these local traditional practices, and raising the question of the relevance and significance of such efforts in the midst of disaster recovery.

Folk performances – notably ritual theatrical dances called *kagura*, and the question of their preservation and transmission have been a consistent focus of Japanese folklore studies. While the function of these practices in promoting and maintaining community cohesion is well documented, the 2011 disaster has shed new light on the extent of the ties between local folk performances and community, as well as the dynamic nature of their continuity and adaptation.

The revival movement following the 2011 disaster became the focus of a large array of research. At first preoccupied with recording the state of the affected cultural assets, the focus then shifted to discussing community rebuilding and local heritage revival. As part of an ongoing investigation in the nature of traditional practices and how they adapt to changing circumstances within a community, the present paper belongs within this folklorist body of research. Here, we depart from the traditional folk performance

scholarship and join this more recent trend, in choosing to focus not on the art itself, but on the practitioners, the usage of the tradition and the link to the community.

In order to do so, this research focuses on the community of Ogatsu in Ishinomaki (Miyagi prefecture), which sustained extensive damage by the 2011 tsunami, and put tremendous efforts in the reviving of its local intangible cultural heritage, the Ogatsu *hōin kagura*.

Following an ethnographic approach, this study examines the dynamic process of reviving the local tradition of *kagura* in a disaster context, and more specifically how the meaning and usages of this *kagura* have shifted and been adapted to fit the new circumstances and needs of the community. More than a process of reviving, the 2011 aftermath has seen a process of shifting and negotiating boundaries to benefit the community while still remaining true to the local tradition. Here, the process of preservation and the notion of authenticity need to be reexamined to reflect the fluid nature of intangible cultural heritage - folk performances such as *kagura*, and the link between community and heritage reframed as a mutual, interdependent relationship.