

Documentation of ICH as a tool for community's safeguarding activities

-The First Intensive Researchers Meeting on Communities and the 2003 Convention-

3-4 March 2012, Tokyo Japan

### **On the Revitalization of Shagiri of Nagahama Hikiyama Matsuri(Festival)**

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Nagahama Hikiyama Festival

The Nagahama Hikiyama (float) Festival is the festival highlighted by boys' enthusiastic kabuki performances on the stage of *hikiyamas* or floats, attracting tens of thousands of spectators every year. The festival events were designated as significant intangible folk cultural assets by the national government in 1979. The festival has over 400 year history. Floats richly decorated with metal carvings and tapestries are said to have been built with gold given to the citizens of Nagahama by then lord named HASHIBA Hideyoshi when he celebrated the birth of his son.

Festival music usually called *Hayashi* but called *Shagiri* in Nagahama does not attract much attention in the festival compared with kabuki, but Shagiri plays an important role in the festival, because the music is played in order to move the float imbued with divine spirit. Thus, the music is played whenever floats move as well as various festival scenes such as those before and after kabuki performance. In a topography written in 1792 there is a description of Shagiri played around the floats, so it is believed to have started before 1792. This musical accompaniment consists of *Shinobue* flutes, two drums, and float gong. It is played by children (both boys and girls). Each float group called *Yamagumi* gathers children once a week throughout the year to practice Shagiri.

Although Shagiri is currently played by children of each Yamagumi group, recent research revealed that most of the Yamagumi groups used to ask local villagers and farmers in the neighborhood to come to the festival as Shagiri musicians before and after the World War II. In these Yamagumi groups Shagiri was played by people outside of the hikiyama community. Members of the Yamagumi group at that time knew little about (so they couldn't play) Shagiri, so that they did not know which number is played in which festival scene, and left it entirely to the people they asked. It seems that Yamagumi members had little interest in the performing art itself and did not consider it to be something they themselves are involved in.

This practice continued for some time after the World War II, but it became increasingly

difficult for villagers in the neighborhood to come to the festival due to aging of the people. Faced with decline in the number of musicians, Yamagumi tried to use audio-taped material at the festival, but was unsuccessful.

Around this time, some of the Yamagumi members became aware that something must be done to prevent further deterioration of the situation and potential extinction of the music. Thus, they first asked one older successor to teach them Shagiri. Thirteen members (all adults) from two Yamagumi groups took part in the practice. The teacher told them to memorize song-like oral forms of sounds or melodies of each number (see picture1 below) by singing or reading them out loud. These representations were written in katakana and kanji characters. The teacher did not teach them how to play shonobue flute until they memorize all the melodies. It took half a year to memorize the melodies and finally practice flute. It took as long as one year to even master the most basic number *Ohiyari*. Until then 8 members of 13 gave up continuing practice and only 5 members were left.

Feeling a sense of crisis, one of the participants who continued the practice started to transform Shagiri into music scores in order to facilitate its transmission (See picture2 below). He happened to be a member of an amateur band, so he was familiar with music scores and able to transform Shagiri into music scores. In 1981 all Shagiri numbers, which had long been handed down orally, were scored, including original numbers for each float group. Moreover, 22 numbers were recorded into CDs and distributed for practice and promotional use.

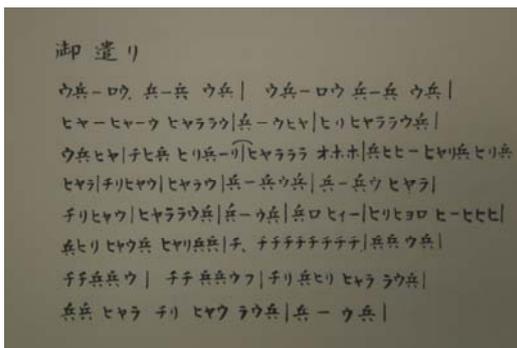
The scoring contributed significantly to the succession and promotion of Shagiri. They enabled us to acquire numbers accurately and in relatively short period. Since most Shagiri groups share music scores, it becomes possible for one group to play with other group or help other group to play Shagiri when the group wants to increase the number of musicians in the festival. Music scores are common to all the people and remain for good, we are now able to preserve and transmit the festival music to the next generation steadily, unlike traditional oral symbols which cannot capture lowness or highness, length, etc, of sounds. In the case of oral symbols, transmission is thereby dependent on individual instructor whose music differs subtly from person to person. Music scores have overcome these differences.

Currently, 9 Yamagumi groups out of 12 utilize music scores when they teach children

Shagiri, though one group uses traditional oral symbols of melodies and another group does not use written material at all, transmitting Shagiri completely orally. In groups which use music scores, children first memorize the most basic number Ohiyari by singing written sounds and phrases, but in some other groups CDs are distributed to children beforehand in order for them to get used to the music and memorize it. When they memorize the number, then they learn how to use shinobue flute and where to put their fingers on by watching other children and adults who acquired the number playing the flute. This being so, it does not follow that the whole process of mastering the music has changed dramatically compared with the past by introducing the music scores.

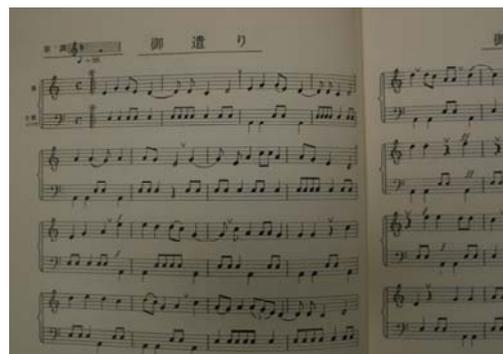
According to recent research, one group in the neighborhood which used to come to the festival more than 40 years ago resumed practicing Shagiri very recently within their community by gathering new members. What they are using is traditional oral symbols of sounds written in katakana. What is more, each number has apparently improvised part and slightly different from those played currently in the Nagahama Hikiyama Festival. This leads us to suppose that there were several variations in the festival music in the past according to district or group, making us imagine what Shagiri 40 to 50 years ago in the festival was like.

Picture1



Shagiri was practiced based on oral symbols of sounds and phrases in the past

Picture2



Music scores of Shagiri