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Audiovisual Ethnography of Performing Arts as Human Cultural Resources

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The international symposium “An Audiovisual Exploration of Philippine Music: The Historical Contribution of Robert Garfias” was held as part of the inter-institutional research project “A Study on Visual Ethnography of Performing Arts as Human Cultural Resources,” a sub-project of the research project “Comprehensive Research on Human Cultural Resources,” funded by the National Institutes for the Humanities, of which Minpaku is a constituting organization. In this article I would like to introduce briefly the outline of the project to show the significance of the films documented by Robert Garfias from our perspective acquired in the project.

Video can document aural and visual dimensions of the performing arts and communicate them to people who do not personally experience the performance. It contrasts to the literacy needed for reading academic articles based on the knowledge and concepts developed in the history of that discipline. Video footage for research purposes can also be viewed by people without any previous academic experience. So the footage plays a wider role in disseminating audiovisual images of the performing arts. Those directly involved in recorded performance become aware of perspectives from outside their community and renew their own understanding of the performing arts by watching the film or video shot and edited by outsiders. This research project focuses on how audiovisual documentation can provide a site to exchange perspectives between people from different backgrounds and therefore to better understand the performing arts.

In recent years, with increasing awareness of intangible cultural heritage, many people have tried to make audiovisual documentation in order to ensure transmission of traditional performing arts in Japan. However, in some cases, the films and videos produced have been stowed away in the shelves. One possible reason is that the producers of film or video do not always have a clear vision as to how it can be utilized for the process of transmission in collaboration with those involved in the performing arts. There is no consensus on what kind of video is required and how it is used among the producers of the video, administrative officers who initiated the project, and practitioners of the performing arts. The video is often considered the end product and goal of the project, which helps explain why the video is not utilized effectively. The necessity of archives that collect and transmit footage of the performing arts does not seem to be fully recognized in Japan yet.

Yamaji Kozo, a scholar of Japanese folk performing arts, has stressed the need to produce video documentation, which can be utilized in reviving the performing arts if they disappear (Yamaji 2002: 71). The lifestyle of people has changed drastically with the process of industrialization and urbanization, and large-scale population movement has changed the social organization of local communities. The rapid change of social environment according to political and economic situations has widened the gap in values between generations. In this situation, traditional performing arts are on the verge of disappearance. It is understandable that many people try to audiovisually document the performing arts for the purpose of reviving it.

However, video might have some significance even for performing arts that still have firm foundation in society. In the latter half of the twentieth century TV was widespread all over the world. Many people now enjoy video from other parts of the world. Consumer video camera has become popular since the 1980s and a wide variety of scenes from daily life have been shot. Now many people carry mobile phones with video recording capabilities everywhere. Furthermore, in the last decade it has become easier to edit and play video on personal computers or other small gadgets and upload video files on the internet. We can say that the relationship between video and human has changed and video has been established as a means to recognize the world around us. We need to continually reflect on the traditional performing arts and explore ways of transmission in the ever-changing social environment. Video can be utilized to support that process.

Project on Ioujima and Tokunoshima

In this section I would like to reflect briefly on what has been done in our project with the cases from Ioujima and Tokunoshima. Ioujima is a small island in Kagoshima Prefecture in southern Japan with a population of 128, whereas Tokunoshima, also part of Kagoshima, is a larger island with a population of around 25,000. In these islands we made video documentation of traditional performing arts and screened the video to explore the role of video in their transmission.

In Ioujima, we focused on *hassaku taiko odori*, a form of communal dance performed every year on August 1 and 2 of the lunar calendar at an open area in front of a shrine. This dance is performed by a person known as *kanetataki* who sings and beats a small gong called *kane* at the center, and ten male dancers older than junior high school students with a drum attached to the chest and a banner on their back dance. Today the *kanetataki* no longer sings and an audio recording by a former *kanetataki* who has left Ioujima is played instead. During the dancing several men run out from the shrine with a small tree branch in their hand. These

men known as *mendon* wear masks and coats made from straw, run through the audience beating them with the branch, and try to catch and snatch away young females. On the second day, after another round of dancing, dancers and *mendon* march around the settlements in a line and drive the evil out with beating drums and waving branches at the shore.

Every year the composition of dancers and *mendon* changes and accordingly the performance differs in detail. It reflects the changing composition of the society. Except for the people already retired from their jobs, it is difficult to live on this small island with the limited infrastructure and employment opportunity. For example, some of the people are employed as teachers at the island school which offers classes of the elementary and junior high school levels. They are encouraged to bring their children because the number of teachers is decided according to the number of students studying there. The teachers move to other schools in Kagoshima prefecture under the direction of the prefectural board of education after teaching there for an average of three years. The students born in the island also have to leave the island if they want high school education.

Despite its size, Ioujima has a school of African drumming called Tam Tam Mandingue, which was established by a famed Guinean musician Mamady Keita. Young males who study *djembe*, West African drum, at the school are also active participants of *hassaku taiko odori*, as dancers and *mendon*. They stay in the island for around five months with financial support from the Mishima village (which is composed of Ioujima and two other neighboring islands) and are obliged to participate in the events and activities of the village. The dance also provides an opportunity to integrate these people who are to leave the island after relatively short time of stay in the island. Although the dance may appear unchanged to the eyes of outsiders, video has documented the changing community of the island.

The main purpose of video documentation of the *hassaku taiko odori* is to document the dance and the song in detail. In the meantime, it also records the image of each dancer in the performance. People of Ioujima easily recognize each person and also when the performance took place. Outsiders may feel that the same performance is repeated every year, but it is a particular event occurred at a particular time for people in the local community. We have recorded the performances on video for several consecutive years, and it helps to reveal the particularities. One year, an experienced dancer who usually dances in the festival as a main member didn't participate in the performance, because his relative had passed away in the same year. At the same performance a first year student of junior high school, who was borne in the island, danced for the first time. The video documented how the performance reflects the ever-changing society of the island.

In 2015, we held a video screening in Ioujima. We showed a video edited from footage acquired between 2007 and 2013, along with the film shot by a folklorist, Miyamoto Keitaro in 1934 and the film produced by Minzoku Bunka Eizo Kenkyujo (the Cinematographic Research Institute for Folklore) under the initiative of Reimeikan Museum in 1983. With the recent videos, people seem to focus on the identity of the dancers, the particularity of the performance, and events of each year. The videos made them recall people who have left the island and the happenings related to them. In contrast, with the film shot in 1983, the changes in people were more obvious, especially the growth of people who were children at the time of shooting. The 1934 film revealed the drastic change of life in the island. It seemed difficult for them to recognize people in the film immediately, but they discussed who were on the video, and also the clothes, habits and landscapes of olden days of which older people still have memories. Some younger dancers said “the dance was great.” Older people like to tell them how great the dance was, how proud they felt if they were chosen as dancers, and how hard the practice was. With this film, younger people could more strongly realize what their elders had been saying.

The footage from Tokunoshima includes folk performing arts played in each community and also folk songs. They have been performed as part of life cycle rituals, agricultural rituals, and annual events of the community and also for amusement. We have documented around 250 pieces/performances from 26 local communities since 2010. One of the motives for launching the documentation project in Tokunoshima came from the screening of “*Hachigatsu-odori: The August Dancing of Amami Oshima Island*,” a video program supervised by Sasahara Ryoji at the National Museum of Ethnology (77 minutes, 2007). We screened the video in Amami Oshima and its several neighboring islands including Tokunoshima (in 2009) where we received a request from the local community to document various performing arts of Tokunoshima.

When we first showed the video at Amami Oshima, a participant said that *hachigatsu odori* is danced around the same time in each community, so people do not know well about the dance in other communities, contrary to expectations. In contrast, folk songs whose repertoire is shared to some extent within the island, beyond each community, are more widely discussed. The situation in Tokunoshima seems similar to that of Amami Oshima. So, to get a general view of performing arts of Tokunoshima, we planned to document at as many communities as possible. In many cases we asked people to perform for a recording session. The video was intended not so much as ethnographic documentation as audiovisual documentation of the repertoire of performing arts.

Along with filming, we also held frequent screening sessions. Responses of audience were similar in each session. People laughed or expressed admiration

when a certain person appeared on the video, recalled when and where it had been shot, and discussed the similarities and differences between their repertoire and that of neighboring communities. Later, we produced a program in which people can interactively choose video clips to watch. At the first step we can choose one out of the 26 communities where we recorded performing arts, then select one piece from a list of pieces recorded. For several communities, the selection includes scenes from traditional festivals where performances were held, such as the *hamauri* festival of Inokawa community. On that occasion people dance *natsume odori* from night until the next morning, while visiting each house of the community. We also added video clips of sites that are culturally and historically significant for the community, and those known for their scenery.

Significance of Films by Robert Garfias

In the 1960s, not many ethnomusicologists used film to document performances of the subject of their study. Filming equipment was larger than video equipment today. Film was expensive, needed chemical development and the shooting time of each roll was limited to around ten minutes. All these facts and the wide range of content make these films especially precious. With this collection we can survey the diversity of music of the Philippines in the 1960s, and recognize changes that occurred subsequently in the music culture.

However, as I have learned from our recent work described above, it is not only what is recorded that determines a film's significance, but also how it is archived and shown to the people who are interested in performing arts recorded on the film. By watching a film or video with people from the source society, we can learn much about their performing arts. The people might tell us how they learned their art, when they performed it, who performed it on the film, who is recognized as his/her successor and so on. Such information may not be recorded directly on the film but can be elicited from conversation while watching the film. At times participants must think hard to find answers to our questions because the questions are unexpected or reflect an unfamiliar perspective. While people in a local community may provide information not included on the film, outsiders can also bring their own knowledge and interest to the community.

In this manner, film and video become a site to exchange knowledge and experience concerning the performing arts. Attended by several experts on Philippine music, this symposium has provided such an opportunity to exchange their insights into Philippine music evoked by the films of Robert Garfias. Finally, I acknowledge the effort by the Musical Instrument Museum in Arizona to digitize Garfias' films, that of the University of the Philippines to reach the descendants of the performers, that of participants of the symposium to interpret the films, that of

Terada Yoshitaka to hold the symposium, and also that of Robert Garfias to respond to all these people. It is not only what was recorded on the films but also these links in the chain of effort that give them significance.

Reference

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