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# Traditional Festival as a Tourism Event: *Stakeholders' Influence on the Dynamics of the Sendai Tanabata Festival in Japan*



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## Summary

A new method of analyzing traditional Japanese festivals (*matsuri*) based on event studies is presented. Stakeholders' influence and their interactions redefine narratives of tradition. In Japan, the urbanization of society has transformed *matsuri* into tourism-oriented events. However, the influence of touristification on tradition has not yet been fully explored. This paper offers a close examination of a case study about the dynamics of the Sendai Tanabata Festival. Local newspaper archives were used as the primary source and adopted the stakeholder theory and social exchange theory from event studies to examine stakeholders' power and interests, as well as their relationships. The results discovered that it is the conflicts of festival stakeholders throughout the years that shaped the Sendai Tanabata Festival to what it is like today. Although festival organizers and local residents are key players, both domestic and foreign tourists' influence should also not be neglected. The inheritance of traditional culture depends on its original community i.e. local residents. Depopulation and aging social problems have shifted the weight of festival ownership to tourists, as they contribute to the economic revitalization and regional development. As a result, festival organizers tend to tailor the festival to tourists' tastes, which often leads to change or loss of tradition's original festive meaning or the invention of a new tradition. This paper suggests that in the discourse of festival tourism, festival organizers should focus on local residents while establishing a connection of the festival belongings with tourists. Sustainable development requires a balance of stakeholders' interests to maintain the benefit to traditional culture under urbanization. In the event of economic and social crises, festivals become a symbolic manifestation of hope and unite the festival stakeholders.

## Key Words

Sendai Tanabata Festival, Matsuri, Festival tourism, Event studies, Stakeholder Theory, Social Exchange Theory

## Foreword

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## Table of Contents

Summary.....	2
Key Words .....	2
Foreword.....	3
Table of Contents .....	4
Note on style .....	6
List of Figures.....	7
Chapter I Introduction.....	8
2. Theoretical Framework.....	10
2.1 Festival and festival tourism.....	10
2.1.1 Festival.....	10
2.1.2 Festival tourism.....	11
2.1.3 Concern of authenticity.....	13
2.2 Festival stakeholders.....	14
2.2.1 The Stakeholder Theory.....	14
2.2.2 Social Exchange Theory (SET) .....	18
3. Methodology.....	19
3.1 Data collection and evaluation.....	19
3.2 Limitations .....	21
Chapter II Matsuri: from traditional festival to tourist event .....	22
1. The nature of matsuri.....	22
2. The characteristics of matsuri.....	22
3. The functions of matsuri.....	25
4. Matsuri in urbanization.....	27

4.1 The blurred boundary .....	27
4.2 The emergence of urban matsuri and new features .....	27
4.3 The collapse of the basic structure.....	28
5. Summary.....	30
Chapter III The Sendai Tanabata Festival.....	32
1. Legend and history: from China to Japan.....	32
2. Sendai city .....	37
3. The phases of the Sendai Tanabata Festival .....	39
3.1 Before World War I.....	39
3.2 The first revival after World War I.....	40
3.3 The second revival after World War II and the debates on style .....	41
3.4 The emerging imitators and touristification.....	43
3.5 The unexpected 2011 .....	46
3.6 A pause in 2020.....	48
Chapter IV Discussions .....	50
Conclusion and implications.....	54
Glossary of Japanese and Chinese terms .....	55
Bibliography .....	59
Appendices .....	75
Field Report .....	75
Figure 9: The Sendai Tanabata Festival Map .....	78
Figure 10: The decoration style and meanings in the Edo period .....	79
Figure 11: Some decorations of the Sendai Tanabata Festival in 2019 .....	80

## Note on style

The Hepburn romanization system is used for Japanese language, except for some common words that already exist in English, such as names of places (e.g. Tokyo, Sendai). Japanese words will be in the Latin alphabet and italic, and are followed by Japanese script and English translation in round brackets when mentioned for the first time (e.g. *kami* (神, the divine Gods)). Japanese book names are in italic style (e.g. *Kojiki*), whereas names of the historical periods are not (e.g. the Edo period). Also, macron is used to designate long vowels (e.g. *Tōhoku* (東北, Northeast)). Japanese words are usually regarded as uncountable nouns to avoid English grammatical errors (e.g. *Matsuri* is...)

Hanyu Pinyin is used for Chinese words, which also shown in simplified Chinese characters (Hanzi) if needed to present the connection with Japanese *kanji* and followed by an English translation for the first time appearance.

Japanese names (Chinese names, if applicable) are written in their original order, where family name is followed by first name (e.g. Orikuchi Shinobu).

Long explanations and additional information are marked with footnote appearing at the bottom of the same page. Japanese words with a script (*kanji* and/or *kana*) and English translation are listed in the glossary at end of the main text. Unless indicated, all the translations text are provided by the author.

In the list of bibliography, unless English translations are provided in the original sources, Japanese sources are listed in romanized form followed by its Japanese script, while Chinese sources are in the Hanyu Pinyin form followed by simplified Chinese characters. This aims to help the reader to look them up easily.

The Harvard style is used for in-text citations and bibliography. In text citation of newspaper articles from *Kahoku Shimpō* are indicated by name and date in round brackets (e.g. *Kahoku Shimpō*, 5 August 2019; *Kahoku Shimpō* online, 5 August 2019). Newspaper Articles from *Kahoku Shimpō* collected from research reports of Sendai City Museum of History and Folklore are shown as name with its issue number and date of the article (e.g. Research report No. 28, 5 August 2019).

## List of Figures

Figure	Name	Page
1	Stakeholder power and interest matrix for festival management	17
2	The development of <i>matsuri</i>	26
3	The structure of the community	29
4	Tanabata, from the series Elegant Play of the Five Festivals ( <i>Gayû go sekku no uchi</i> ) (1839), <i>Utagawa Kuniyoshi</i>	36
5	The City Flourishing, Tanabata Festival, No 73, One Hundred Famous Views of Edo ( <i>Shichu han-ei Tanabata matsuri/ Meisho Edo Hyakkei</i> ) (1857), <i>Utagawa Hiroshige</i>	36
6	The location of Sendai in Japan	38
7	The Sendai Tanabata Festival in 1954	43
8	The stakeholder power and interest matrix of the Sendai Tanabata Festival	51
9	The Sendai Tanabata Festival Map	78
10	The decoration style and meanings in the Edo period	79
11	The decorations of the Sendai Tanabata Festival in 2019	80

## Chapter I Introduction

There are a countless number of festivals that are celebrated every day all over the world. People are attracted to enjoy the local culture, festive food, take photos, and bring some souvenirs back.

When I started my research on festivals, I was drawn to the cheerful, lively, and sometimes wild festive atmosphere. As my interest is in Japan studies, I tried to read as much as I could about Japanese festivals in both English and Japanese. In each language, the description of various festivals had a slightly different representation and often the Japanese writing was a little bit odd.

I began to think about many possible explanations. Could it be a translation problem? Is *matsuri* not equivalent to Japanese festivals? Could it be they are focusing on different aspects of festivals? Or could it be the difference in research methods? In the end, I concluded that Japanese festivals are often discussed in folklore studies<sup>1</sup> (民俗学) and sociology in Japan, while in English-language, the Japanese festivals are normally examined from culture anthropology and ethology.

Moreover, I later discovered an interesting phenomenon: there was a shift in traditional Japanese festivals to become tourism oriented events for greater economic benefits. Since one of the discourses in festival studies is festival tourism (Getz, 2010), I decided to try to combine cultural anthropology, folklore studies, and event studies to investigate the relationship between tourism and traditional festivals.

In the context of depopulation and industrial structure change, the importance of festivals has become more and more prominent in order to promote domestic travel and increase the number of foreign tourists visiting Japan (Yasuda, Nakamura and Ueno, 2008). The concept of festival, as a historical phenomenon, is always changing and never static. It raises questions such as: Why and how did traditional festivals become tourist attractions? How

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<sup>1</sup> Folklore studies (*minzokugaku*, 民俗学) is a discipline that mainly studies the history of the development of life and culture of the general public (peasants) through research on folklore. It was systematized by Yanagita Kunio 柳田國男 and Orikuchi Shinobu 折口信夫. Digital Daijise (デジタル大辞泉).



much traditional content has been preserved or changed in the process of touristification<sup>2</sup>? Who are the key players in inheriting traditional culture? How did the festival traditions and new events combine? What is the role of festival tourism in Japanese society? To get more specific information, I decided to use the Sendai Tanabata Festival as my case study for two reasons: it meets the requirements of a tourism-oriented traditional festival and I am very familiar with the topic due to my background in Chinese history and literature.

In general, the Tanabata Festival in Japan is a combination of traditional Chinese love legend and Japanese folk belief, with a long history dating back to the Nara period (710-794 CE). So far, many studies have focused on its poems and legend in the literature, its origin and customs in folklore study, and the comparative study between Chinese and Japanese culture.

In the case of the Sendai Tanabata Festival, which was revived to boost the economy and attract tourists after the end of World War II, previous works have focused on its origin and tradition, and limited researches have addressed the issue of festival tourism. Takahashi and Hatsuzawa (2003) pointed out that the Sendai Tanabata Festival has become a tourist event and discussed the changes brought by installing arcades in the central shopping streets since the 1980s. Ōmi (2004) outlined the past and current development and investigated the festival decorations in detail (Ōmi et al., 2010). Anami (2009) analyzed the festival development since its revival in 1926. By examining the formation process of the Tohoku's Three Great Festivals, he argued that the touristification of traditional festivals not only attract visitors but also arouse cultural awareness (Anami, 2011). In focus of the crises in traditional culture, Watanabe (2011) was mainly concerned about the problems of the aging population and the decline of successors in the Japanese society. Finally, Kino and Nagao (2013) brought the festival's overseas influence to attention.

Nonetheless, there are still many issues on the Sendai Tanabata Festival worth exploring. The previous research has not fully explored the transformation from a traditional family-based festival to a large tourist event attracting over 2 million visitors every year. Also the influence of this touristification process needs to be examined. Combining festival tourism in

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<sup>2</sup> Tourstification refers to “a process, and the resulting state in a definite space, of relatively spontaneous, unplanned massive development of tourism, which leads to the transformation of this space into a tourism commodity itself”. For more information: Del Romero Renau, L. (2018) Touristification, Sharing Economies and the New Geography of Urban Conflicts. *Urban Sci*, 2(104). Doi:10.3390/urbansci2040104. <https://www.mdpi.com/2413-8851/2/4/104#cite>

event studies and cultural anthropology, this paper aims to examine the stakeholders' influences on the dynamics of the Sendai Tanabata Festival from a historical perspective.

The main research question is:

What are the dynamics that pushed the Sendai Tanabata Festival into the shape that it has today?

and the subquestions are:

1. What were the factors that formed the festival?
2. How has touristification changed the festival?
3. Who were/are the stakeholders? What were/are their roles and agendas? Was/Is there a conflict of interest? What was/is it?

After defining the key concepts and theories, the paper looks into the festival's history to investigate its original meaning by referring to the development of *matsuri*. Then it focuses on the evolution since the revival in 1946. Based on the data from the local newspaper archives, this paper examines the conflicts of interests by identifying the stakeholders' power and interests within the scope of the stakeholder theory and social exchange theory. This new method of analyzing traditional Japanese festivals presents a better understanding of the festival's touristification process and its impact on festival development.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

This section addresses the general concepts of festival and its definition, as well as building a model with stakeholder theory and social exchange theory in event studies.

### **2.1 Festival and festival tourism<sup>3</sup>**

#### **2.1.1 Festival**

The word "festival" originates from the synonymous Latin words *festa* and *feriae*, meaning public joy and absence from work in honor of the gods. Both Latin words are in the plural form to show that festivals often continue for days and include many events (Falassi, 1987). In contemporary English, festival refers to an organized series of events in the sense of celebration; it also means a time of the year when people have a holiday from work and celebrate

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<sup>3</sup> 2.1.1 Festival and Chapter II are expanded on my previous research "*The Interrelationship between Festival and Community : A Review of Literature*" submitted for JAP4610-Readings in Modern Japan, Spring 2019.

special events in a holy<sup>4</sup> spirit (Collins English Dictionary). Festivals can also be interpreted in different disciplinary backgrounds as well as research objects. For example, from an anthropological viewpoint, festivals, as a social phenomenon, are “a sacred time of celebrations, marked by special observances” (Falassi, 1987). They are time-honored traditions with their historical roots in religious rituals (Averbuch, 1995; Schnell, 1999). However, the sacred and divine elements are not immutable. Human worship or fear of gods, which stems from harvests or unexplainable events, gradually get weakened by understanding the laws of nature. As a result, festivals have become more secular or “profane” events. To this end, event studies may provide a better definition, that festivals are “themed, public celebrations” (Getz, 1991; Getz and Page, 2016). This approach is considered to be the most practical one for festival analysis (UNESCO, 2009). There are three discourses in this field: “a classical discourse” which focuses on the meanings and functions of festivals through their social and cultural impacts; “an instrumental discourse” which implies that festivals are employed as tools in economic growth; and “an event management discourse” which refers to the marketing and management aspect of festivals (Getz, 2010; Duffy and Mair, 2018).

### **2.1.2 Festival tourism**

Simply put, festival tourism means a trip to experience a festival. Festival is the main purpose of the trip. To date, many festivals, mostly urban festivals, are becoming tourism-oriented events.

Festivals are unique tourism resources. The research on why people are participating in festivals is an important socio-psychological study, which covers a variety of fields, and the results show a common motivation in all groups of participants (Quinn, 2009; Li, Huang and Cai, 2009). For tourists, festival tourism can provide an unusual time and experience beyond their mundane daily life (Getz, 1991). Because festivals are not only a way of entertainment and leisure, but also provide a new way to get in touch with cultures, establish social interactions, and understand the world (Buch, Milne and Dickson, 2011; Ma and Lew, 2012; Cudny, 2013). They offer a deeper meanings in life, through creating memories and celebrating the beauty of human existence (Pan and Huan, 2013).

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<sup>4</sup> holy: dedicated or consecrated to God or a religious purpose; sacred.

Festival tourism belongs to the research scope of tourism management and event management, focusing on leisure participation, community development, sociology, tourism management, and other aspects (Getz, 2008). Research in this field began to increase in the 1990s, and has been proposed to be a separate type of tourism in academia in recent years (Getz, 2008; Cudny, 2013).

Festival tourism brings in social and cultural impacts on the festival location and its local community (Arcodia and Whitford, 2006). On the one hand, it can increase regional values and traditions and encourage cultural conservation (Getz, 1991). In particular, concerning cultural heritage, festival tourism can connect people with a particular location and its culture. It will gather people's interest and raise awareness of protection (Cudny, 2013). It will also strengthen the local community's sense of identity and belongings by cultivating their own cultural heritage (Ma and Lew, 2012; Cudny, 2013). On the other hand, it functions as a means of maintaining networks among the local residents. Because festivals reveal who they are and their value (Falassi, 1987). They are proud to share their community and culture (Wazaki, 1976). Thus, they become more united to create a positive image.

"A festival is cultural, but its aim is economic" (Quinn, 2009). The economic impacts of festival tourism should be viewed from both positive and negative aspects. Festivals attract tourists to the local area, and their consumption of accommodation, restaurants, and souvenirs will increase employment and boost the local economy (Sullivan and Jackson, 2002; Arcodia and Whitford, 2006; Ma and Lew, 2012; Pan and Huan, 2013). Although the direct economic contributions are only related to clothing, food, housing, and transportation, in the long run, festivals will contribute to sustainable development (Getz, 1991; Sullivan and Jackson, 2002). This way, festival tourism serves as a tool for community revitalization. However, it does not mean that the local community can be over-reliant on the economic benefits of festival tourism to get out of financial difficulties (Bouhdiba, 1981). The commercialization of cultural resources will lead to a power shift from the local community to tourists. Over dependency on tourists will cause imbalances in the local economy, seasonal or between different industries. And if tourists stop coming, it will threaten the economic vitality of the community and even cause a serious economic crisis.

From a marketing point of view, in the tourism industry, festivals are used to attract tourists, enhance the image of the destination and build city brand (Quinn, 2009; Getz, 2010).

But products must meet the needs of customers. As festivals are tourism commodities, they must satisfy the needs and wants of tourists (Getz, 1991; Pan and Huan, 2013). Festival market is highly competitive. Various new festivals continue to emerge every day. This situation requires festival organizers to constantly make adjustments to suit tourists' expectations (Li et al., 2009). It can be very challenging to maintain the balance between the local community and tourists, especially when festival tourism brings significant economic benefits. Festival organizers are inclined to prioritize tourists, causing negative impacts, including inflated prices, environmental problems and disturbing community livelihood (Arcodia and Whitford, 2006).

### **2.1.3 Concern of authenticity**

This choice of tourists over the local community often leads to excessive commercialization of festivals, which is called touristification (Getz, 2010). Through touristification, festivals are commodified to satisfy tourists (Cudny, 2013). Regarding the nature of festivals, there is a debate between Constructivism and Essentialism (Wang, 1999; Kato, 2018). Essentialism emphasizes the authenticity of the culture. It believes that tradition must be preserved intact as in a certain historical period. It advocates the preservation of the original festivals' features because authenticity is the most important reason for tourists to see a festival. However, Constructivism insists nothing is absolute, static or immutable. Festivals should change along with the development of society and culture. That transformation, adjustment, and creativity are inevitable. Correspondingly Constructivism supports the modification of a festival to meet market demands and to adapt changes in tourism.

Regardless of the outcome of this controversy between Constructivism and Essentialism, the impact of tourism on festival's origin (tradition) is indisputable. However, tourism should not take all the blame. It is simply a catalyst, speeding up the process in historical development (Bouhdiba, 1981). Tradition is something that has been passed down from generation to generation, and something that contains value and should be preserved. The consciousness of tradition is realized along with people's perception of change (Graburn, 2001). From the perspective of historical development, traditions are constantly being created, and we are now creating new ones for the future. It is the past that needs to be saved and maintained. "If traditions were threatened, they might be invented, collected, labeled, celebrated,

or museumized” (Graburn, 2001). Therefore, whenever discussing tradition, a timeframe and objective should be clarified as traditions differ for whom and when.

People complain that festivals, which used to be for local residents, are becoming a show for tourists. This problem concerns both local residents and tourists. If local residents prefer the significant benefits of commercialized festivals, authenticity becomes less important. They may select, modify, or transform tradition into something easy to perform for profit (Quinn, 2009). Consequently, it will lose the original meaning and make people feel less interested in culture (Quinn, 2009). Therefore, authenticity is not changed by tourists, but by its local residents. And the survival of the tradition depends on its own people (Getz, 1991). Whether festival tourism is a blessing or blight to tradition depends on the choice of the local community (Stansfield, 1975).

For tourists, authenticity is about toured objects that attracted them to visit and the experiences during the trip (Wang, 1999). Tourists have higher expectations and criticism of authenticity when it comes to festivals with a long history (Ma and Lew, 2012). But traditional festivals are not just about form and rituals, they are also about the symbolic meanings and importance to society at that time. In addition to leisure and entertainment, tourists are attracted to experiences and cultural connotations of the destinations. Festival tourism should generate nostalgic feelings that are connected to the local culture even through perceived authenticity (Chhabra, Healy and Sills, 2003). Only in this way can the true cultural value of the festival be truly realized.

## **2.2 Festival stakeholders**

### **2.2.1 The Stakeholder Theory**

The definition of stakeholders was first proposed by Freeman (1984) as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm’s objectives” (Getz, Andersson and Larson, 2007; Andersson and Getz, 2008; Karlsen and Nordström, 2009; Capriello and Rotherham, 2011; Todd, Leask and Ensor, 2017). The Stakeholder Theory is derived from models in the economic and business fields (Karlsen and Nordström, 2009). Companies are seen as organizations affected by many stakeholders whose requirements and agenda are not always consistent, sometimes even conflicting (Presenza and Iocca, 2012). Companies

must balance the conflicts of all stakeholders because the relationship between stakeholders is vital to their sustainable development (Van Niekerk and Getz, 2016).

Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997) highlight three key concepts, namely power, legitimacy, and urgency (Getz et al., 2007; Andersson and Getz, 2008; Capriello and Rotherham, 2011; Presenza and Iocca, 2012; Todd et al., 2017; Adongo and Kim, 2018). Power is the ability of one party over the other, which embodies the relationship between stakeholders. The source of power may be material or financial resources, symbolic resources, and authority (Todd et al., 2017; Adongo and Kim, 2018). The relevant literature indicates that the status of stakeholders is not equal, and we should prioritize the most powerful stakeholders in our analysis (Presenza and Iocca, 2012; Adongo and Kim, 2018). Legitimacy refers to “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Getz et al., 2007; Adongo and Kim, 2018), while urgency forces on the ability to “call for immediate attention” (Getz et al., 2007; Todd et al., 2017).

Stakeholders can be divided into two categories: primary and secondary. Primary stakeholders (e.g., employees, volunteers, and sponsors) are those on whom the organization is dependent and those whose participation is critical to the success or survival of the organization (Presenza and Iocca, 2012; Todd et al., 2017). Secondary stakeholders contain the host community, government, tourism organizations (Presenza and Iocca, 2012). Furthermore, Getz et al. (2007) proposed another classification in festival networks, besides festival organizations, there are also facilitators, suppliers, regulators, co-producers, allies, and collaborators. Finally, a more diverse analysis by function is owners; customers; competitor media; employees; suppliers; governments; and local community organizations (Todd et al., 2017).

The Stakeholder Theory has been widely used in tourism and festival research (Van Niekerk and Getz, 2016). Because festivals can be managed as events, and their survival depends on the management and interaction of a series of stakeholders (Getz and Andersson, 2009; Karlsen and Nordström, 2009; Presenza and Iocca, 2012; Merinero-Rodríguez and Pulido-Fernández, 2016; Adongo and Kim, 2018). According to Getz (2008), “Festival stakeholders are identified as those individuals who have a stake in the festival and its outcomes and who influence or are influenced by it”. In literature, stakeholders are classified into multiple categories. Like the classification of stakeholders in the business, they can also be divided

into primary (such as employees, volunteers, tourists, suppliers, sponsors) and secondary (such as local residents, government, media) stakeholders (Getz et al., 2007). In addition, Van Niekerk and Getz (2016) identified 8 universal groups and 45 unique subgroups. Category and numbers of stakeholders, their roles, and their functions vary from different festivals. One stakeholder may have multiple roles at the same time, and roles are constantly changing over time (Getz, et al., 2007; Karlsen and Nordström, 2009).

Stakeholders with various interests and agendas have different positions of power in the festival network. Their interactions are not always harmonious and involve conflicts (Getz et al., 2007; Adongo and Kim, 2018). For instance, during the touristification of traditional festivals, organizers may adjust or change the time of the program if tradition is not convenient for tourists; or organizers may invite more participants for profit by ignoring the strict regulations by tradition. This pursuit of commercialized interests results in damaging the authenticity of the festival culture and history. For stakeholders, it is necessary to strengthen their power position in the network to realize their interests. The festival represents the cooperation between different stakeholders based on their utilitarian interests (Larson, 2009). Their relationship should be a positive-sum game<sup>5</sup>. Cooperation will not only reduce costs but also make it possible to propose innovative policies (Arambasa, 2016). In other words, the stakeholders of festivals both compete for their interests and work together to reduce conflicts. The result of their interaction creates festivals as products to attract tourists (Presenza and Iocca, 2012).

The festival stakeholders model focuses on the roles and functions of stakeholders and their relationship, which can help organizers to identify existing or latent stakeholders, satisfy their expectations and needs, to manage better festival events (Van Niekerk and Getz, 2016; Merinero-Rodríguez and Pulido-Fernández, 2016; Todd et al., 2017). The power of festival stakeholders is not equal. Stakeholders with more power and legitimacy often influence the commercialization and development of the festival (Presenza and Iocca, 2012). This structure will hinder or enhance the collaboration between them, thereby affecting the festival sustainability (Song, Xing and Chathoth, 2015; Adongo and Kim, 2018).

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<sup>5</sup> Positive-sum: relating to a situation in which each of two sides gets an advantage.  
See in <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/positive-sum>



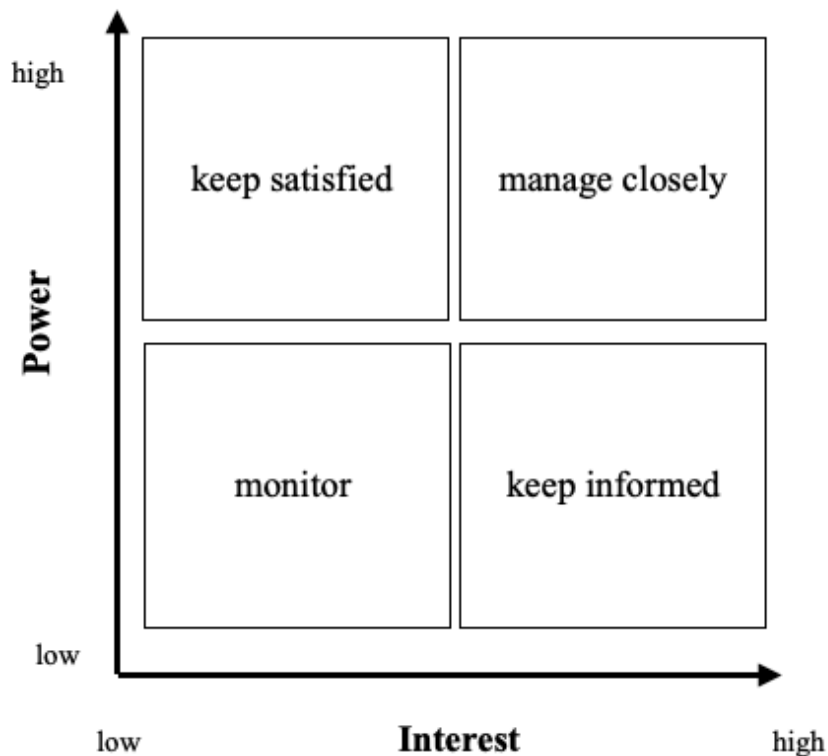


Figure 1: Stakeholder power and interest matrix for festival management

There are many models to analyze festival stakeholders demonstrated in the literature of the stakeholder theory's application (Michopoulou and Wallace, 2019). This thesis adopted the power and interest approach<sup>6</sup> (Figure 1) to prioritize festival stakeholders and find out the supporting or opposing group for festival management. In this matrix, stakeholders who have high power and high interest tend to control the festival. The high-power-less-interest stakeholders are considered as potential threats, whereas the low-power-high-interest ones are recognized as potential collaborators. Interest is not limited to economic benefits, because festivals contain economic, social, personal, and symbolic dimensions (Getz and Page, 2016).

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<sup>6</sup> Stakeholder power and interest matrix for festival management adapted from: Mendelow, A.L. (1981) Environmental Scanning - The Impact of the Stakeholder Concept. Available from [https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM\\_07.htm](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM_07.htm) Also, Van Niekerk, M. (2016) The Applicability and Usefulness of the Stakeholder Strategy Matrix for Festival Management. *Event Management*, 20, pp. 165-179. Available from <http://dx.doi.org/10.3727/152599516X14610017108666>

### **2.2.2 Social Exchange Theory (SET)**

Social exchange theory is generated from human behavior based on give-and-take exchange, which was proposed by American sociologist George Homans in “Social Behavior as Exchange” in 1958 (Emerson, 1976). The cost-benefit model forms the basis of human relationships. In other words, in a relationship people will pay a cost and expect to be rewarded in return. This exchange is not limited to economic benefits but also involved social and cultural content (Adongo, Kim, and Elliot, 2019). In the tourism setting, SET is particularly useful to explain residents’ viewpoints and support for festival tourism (Alonso and Bressan, 2013; Li and Wan, 2017; Adongo et al, 2019). SET believes residents appear supportive of the festival when they can benefit from it without cost. Conversely, when residents receive no benefits while paying the cost, they will have negative comments or even commit sabotage to the festival. When the festival is considered beneficial to community development, residents will show a higher level of support, meaning they may be irrationally and emotionally willing to pay a cost without expecting equal or any return (Getz, 2012; Alonso and Bressan, 2013; Song et al, 2015).

Residents’ positive attitude towards festival tourism stems from the employment created by tourism development (Weaver and Lawton, 2013). The more residents rely on the tourism industry, the more positive they are towards festival tourism. However, economic impacts alone cannot fully explain residents’ perspectives towards festival tourism (Harrill, 2004). In fact, festivals that rely solely on tourism are more likely to trigger negative feelings of residents. For example, residents believe that tourists cause traffic congestion, environmental pollution, high housing prices, and increasing living costs. Besides economic benefits, residents’ support for festival tourism also shows in social and cultural aspects. For residents, festivals are “home in their hearts” (Matsudaira, 2001). Festivals can enhance their community pride, generate their sense of identity, and sense of belonging (Sullivan and Jackson, 2002; Yolal, Gursoy, Uysal, Kim and Karacaog˘lu, 2016). Festivals create opportunities for residents to share their culture and community with tourists. Through interactive communication with tourists, they can gain a deeper understanding of the charm of their own culture and increase their awareness of cultural protection (Liu, Lin, Wang and Chen, 2019). In addition, festivals sometimes are an expression of residents’ voices, which function as an instrument to reveal

their demands that provides a temporary immunity for their behavior during the festival chaos (Schnell, 1999).

### **3. Methodology**

Since the Edo period, there are approximately more than 300,000 traditional festivals in Japan. It is easier to choose a representative festival as an entry point for its general similarity because manageable data can allow for in-deep research, including the background, causes, and effects. A case study is also identified as the most commonly used strategic approach for qualitative research among various social science fields such as sociology and anthropology. I intend to examine the concept of festival tourism from a single case and explore the reasons behind the phenomenon. The Sendai Tanabata Festival is chosen as a case study, not only for my interest but also for the numerous relevant data obtained during my stay in Japan. Moreover, I have a local friend who has lived in Sendai for more than 20 years, making it easier to have interviews and follow-ups.

Previous research shows that ethnography that collects data from informant interviews and participant observations and examines the deep meaning of festivals from specific locations is the most commonly used method in festival research (UNESCO, 2009). However, it requires significant amount of time, financial and human resources. In addition, the festival is only held once a year and lasts for three days. I originally planned to visit twice in 2019 and 2020, but unfortunately, it was canceled in 2020 due to the COVID-19<sup>7</sup> pandemic. Therefore the historical discourse is adopted to focus on the dynamics of events change over time. This methodology provides the event with a time frame with its social and economic environment. It is important because any event without its background can hardly be justified for its authenticity and development. A “snapshot picture” will fail to capture the underlying reality of the situation (Sofield, Mei and Li, 1998).

#### **3.1 Data collection and evaluation**

For qualitative research, combining multiple techniques for collecting data in a case study will strengthen and confirm the results (Mohd, 2008). The sources of data for this thesis include

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<sup>7</sup> For more information on COVID-19: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019> ; on the state of emergency: [https://corona.go.jp/news/news\\_20200421\\_70.html](https://corona.go.jp/news/news_20200421_70.html)

the research reports of Sendai City Museum of History and Folklore, newspaper archive data of *Kahoku Shimpō* (2011-2018), *Kahoku Shimpō* online news (April to August 2020), informal interview with a local informant, participate observation of fieldwork, and secondary sources.

The most important source of data for this thesis is from the local newspaper *Kahoku Shimpō*, which was first published in 1847 and mainly covers the news in Miyagi prefecture in Japan. Its headquarters is in Sendai city, so the information including news and images about the Sendai Tanabata Festival is sufficient in detail. However, its database network service started in 1991. There are two ways to get older data: using a dedicated computer in the *Kahoku Shimpō* building or manually searching page by page through microfilm. I visited the *Kahoku Shimpō* publishing in Sendai and found out it would not work out because the searching system was not adequate for research purpose. For example, it couldn't recognize the entry difference of letters between “七夕(Tanabata)” and “セ タ(se ta)”. Moreover, making a physical copy of any information required an application and a long process for approval.

Therefore, I turned to microfilm in the National Diet Library instead. As the research report has already organized newspaper data until the 1980s, I focused on relevant news from 1 to 9 August in the year 2011 to 2018 in order to ensure the comprehensiveness of the information. I transcribe and code<sup>8</sup> as I collected the data to avoid too much data or missing out the relevant details. Information from 2019 was collected through newspapers and fieldwork. Considering the 2020 festivals were all held virtually, the relevant information was collected on the *Kahoku Shimpō* website. While selecting data, I focused on from 1946 since it is suggested as the model for the festival today (Anami, 2009). I also included its history briefly as background information to get a whole picture.

Between 5 to 9 August in 2019, I visited the Sendai Tanabata Festival for the first time. I stayed 5 min away from the main shopping streets. I participated as a tourist in most festival events and observed carefully while trying to capture every detail of the festival. I also visited the Sendai City Museum of History and Folklore and found out a large amount of

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<sup>8</sup> On how to identify stakeholders, my earlier research “*A Literature Review on Analysing Festivals Through A Perspective of Stakeholders*” (submitted for JAP4010 Theory and Method in the Study of Modern Japan, Autumn 2018) has explored how to identify, categorize and examine festival stakeholders through a relevant literature review providing a theoretical ground on stakeholders' perspective for the study of Sendai Tanabata Festival.

useful data. On the second day of the festival, I was guided by my local friend to map all the decorations in the main shopping streets and participate in the festival events. With a general inquiry direction beforehand, the informal interview had no decided specific questions. The whole process was a natural flow of approachable conversation where the interviewee was free to talk about all the relevant content. I took notes and photos and sometimes made further inquiries afterwards to get more in-depth information as well as to judge its reliability, accuracy, and relevance. This approach provided enough space with open questions and avoids controlled conversation (Gray, 2009). The interview contributed to exclude some infeasible assumptions and to gain inspirations.

### **3.2 Limitations**

A single case study approach can be criticized for its lack of generalizability and applicability. Although it is not guaranteed that any research result can be stated as a characteristic for all festivals, I focus on the phenomena existing in this case. If applicable, further research can consider a comparative study.

Newspaper articles are subjective because news is selective and edited. The content of a newspaper cannot be equated with history. But in this case, newspaper data offers the most accurate facts that happened during the festival. To avoid any bias, the only reliable approach so far is for the author to be aware of the limitations and overcome the temptation of trusting everything directly from the newspaper (Ortiz, Myers, Walls and Diaz, 2005). Therefore, I also include different types of data to avoid collecting a one-sided source (Bennet, 2004).

As there is no such thing as a transparent observer, it is impossible to remain fully neutral, objective, and distant during the fieldwork (Wheeldon and Ahlberg, 2012). I read a few guidebooks on how to conduct fieldwork beforehand and noted the importance of reflexivity. I tried to reduce subjective factors, and critically examined how to shape the research, and to report the findings (Charmaz, 2006) in order not to tamper with information or implant biased views that could potentially affect the research results.

## Chapter II *Matsuri*: from traditional festival to tourist event

Nowadays events with name “*matsuri*” can be seen everywhere in Japan: seasonal festivals all year-round, religious ceremonies in shrines and temples, discount sales in department stores, various exhibitions, public celebrations, etc. As to what *matsuri* is, many scholars have expressed various opinions from different research fields. Before discussing the focus of *matsuri*, it is necessary to first clarify its original nature, characteristics, and functions of traditional *matsuri*, and then examine its impact of urbanization and concepts in a wider sense nowadays.

### 1. The nature of *matsuri*

The Japanese word *matsuri* (祭り) is often translated as “festival” or “divine worship” in English. It comes from the verb *matsuru* (まつる), meaning “to serve, to take care of, to attend to, or to entertain” (Kitagawa, 1987, cited by Averbuch, 1995). The objects of the action are *kami* (神, the divine Gods). *Kami* is invited as honored guests to this noble feast. They are well served and entertained so that they will protect the well-being of humans as guardian deities and renew the contract (Matsudaira, 1977). In this sense, *matsuri* appears as a religious ritual (Yanagawa, 1988). It takes place at a specific time and place. It is a serious activity that worshipping *kami* is the whole purpose. *Kami* is welcomed, served, and sent off by the believers<sup>9</sup>. Those who participate in *matsuri* enjoy the privilege of having good luck and realizing their wishes (Anami, 1997). As long as they cater to *kami*’s pleasure, they will be blessed. At the same time, they have to bear the responsibility to carry on holding *matsuri* and continue the worship (Anami, 1997).

### 2. The characteristics of *matsuri*

The religious nature of *matsuri* implies formality (Yanagawa, 1988; Gilday, 1990). Every aspect of the ritual has strict regulations that one has to follow. If *kami* is offended, not only will

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<sup>9</sup> Sonoda (1975) states traditional *matsuri* includes 5 stages of ritual actions: purification, invocation, offering, participation, and seeing off. It also contains 5 steps of festivity: sacralization, setting in motion, lively motion, animation, and standing still. Sonoda, M. (1975) The Traditional Festival in Urban Society. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 2(2/3), pp.103-136.

humans' wishes not come true, they will also be punished. In the era of agriculture civilization, people basically lived at the mercy of the weather<sup>10</sup>. *Kami* were believed to control the weather as well as holding the supernatural power to influence birth, age, illness, and death (Matsudaira, 1977; Komatsu, 1997). As the power and the existence of *kami* is rarely questioned, making *kami* happy and satisfied was the most important objective. Everyone has to be cautious and follow the rules strictly. Fortunately, *kami*'s preferences appeared much easier to understand than the unpredictable weather. Just like humans, *kami* also has emotions and desires. They are said to be fond of delicious food, valuable gifts, beautiful dance and music, etc. These human features of *kami* bring out the informal side of *matsuri*, which includes the following aspects.

*Matsuri* is festive and joyful. During *matsuri*, believers carry the *mikoshi* (神輿, a sacred palanquin serving as a portable *Shintō* shrine) is around town while chanting *wasshoi* (わっしょい, heave-ho, heave, heave-ho!) in group to keep the same pace and announce the presence of *kami*. *Matsuri* is filled with the sound of drums, flutes, laughs, and shouts; the colorful floats and lively crowds; the aroma of *sake* (酒, Japanese alcoholic drink made from fermented rice) and the taste of delicacies, etc. Every bit of *matsuri* stimulates all kinds of sensory, which enabling its participants' body and mind to reach a religious state, or at least an extremely excitement (Yanagawa, 1988). The keyword is *asobi* (遊び, to play) (Averbuch, 1995). Either to *kami* or human, having fun appears to be the primary reason. Play is also a way of disguise. It allows people to escape from the routine and ordinary lives, to become playful like children again or even take on a different persona. It is the freedom and excitement that are so enjoyable that attracting people to participate (Sonoda, 1990).

*Matsuri* is orderly chaos. It refers to a phenomenon called *matsuri sawagi* (騒ぎ, festival uproar) (Schnell, 1999). During festival periods, people will feel free from their daily restraints and believe that they can temporarily ignore the rules and express their voice. They believe that what happens in *matsuri* is an act of *kami* which cannot be prevented. As legitimacy is provided, behaviors beyond common sense and even violence are given a temporary

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<sup>10</sup> Note that animal husbandry is a branch of agriculture. Livestock are also dependent upon the weather for their comfort and food supplies.

immunity. For example, during the drum ritual in the *Furukawa Matsuri*<sup>11</sup> (古川祭り), fights and injuries are to be expected. Whether it is the participants of the intense activity or the tourists observing from a safe distance, they must be responsible for their own safety (Schnell, 1995). *Sake* is another cause of chaos. Drunkenness is a perfect cover and excuse for what happens in a *matsuri*. During festivals, people are obliged to tolerate and accept all kinds of behavior.

Despite such orderly chaos, *matsuri* will not trigger any change in the social order. Every detail of *matsuri* is predesigned and requires strict implementation (Sonoda, 1990). The act of serving and obeying *kami* is more than religious, as it is also about politics and economy (Yanagita, 1980, cited by Komatsu, 1993). *Matsuri* is the maintenance of the social system that consolidates the inherent order. No matter how chaotic a *matsuri* can be, life will return to normal at the end. The privileged class has learned how to “communicate”, “negotiate”, and even “control” *kami* (Matsudaira, 1977; Gilday, 1990). They perform as agents of *kami* and convey the message to control people’s behavior.

During the *Meiji* era (1868-1912), the central government used “State Shinto<sup>12</sup>” to establish its authority. *Matsuri*, as the traditional religious rituals, gained administrative functions. Loyalty to the Emperor equaled obedience to *kami* (Schnell, 1995). As Gilday (1990) argued that *matsuri* is a game of “power play through ritual fabrication”. It is about obedience to the traditional order and the privileged class, a particular structure of chaos within the social order.

*Matsuri* is a collective activity (Sonoda, 1990). It is a reaffirmation and confirmation of group values, systems, and methods within its members (Matsudaira, 1977; Sonoda, 1990).

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<sup>11</sup> *Furukawa Matsuri* is an annual *Shintō* shrine festival in *Hida* region of central *Honshu*, Japan (Schnell, 1995). For more information <https://www.hida-kankou.jp/event/1313/>.

<sup>12</sup> State Shinto: (*Kokka Shintō* 国家神道). According to Digital *Daijise* (デジタル大辞泉), it was created by the *Meiji* Government by linking Shrine *Shintō* and Imperial *Shintō*. From a national perspective, *Shintō* as a religion was the center of national spirit. The state adopted administrative measures to protect and supervise, and the people were obliged to worship the emperor and believe in shrines. After World War II, it was dismantled by the command of the occupation army. For more information: Shimazono, S. (2005) State *Shintō* and the religious structure of modern Japan. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 73(4), pp. 1077-1098. Available from <https://academic.oup.com/jaar/article/73/4/1077/761785>.



On the one hand, it is utilitarian<sup>13</sup> and dedicated to meeting the needs of the collective (Matsudaira, 1977). On the other hand, it is selfish<sup>14</sup> and an expression of individual desire. If believing in *kami* is only based on *kami*'s ability to satisfy human desires (Matsudaira, 1977; Komatsu, 1997), it is natural to agree that *matsuri* is a fabrication (Gilday, 1990), by considering its ownership and beneficiary. Nevertheless, is it fair to speculate on the thoughts of stakeholders or faithful believers from the perspective of onlookers?

To most Japanese people, “*matsuri ha kokoro no furusato*” (祭りは心のふるさと, *matsuri* is the home in one's heart) (Sonoda, 1990; Gilday, 1990). It is the memory of childhood, the nostalgia of mind, the feeling of belonging somewhere (Sonoda, 1990). Traditional *matsuri* was closely integrated with agriculture. It was deeply related to changes in nature and seasons. With the improvement of productivity and understanding of nature, *matsuri* has gradually become a formality, a symbolic and commemorative ceremony (Sonoda, 1990). It creates a specific space and time at heart to rest the mind from the busy daily life. As *furusato* (ふるさと, hometown) is considered as a place where nature and humans find warm harmony, *matsuri* is a retreat that one can relax and recharge humanity (Sonoda, 1990).

### 3. The functions of *matsuri*

Based on these characteristics, *matsuri* also manifests multiple functions. Many researchers agree that *matsuri* is a communal ritual performance with extensive contents in a religious sense (Gilday, 1990; Averbuch, 1995; Schnell, 1999; Matsudaira, 2001; Kato, 2018). Also, in the analysis of specific cases, different interpretations have been presented. For example, Schnell (1999) provides an exceptional view of its instrumental role in society. In his case study of the *Furukawa Matsuri*, he claims *matsuri* is a self-fulfilling expression of local values, especially social discontent, based on ritual is a social act. It creates opportunities for revealing one's purposes and agendas under the disguise of interaction with the supernatural

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<sup>13</sup> Utilitarianism is a concept of moral philosophy, advocated by philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham, referring to the greatest happiness of the greatest number, the greatest number represent the interests of the collective.

<sup>14</sup> Here refers to selfishness in a broad sense, where selfishness is a neutral term, based on the behaviors and responses to personal interests. Ayn Rand argued in “*The Virtue of Selfishness*” that people are concerned with their interests is the essence of moral survival. In a narrow sense, selfishness is to prioritize their desires at the expense of others.

entity of *kami*. Thus, *Matsuri* functions as a public forum for its participants to express themselves.

In the case of the *Hidari Daimonji* (左大文字), Wazaki (1976) argues the symbolic meaning of *matsuri* reconfirm the identity and further unite and revive the community as a whole. As a tradition, *matsuri*'s central role is to maintain the internal network of the community. People who celebrate a *matsuri* is honoring one's own community culture. Participants will be reminded of their sense of identity, encouraged unconsciously through shared ritual activities (Matsudaira, 2001).

Shrine →village (*mura*, 村)→urbanization→modernization  
ritual festivals→urban festival →touristy festival  
religious purpose → secular affairs

Figure 2: The development of *matsuri*

Nevertheless, as a social and historical phenomenon, the functions of *matsuri* are constantly subject to change (Matsudaira, 2001; Kato, 2018; Foster and Porcu, 2020). In general, *matsuri* has gone through a process of rural development and proceeded to urbanization and modernization (Figure 2). In this process, the original religious significance has been gradually weakened. Communities also replaced the power of discourse from *Shintō* shrines. *Matsuri*, as a reflection of people's change in lifestyles over time, begins to develop the economic value as a cultural resource. Moreover, the disintegration of the original social structure in communities also caused acceleration of the evolution of *matsuri* towards festival tourism (Kato, 2018).

## 4. *Matsuri* in urbanization

### 4.1 The blurred boundary

Many Japanese scholars emphasize that *matsuri* is fundamentally different from *events*<sup>15</sup> due to the feature of *kami* (Matsudaira, 1980; Sonoda, 1990; Dejima, 1997; Komatsu, 1997). Indeed, with the advancement of science and technology, agriculture has developed exceedingly. Festivals that were deeply related to the agricultural cycle in the countryside, whether praying for rain in the spring or a harvest in the autumn, become less dependent on *kami*. This indicates that the spiritual foundation that supported *matsuri* had weakened. As for people in the cities, who were engaged in the secondary and tertiary industries, they cared more about health, especially in the summer season when epidemics were high (Anami, 1986). Thus summer festivals, as a way of disease prevention are more common in cities. Residents went back to their hometown for *matsuri* and pray for a good harvest was no more than a ritual form (Kurata and Inada, 2016) or for other purposes such as *goryōe* (御霊会<sup>16</sup>). Matsudaira (1980) explains that the form of *matsuri* changes according to life and society. Today's *matsuri* may have nothing to do with *kami* because people's focuses have changed to diverse personal interests and needs. The boundary between original *matsuri* and nowadays events are getting blurred caused by urbanization. *Matsuri* has gone beyond the scope of shrine festivals and includes all kinds of public events that appear to be festive and fun.

### 4.2 The emergence of urban *matsuri* and new features

Yamaguchi (2005) divided the post-war Japanese *matsuri* into four types: from 1945 to 1955, traditional festivals were revived in the cities after the war in order to attract tourists and promote the local economy<sup>17</sup>. During the period of high-speed economic growth from 1955 to 1973, festivals were either diminished or interrupted due to population migration from rural areas to cities. From 1973 to 1987, people returned to *matsuri* for traditional culture and nos-

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<sup>15</sup> *Events* (in plural and italics) refers to the Japanese word “イベント *ibento*”. In this thesis, the English word event in event study and event tourism will be in singular and regular form.

<sup>16</sup> Since the Heian period, *goryōe* has been held to calm and appease evil gods and the spirits of the dead. Shogakukan Japanese Dictionary.

<sup>17</sup> The Sendai Tanabata Festival belongs to this type.

talgia. After 1987, *matsuri* was carried out as a tool for economic revitalization and regional development.

Urbanization makes *matsuri* to become more daily. In Japanese folklore studies, there are two concepts: *hare* (ハレ) and *ke* (ケ). *Ke* refers to daily life. *Hare* is the opposite of *ke*, referring to a non-daily space of time that can make one both nervous and excited (Komatsu, 1997; Yamaguchi, 2005). *Matsuri* is typical of *hare* where people dress up, eat special food, and hold special events for this extraordinary experience (Komatsu, 1997). It is a break from the tension of a busy life on the farm. As living standards have improved, this exceptional experience became rather a choice of lifestyle. It is easy to find theme parks and shopping malls with a festive atmosphere every day almost everywhere. Thus, *hare* became part of daily life.

*Matsuri* become a commodity mainly because its outstanding economic effects generated by festival tourism. The consumption of tourists, such as food, hotels, transportation, has brought enormous economic benefits. Various activities under the name of tradition also stimulate the desire to purchase. Thus, the cultural value of *matsuri* is easily used to attract people and revitalizes local economy, especially in places with economic recession and population loss (Komatsu, 1997; Yamada, 2016). In the 1980s, under the influence of the national policy to promote localization, *furusato* became an important selling point in tourism (Yasui, 1997). *Matsuri*, as a traditional culture born from the *furusato*, can create the ideal nostalgic memories and carry the responsibility of inheriting local culture (Creighton, 1997). It became a consensus that continuation of *matsuri* equals to the protection of traditional culture. The Japanese government attached great importance to the cultural significance of *matsuri* and had listed many *matsuri* as intangible cultural property (無形文化財, *mukei bunkazai*<sup>18</sup>) or intangible cultural heritage (無形文化遺産, *mukei bunka isan*<sup>19</sup>) (Teeuwen, 2020). The media also helped plant the same idea into the public minds.

### 4.3 The collapse of the basic structure

The process of urbanization has also destroyed the basic structure of original *matsuri*. Social development has increased the cost of living, and the economic conditions of residents have

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<sup>18</sup> For more information

[https://www.bunka.go.jp/english/policy/cultural\\_properties/introduction/intangible/](https://www.bunka.go.jp/english/policy/cultural_properties/introduction/intangible/).

<sup>19</sup> For more information [https://www.bunka.go.jp/english/report/publication/pdf/pamphlet\\_en\\_05.pdf](https://www.bunka.go.jp/english/report/publication/pdf/pamphlet_en_05.pdf).

become so severe that they have to look for jobs in cities. This separation of residence and workplace leads to a dramatic loss in local population (Komatsu, 1997; Matsudaira, 1980). In rural Japan, it is not uncommon to find sparsely populated villages and towns. Furthermore, the fertility decline and aging population have also caused a decrease in *matsuri*'s successors and the lack of financial fundings (Matsudaira, 1977). The tradition of *matsuri* that deeply related to residents built on blood hood and family hood is becoming ever more challenging to maintain (Sonoda, 1975). In the end, it may be simplified or discontinued. The development of urbanization has accelerated such sacrifice of local *matsuri* (Komatsu, 1997).

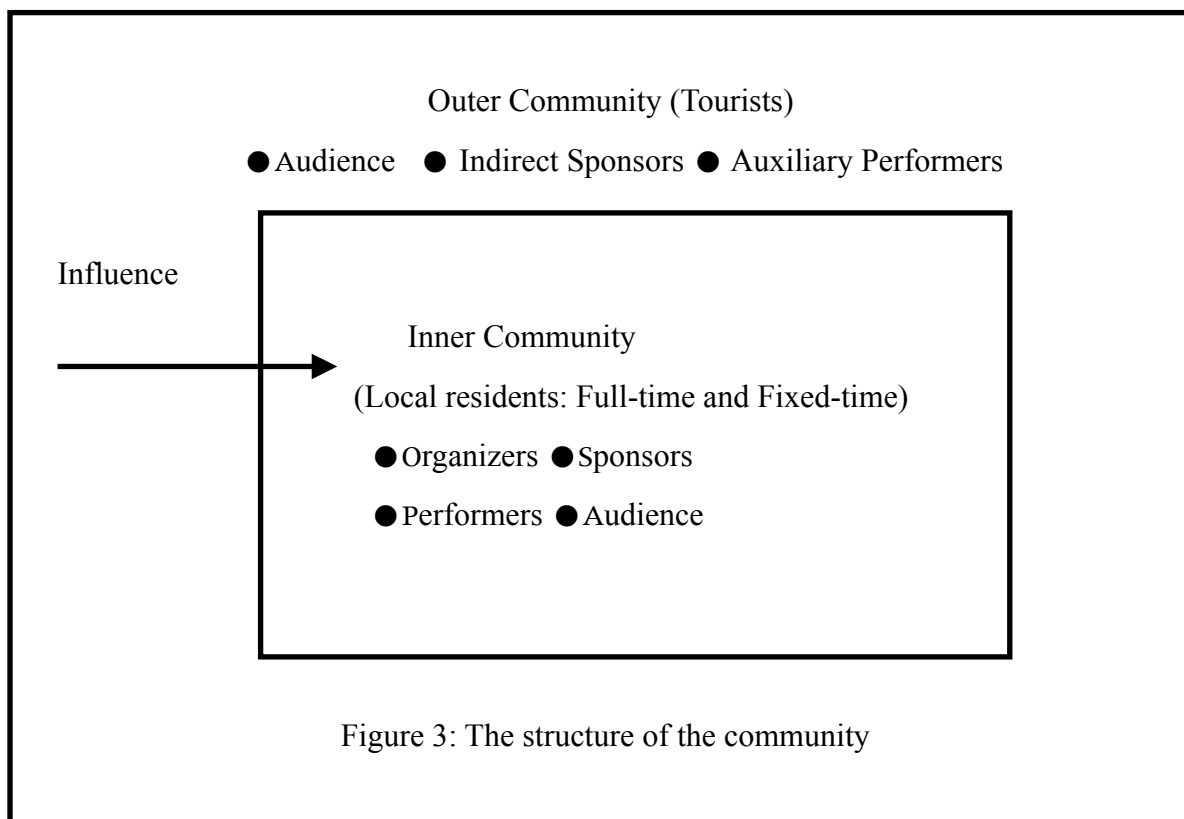


Figure 3: The structure of the community

Yanagita (1980) pointed out an important phenomenon of *matsuri* that it transformed from a narrow sense of worshiping *kami* into *sairei* (祭礼, display) since medieval Japan. *Matsuri*, which used to be hold by its residents directed towards their gods, was getting more and more attention from non-resident onlookers. In the modern times, this phenomenon has become more significant. The range of community, which used to mean a group of people who live where the festival is celebrated, has expanded out of its original scope. Previous re-

search divided the community by the degree of participation, so residents were the main focus, while tourists were given little importance (Wazaki, 1976). This approach is dated because the definition of participation is rather vague. It does not take into account of those audience who watched the performance, but also participated in the festival. The community of *matsuri* should contain two parts: the inner and the outer (Figure 3). The inner community refers to residents who function as festival organizers, performers, and audience; while the outer part is formed by tourists who serve as audience and indirect sponsors. Tourists may also become auxiliary performers through the interaction of festival programs. Their satisfaction can influence the festival image and design as well. And when *matsuri* become tourism events, the impact of outer community could be stronger than the inner community.

Matsudaira (2001) divides the inner community into full-time and fixed-time residents. Full-time residents are able to care about what happens in their community. The people are home makers, elders, children, shop owners, etc. In place of the original household networks, new channels are developed to support *matsuri*<sup>20</sup>. At the same time, *matsuri* helps to create an opportunity for building new connections. Fixed-time residents consist of salarymen and students, who join *matsuri* only on the day. In addition, what determines the prominence of a member of the inner community has shifted from personal reputation and community service to wealth and political influence (Schnell, 1999; Matsudaira, 2001).

## 5. Summary

*Matsuri* is a combination of ritual and festivity, formal and informal. Almost every traditional started has its religious origin, but in the process of urbanization, the influence of *kami* has declined, and the original structure was destroyed. This change makes it difficult to distinguish the boundary between *matsuri* and public events, and outstanding commercial value also promotes the diversification of *matsuri*.

*Matsuri* is a comprehensive product of socio-economic culture and time. The understanding of traditional *matsuri* should be viewed from a developmental perspective. Scholars who try to distinguish events from *matsuri* only use *kami* as the criterion should always use a timeframe, as nothing is immune to social changes and tradition will never stay the same

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<sup>20</sup> In urban cities, local communities are unorganized and unrelated who rely on the neighborhood association such as *chō-kai* (町会) and *jichikai* (自治会) (Nakajima, n.d.), which are a type of service agency for the people who live in the same area.

(Robertson, 1991). More and more *matsuri* in cities has parted away from *kami* (Yanagita, 1941), chiefly sponsored by the administrative authorities (Anami, 1986). Instead of *kami*, the honored guests now are tourists who can directly bring economic benefits. They value the symbolic meaning of *matsuri*, which serves as a relaxing moment of mind and a link between the past and future (Robertson, 1997; Yamada, 2016). Thus, traditional *matsuri* is given a new purpose in tourism. Such over-reliance on tourists also comes with economic risks. *Matsuri* has to be tailored to the tastes of tourists (Eric, 1983) and may experience a sudden drop in participants or audiences due to circumstantial change, such as disasters. Because tourists are neither obligated nor composed to participate, *matsuri* needs its own people to carry on (Anami, 1997).

Next, I will use the Sendai Tanabata Festival as a case study to explain how this traditional *matsuri* has developed into a festival event in tourism under social changes.

## Chapter III The Sendai Tanabata Festival

In this chapter, I will briefly introduce the nature and development of this festival in China as a background to understand how it was adopted, developed, abolished and revived in Japan. Then I will examine the history of the Sendai Tanabata Festival through different phases focusing on stakeholders' points of view.

### 1. Legend and history: from China to Japan

Far, remote the “Cowherd”star,  
Shining white the “Weaver Girl.”  
Slender, her white hand goes out,  
Whirring and whirring she works the loom,  
All day without finishing,  
Sobbing and weeping like rain.  
The Silver River is clear and shallow.  
How far apart are they from each other?  
Clear, transparent across the water,  
Loving, loving, unable to speak.

(Nineteen Old Poems<sup>21</sup>, anonymous, translated by Sullivan (2019))

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<sup>21</sup> Original poem: tiáo tiáo qiān niú xīng 迢迢牵牛星, jiǎo jiǎo hé hàn nǚ 皎皎河汉女。xiān xiān zhuó sù shǒu 纤纤擢素手, zhá zhá nòng jī zhù 札札弄机杼。zhōng rì bú chéng zhāng 终日不成章, qì tì líng rú yǔ 泣涕零如雨。hé hàn qīng qiě qiǎn 河汉清且浅, xiàng qù fù jǐ xǔ 相去复几许? yíng yíng yī shuǐ jiān 盈盈一水间, mò mò bú dé yǔ 脉脉不得语。Nineteen Old Poems, also known as Gushi shijiushou 古诗十九首, is an anthology of 19 Chinese poems during the Han dynasty (202 BC-220 CE). Available from [https://www.academia.edu/39660835/Translation\\_of\\_Nineteen\\_Old\\_Poems\\_%E5%8F%A4%E8%A9%A9%E5%8D%81%E4%B9%9D%E9%A6%96](https://www.academia.edu/39660835/Translation_of_Nineteen_Old_Poems_%E5%8F%A4%E8%A9%A9%E5%8D%81%E4%B9%9D%E9%A6%96)



This ancient poem describes a legend about the tragic love story between the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl<sup>22</sup>, who were deeply in love but separated by the Milky way. According to the legend, the Weaver Girl was the daughter of the Goddess of Heaven and the Emperor of the Universe. As a fairy, she was good at weaving colorful clouds for the sky every day. One day she decided to escape to Earth and married to a cowherd secretly. They had a happy life together until they were found by the Goddess of Heaven, who was enraged and created a river (the Milky way) to separate them as a punishment. They were only allowed to meet each other once per year on the 7th day of the 7th lunar month. Their unwavering love moved all the magpies that flew up into heaven to build a Magpie Bridge over the river so the couple could meet on the night.

The Qixi Festival<sup>23</sup> is the celebration of this love legend. The content of the story was changed and enriched in time along with the custom and festival ritual. The celebration, originated from the Chinese Zhou Dynasty (11th century BC), is a complex religious culture that reflects the primitive farming and weaving civilization, the worship of stars, and regional culture (Meng, 2008). The origin was to pray for wealth and offsprings and give gratitude to the ancestors, reflecting the reproductive worship in the agrarian society (Zhang, 1994). Later, after incorporating the love legend of the Cowherd and Weaver Girl, the festival ritual mainly turned into Qiqiao Dian (乞巧奠, a ritual to pray for dexterity in needlework) and became popular all over the country during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE) (Liu and Li, 2007). In the evening of the festival, young Chinese women would set up a table for offerings, including wine and fruits, and try to pass five colored threads through seven needles. Meanwhile, they would gaze at the star Vega and pray for dexterous hands as an indication of a good marriage and a happy life (Ōmi, 2004; Wang, 2006).

As time went by, the legend had been revised numerously, and the original festival customs and rituals gradually faded away due to changes in values and lifestyles. In 2006, the

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<sup>22</sup> The Cowherd, represented by Star Altair, is called Niulang 牛郎 in Chinese, *Hikoboshi* 彦星 in Japanese. The Weaver Girl, represented by Star Vega, is called Zhinü 织女 in Chinese and *Orihime* 織姫 in Japanese.

<sup>23</sup> The Qixi (七夕) Festival is also known as The Double Seventh Festival, the Star Festival, the Qiqiao Festival, the Seventh of July Festival and the Tanabata Festival. 七 means seven in both Chinese and Japanese languages.

Qixi Festival was rated as the National Intangible Cultural Heritage<sup>24</sup>. The reason behind this is that this festival was no longer observed in the cities, and only existed in certain rural areas. Although the legend is still popular, the traditional customs were disappearing, and the cultural connotation was weakening. The Qixi Festival needed to be explored and protected. Another issue is since 2003 the Qixi Festival has been promoted as Chinese Valentine's Day (Zhang, 2010). This was supported by the Chinese government to counter the influence of Western culture (Song, 2009). Under the hype of businesses and the media, the original concepts such as cherishing love and hard work were replaced by commercial events. To date, people see the Qixi Festival as another occasion to buy flowers and gifts for their lovers.

Through the cultural exchange between China and Japan brought on by a large number of literati and craftsmen via the Korean peninsula since the 5th century, the love legend was introduced to Japan during the Hakuho period (645-710 CE) (Bi, 2007 and 2013b; Ōmi, 2004). The plots and narratives underwent many changes due to the geographical environment, culture, and customs (Peng, 2017). The Tanabata Festival in Japan is a synthesis of the Chinese Qixi Festival and ancient Japanese faiths (Kawada, 2016). Orikuchi (1965) pointed out the traditional belief of the Japanese *Tanabatahime* in the myth of folklore (Bi, 2013a). In ancient Japan, a specially selected virgin would set up a shed on the coast and weave cloth while waiting for the arrival of a distant god. This custom ritual was a prayer for the autumn harvest. *Tana* was a shelf hung on the river while *Tanabata* refers to the weaver girl. In the *Kojiki* (古事記, Record of Ancient Matters), the weaver girl next to the shelf (*Tanabatahime* 棚機织女) means the woman weaving by the water (*Tanabatatsume* 棚機津女) (Nozaki, 2014; Matsuzaki, 2016). The Japanese Tanabata looked similar to the Weaver Girl in Chinese legend. Therefore, the Weaver Girl from the earth in Japanese legend and one from the sky in Chinese legend were combined into one. It thrilled the Japanese poets who were deeply influenced by Chinese culture in the Nara period. They expressed their real-life scenes through the legend of Tanabata and achieved the Chinese style in the literature (Orikuchi, 1965 cited in Bi, 2013a). The *Man'yōshū* (万葉集, oldest extant collection of Japanese *Waka* 和歌) of the Nara period contains more than 130 poems about *Tanabata* (Bi, 2007; Matsuzaki, 2016). And

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<sup>24</sup> The Qixi Festival was added to the National Intangible Cultural Heritage list by the State Council of China in 2006. For more information [http://www.ihchina.cn/project\\_details/14926](http://www.ihchina.cn/project_details/14926)

eventually, the Chinese character of Qixi (七夕) was pronounced as *Tanabata* (棚機) (Matsuzaki, 2016) and the festival became a localized Chinese-infused Japanese tradition.

In the beginning, the Tanabata festival was an annual event of the royal court and a *matsuri* to entertain *kami*. Sumo was held during the day and poem-writing and banquets at night (Shogakukan Japanese Dictionary). Qiqiao Dian was very popular as a way to imitate China, but the scope went beyond women wishing to find good spouses (Kokuban, 1973; Bi, 2007). The customs inherited from the Tang Dynasty combined with Japanese styles, such as writing poems. At that time, however, the ability to understand Chinese characters was still the privilege of nobility. Commoners would never have the opportunity to learn Chinese, let alone write poems. Thus, the Tanabata festival was held for a long time only as a ceremony for court aristocrats<sup>25</sup>. Most customs at that time were related to number seven, such as seven games, seven offerings, and seven colors (Ōmi, 2004).

Until the Edo period (1603-1868 CE), the Tanabata festival was listed as one of the *Gosekku*<sup>26</sup> (the five seasonal festivals) and was celebrated all over Japan (Ōmi, 2004; Bi, 2013b). Whether it is in the shogun's harem, the samurai families, or ordinary people (庶民, *shomin*), they all had their own ways of celebration in their households (Ōmi, 2004). The celebration usually started on the evening of July 6. Ordinary people would set up offerings in their yard, write down their prayers (e.g., beautiful handwriting) on five-colored paper cards, decorated them on the Japanese *sasatake*<sup>27</sup> (笹竹, small bamboo), and pray to the stars. The decorated *sasatake* had handmade paper crafts by using *washi* (和紙, Japanese paper), including seven kinds, namely paper cards, paper purses, paper kimonos, paper cranes, paper fishnets, paper windsock, paper garbage cans, each representing good wishes and blessings. The next day morning, people would flow the decorated bamboo branches and offerings down the

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<sup>25</sup> During the Muromachi shogunate period (*Muromachi bakufu*, 室町幕府, 1338-1573), it was customary that the *shogun* (military dictator) would write seven Tanabata poems on seven pieces of paper mulberry leaves (*Kaji no ha*, 梶の葉).

<sup>26</sup> According to *Kokushi Daijiten* 国史大辞典, *Gosekku* 五節句 refers to the 7th of Jan (*Jinjitsu* 人日), the 3rd of Mar (*Joshi* 上巳), the 5th of May (*Tango* 端午), the 7th of July (*Tanabata* 七夕), and the 9th of Sep (*Choyo* 重陽) in Chinese lunar calendar in the Edo period.

<sup>27</sup> In the Tang Dynasty, bamboo poles were used to dry clothes and hang silk threads (Bi, 2014). After it was introduced to Japan, *sasatake* was used because of its strong vitality and upright-shape symbolizing that wishes can be conveyed upright to the sky (Shogakukan Japanese Dictionary).

river. Because Tanabata was also the beginning of the *Obon*<sup>28</sup> festival, this custom was considered as part of the *Obon* preparation (Naoe, 1980; Bi, 2007 and 2013b). The festival was also religious because the essences of *matsuri* were for worshipping *kami* (Yanagita, cited by Iwasaki, 1994). Offerings were prepared for *kami* during the Tanabata festival, and bamboo can be seen as a medium to welcome them. Another example is many water-related rituals were performed for the harvest of the coming autumn as there was always not enough rain during this season (Iwasaki, 1994).



Figure 4 (Left): Tanabata, from the series *Elegant Play of the Five Festivals (Gayû go sekku no uchi)* (1839), *Utagawa Kuniyoshi* 歌川国芳 <https://ukiyo-e.org/image/mfa/sc157319>

Figure 5 (Right): *The City Flourishing, Tanabata Festival, No 73, One Hundred Famous Views of Edo (Shichu han-ei Tanabata matsuri / Meisho Edo Hyakkei)* (1857), *Utagawa Hiroshige* 歌川広重 [https://ukiyo-e.org/image/bm/AN00517785\\_001\\_1](https://ukiyo-e.org/image/bm/AN00517785_001_1)

<sup>28</sup> *Obon*: お盆, ancestral observances, an annual Buddhist event for commemorating one's ancestors. Usually starts from 13th of July (old), 13th of August (new).

In the late Edo period, the Tanabata festival became an event among the children of *terakoya* (寺子屋, temple schools) (Shogakukan Japanese Dictionary). Now we can imagine what Tanabata was like at that time from the *Ukiyo-e* (浮世絵, Japanese Woodblock print) of the Edo period (Figure 4 and 5). But note that customs and decorations were always changing. For instance, during the 1700s, colored paper strips and paper cards began to appear on the original wishing silk threads as a basic form of Tanabata bamboo decorations. The paper windsock (*fukinagashi*, 吹き流し) used today is a transformation of the five-colored wishing silk threads.

With the adoption of the new calendar in 1873, *Gosekku* was abolished and the Tanabata festival was not an annual event any more. As a result, it gradually faded out of people's lives, and the glory in the past no longer existed. Only some remaining folk traditions of the festival could be found in the countryside, integrating their own unique cultural and social environment (Ōmi, 2004; Bi, 2007).

Today, there are about 70 Tanabata celebrations in Japan and the Sendai Tanabata Festival is the largest and the most famous. It is also known as the three major Tanabata Festivals in Japan, together with Shōnan Hiratsuka Tanabata Festival in Kanagawa Prefecture and Anjō Tanabata Festival in Aichi Prefecture<sup>29</sup>. Apart from the customs of the past, many of them are reproductions triggered by the Sendai Tanabata boom. Nonetheless, they are neither the whole picture nor the only form of Tanabata festival in Japan. Within Miyagi Prefecture, we can find straw-made Tanabata horse, Tanabata puppet theater, pot-planted Tanabata bamboo decorations, and “*Kanazu* (金津) Tanabata,” an intangible folk cultural property celebrated by children up to middle school, praying for a good harvest before the *Obon* festival.

## 2. Sendai city

Sendai (Figure 6)<sup>30</sup> is the capital city of Miyagi Prefecture and the largest city in the Tohoku region (Northeast Japan) with a population of over one million. Although air raids destroyed most of the city in 1945, it has now become a modern and charming city. Under the national tourism policy, Sendai has also been committed to promoting its tourism resources. In 2016,

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<sup>29</sup> For more information: <http://www.tanabata-hiratsuka.com/> and <https://www.anjo-tanabata.jp/>

<sup>30</sup> Figure 6: The location of Sendai in Japan from: Street, J.(2006) Sendai-City of Trees. Available from [www.nature.com/articles/nj0122.pdf?origin=ppub](http://www.nature.com/articles/nj0122.pdf?origin=ppub)

“The DATE Culture<sup>31</sup>” born from the Sendai domain fostered by *Masamune* was certified by the Agency for Cultural Affairs as “Japan Heritage”- a popular brand for tourism. Several PR bases were set up abroad for the international tourism markets. Starting in 2019, it has also formulated a strategy for the non-resident population business activation<sup>32</sup>, and launched over 1000 tourism experience projects for tourists, aiming to be the No. 1 experience-based tourism city in Japan<sup>33</sup>. The Sendai Tanabata Festival, as a hallmark tourism event with over 400 years’ history that attract over 2 millions people every year<sup>34</sup>, has become an extremely valuable cultural resource for Sendai’s tourism. According to a study on the image and taste of the “festival”, the Sendai Tanabata Festival ranked as second among all the festivals that linked the image with a city in Japan (Hirota and Tsuboi, 2015). Sendai city and Tanabata have become two inseparable keywords. The Tanabata culture, especially with its unique decorations, continues to play a significant role in the promotion of Sendai at home and abroad.



<sup>31</sup> The Sendai Tanabata Festival was included in the list of “The DATE Culture”. For more information: <http://datebunka.jp/en/>

<sup>32</sup> Nonresident population business (*Kōryū jinkō business*, 交流人口ビジネス): the various business (along with the traditional tourism-related industries such as travel, accommodation, and restaurants) that will spread due to the expansion of the nonresident population. For more information <https://www.city.sendai.jp/kankokikaku/senryaku.html>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.city.sendai.jp/contentsoushutsu/sendaitabisakitaikencollection.html>

<sup>34</sup> As a comparison, the population of Sendai on 1st August 2019 was 1,090,034 (<http://www.city.sendai.jp/chosatoke/shise/toke/jinko/suike.html>), while the total number of people that visited the Sendai Tanabata Festival from 5 August to 8 August 2019 was 2,249,000 (<https://www.sendaitanabata.com/outline/document>).

### 3. The phases of the Sendai Tanabata Festival

#### 3.1 Before World War I

The Sendai Tanabata Festival has a history of more than 400 years. The story started from Sendai's first lord, *Date Masamune* (伊達政宗, 1567-1636 CE). He encouraged women's handicraft and weaving skills and vigorously promoted the Tanabata festival in Sendai. His eight Japanese poems depicts what it was like back in the days<sup>35</sup>. As a household-based event, each family would start to prepare for the festival about ten days in advance, including cut the five-colored paper cards and hand-make paper crafts. In Sendai City, there would be some street vendors selling *karadake* (唐竹, Sinobambusa tootsik), which is now using *Mōsōchiku* (孟宗竹, *Phyllostachys edulis*) instead (Mihara, 1971). On the festival evening (the 7th of July, later changed to the 6th), people would put the decorated bamboo in the yard together with seasonal vegetables and fruits as offerings and pray to the stars. Children would dress up and make wishes for better handwriting. On the next day morning, after floating all the decorated branches down the Hirose River, people would bring back the bamboo poles and then go to sweep the family grave<sup>36</sup>. Some folklore scholars believe that the Tanabata festival in the Edo period was a grand entertainment event, which may have been more spectacular than the one today (Ishikawa, Kato, et al., editors, 1994).

In Sendai, the Tanabata festival was more than decoration. It was a sacred ritual to welcome the God of Harvest. It demonstrated the folk belief in the God of water, earth, stars as well as the ancestor spirits (Japanese Folklore Dictionary). For example, in 1783, after the great famine broke out, the Tanabata festival was held grandly as rehabilitation<sup>37</sup> to make the

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<sup>35</sup> For more information: <https://www.sendaitanabata.com/outline/history>

<sup>36</sup> See in 1848 「*Ouuichirandouchuuuhizakurige*」 No. 4, [*Sendai nendjūgyōji taii*] [July] . “*Muika yoru yori sasatake ni shiki-shi tanzaku saku no katachi o kirite uta o kaki matate u-chin o tomoshi, nanoka no asa hyōjaukawa matawa hasekurakawa, yodomikawa e nakasu.*” 「奥羽一覽道中膝栗毛」四編下には、「仙台中行事大意」の「七月」「七日棚機祭、六日夜より笹竹に式紙（しきし）短冊くさくの形（かたち）を切（きり）て歌をかき又てうちんをともし、七日の朝評定川（ひょうじやう）または支倉（はせくら）川澱（よどみ）川へなかつ」。 (Research report, No. 21 and No. 26)

<sup>37</sup> Rehabilitation: *yonaoshi*, 世直し. More information available from <https://kotobank.jp/word/%E4%B8%96%E7%9B%B4%E3%81%97-654673>

world a better place. This might explain why it survived in Sendai after the abolition of the *Gosekku*. It had the power of a simple folk belief that awing against irresistible natural threats and combined with *Obon* to commemorate ancestor spirits. It was a formal expression of people's wishes, who were praying for a good harvest and honoring their spirits of ancestors.

During the Meiji period (1868-1912 CE), it was passed down as a school event, such as a decoration contest in tailoring schools. From the late Meiji period to the Taisho period (1912-1926 CE), the Tanabata had three different forms in Sendai because people needed the time to adapt to the new calendar that Miyagi Prefecture decided to adopt in 1910, which postponed the festival date to August 6-7. In some places and individual families, the festival continued on July 6-7 by the old calendar. In the 1920s, elementary schools in Sendai celebrated it on July 6-7 by the new calendar as one of the school events (Research report, No. 28; Ishikawa, Kato, et al., editors, 1994).

### 3.2 The first revival after World War I

After World War I and the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake, a severe economic depression spread all over Japan. Modernization also brought practical issues such as the inconveniences created by utility poles for the festival floats (Teeuwen, 2020). People were not in the mood of any celebration. The Tanabata festival had lost sight of the past. The sporadic decorations for the meeting of the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl appeared very lonely. To revitalize the economy, merchants in Sendai set up a joint sale event in 1926. Among them, the *Omachi Gochome Kyodokai*<sup>38</sup> put up the gorgeous Tanabata bamboo decorations in the shopping streets and held a competition for it. People flocked excitedly to have a look at what hadn't been seen for a long time. The following year the *Omachi Yonchome* joined the competition that led to huge crowds of people (Research report, No. 14). In this way, decorated shopping streets (mainly in *Kokubuncho* and *Omachi*) became the mainstream events for the Sendai Tanabata Festival. In 1928, the Tohoku Industrial Exhibition was held in Sendai. The Sendai Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Sendai Association<sup>39</sup> held the Tanabata decoration contest to promote the festival. 11 neighborhood associations on the main streets of Sendai began to

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<sup>38</sup> 大町五丁目共同会, *Omachi Gochome* Joint Association. *Omachi Yonchome* 大町四丁目

<sup>39</sup> The predecessor of SenTIA (Sendai Tourism, Convention and International Association).  
<https://www.sentia-sendai.jp/english-guide/>



decorate from the evening of August 6. After three days and two nights, the entire shopping streets were full of festive joy. The Sendai Tanabata Festival was completely revived and became well-known throughout the country. It marked the beginning of an urban festival and served as the prototype of the current Sendai Tanabata Festival (Ōmi, 2004; Anami, 2009). As it was developed through the competitions of decorations, shop owners who were aiming at the top prizes, prepared their unique decorations wholeheartedly but also felt pity to see all those decorations discarded after the festival. For the first time, this led to a debate whether to consider an extension of the duration (Research report, No. 27). During World War II, however, continuous war efforts and severe disasters made people less concerned about any event.

### **3.3 The second revival after World War II and the debates on style**

In 1946, Sendai city was in ruins after continuous air raid. The 52 bamboo decorations in the desolate *Ichibancho* Street (*Ichibanchō Tōri*, 一番町通) triggered the nostalgia of the Tanabata festival of the good old days. It was the first step of the festival's revival after World War II. *Kahoku Shimpō* commented as “yearning to see this scene for years, people would burst into tears” (Research report No. 28, 7 August 1946). In 1947, Emperor Showa made an imperial tour to encourage and consolidate the nation and visited Sendai on August 5. Despite financial difficulties, the Sendai City and Sendai Chamber of Commerce and Industry organized the citizens of Sendai prepared 5,000 bamboo decorations to welcome the emperor. Each shop handmade the decorations and hung in front of the door for three days, marking the official revival of the festival as a tourism event. In this year's decoration contest, the first-prize-winner design used a paper ball (*Kusudama*, 薬玉) on top the paper windsock and later became a new traditional style of the Sendai Tanabata festival decoration (Research report, No. 28).

The following year, Sendai became a designated city for tourism in Japan assessed by the Cabinet Tourism Council. The Sendai Tanabata Association was officially established as the festival organizer and changed the festival date to August 5-7. Centered on the Sendai Chamber of Commerce and Industry, this economic organization mainly aimed to promote regional development. After taking over the festival's ownership, they arranged all kinds of entertainment activities, such as the Miss Tanabata beauty pageant targeting tourists from the Kanto region.

At this point, the relevant stakeholders mainly included the festival organizer, government, shop owners, local residents, and *Kahoku Shimpō*. *Kahoku Shimpō* set up a column from local residents to express the opinions on the festival. The opinion pieces included: “The beautiful decorations will be torn off by the visitors and will not last the next day. We must tidy up the chaotic and crowded Sendai Station to give a good impression to tourists”, where others argued, “why must we spend so much money on this festival? Have you considered the victims, the survivors, and bereaved families of the war? For whom do we hold the festival? Will the Cowherd and Weaver Girl be happy about this?” (Research report No. 28, 6 August 1952) The organizer invited celebrities from all walks of life as guests to visit and rate the festival to defend its legitimacy, yet the result was not as expected. They commented: “the festival was magnificent and impressive, but it should keep its tradition and simplicity, and should not lose the way it was in the past and become a pure decoration event” (Research report No. 28, 7 August 1952) On the other hand, the shop owners hoped to make the festival as grand as possible, because they wanted to win the decoration contest and that could attract more customers.

Regarding whether the festival should maintain its tradition or be more luxurious, the festival organizer also had disagreements. The main concern was the rain season in August. Because the traditional decoration material was paper, it could not be replaced with paraffin paper or plastic. Similarly, maintaining tradition also meant not to change the festival date. In the end, plastic bags covering the decorations were used as a compromise. In contrast, reformists felt that festivals should keep pace with the times and be more luxurious regardless of traditional style, for the festival would not last long if it was not profitable. They were very clear about the purpose of this festival’s commercialization aspect and spent more than half of the budget on publicity in Tokyo, hoping to attract more tourists (Research report, No. 28).

Later the discussion about the old and new styles extended to the essence of the festival. In 1954, *Kahoku Shimpō* commented that too much money was spent to create the largest and most luxurious Tanabata celebration after the war. But it lost the origin of a house-based tradition worshipping the god and became a commercial event in the shopping street (Figure 7). It also quoted from folklorists: “the current Sendai Tanabata festival is entirely different from the past. It has no traditional spirit. The happiness and meaning of the past are also lost

when decorations are bought instead of being handmade by themselves.” (Research report, No. 28).



Figure 7: The Sendai Tanabata Festival in 1954<sup>40</sup>

### 3.4 The emerging imitators and touristification

With the growing popularity of the Sendai Tanabata Festival, the number of tourists increased as well. The successful commercial business model of the traditional *matsuri* attracted imitators from many places, among which the Hiratsuka Tanabata Festival caught the most attention (Yasuda et al., 2008). Since 1951, the Hiratsuka Chamber of Commerce and Industry had come to Sendai to observe and held a similar event of their own that gradually expanded to

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<sup>40</sup> Taken by Walter Ponsard (own translation of ウォルター・ポンザール), Research report, No. 28. (2010.3) *Ashimoto kara miru minzoku (18)—ushinawareta denshō hen'yō suru denshō aratanaru denshō—*足元からみる民俗(18)—失われた伝承・変容する伝承・新たな伝承— Sendai City Museum of History and Folklore [https://eichi.library.pref.miyagi.jp/da/detail?data\\_id=010-128577-0](https://eichi.library.pref.miyagi.jp/da/detail?data_id=010-128577-0)

become a rival to Sendai (Anami, 2009). Compared with Sendai, the Hiratsuka Tanabata festival had many advantages. As an imitator, it had no traditional constraints. The festival lasted for five days and used plastic materials instead of paper to solve the weather problems. It embraced new, bold, and various designs to attract tourists. With illuminations at night and advertisements in decorations, it managed to profit more than Sendai. It also benefited geographically for its proximity to Tokyo and was suitable for day trips (Takahashi and Hatsuza-wa, 2003). As a result, the number of visitors to the Hiratsuka Tanabata festival were almost equal to that of Sendai.

In 1956, the Japan Broadcasting Corporation, NHK, broadcasted the Sendai Tanabata Festival to the whole country that triggered the Sendai Tanabata boom. The government of Sendai started to worry about its status (Anami, 2009) and the possibility of losing the financial benefits generated by festival tourism. Therefore the decision was made to emphasize its tradition as the selling point that demanded more effort and cost. The festival organizer set several requirements about its decoration style: they must use *washi* and *Mōsōchiku*; they must be handmade; they must include seven kinds of paper crafts of the Edo period and five as one set of standard decorations; they must be traditional as well as innovative. They also launched the “*ikko ippon*” (一户一本, one family one (bamboo) pole) motion by distributing bamboo poles to elementary school students in the city and calling on every household to decorate and display a festive atmosphere everywhere in the city (Research report, No. 28).

By integrating other summer festival tourism resources in the Tohoku region, the Sendai Tanabata Festival, the Aomori Nebuta Festival, and the Akita Kanto Festival<sup>41</sup> became Tohoku’s Three Great Festivals (Research report, No. 28; Anami, 2011). After the completion of the railway, this unique summer festival combination attracted a steady stream of tourist groups from Kanto region (Yasuda et al., 2008). The date of the festival was changed to August 5 to 8, in order to separate the other two Tohoku’s Great Festivals. More and more activities were arranged, such as float parades, illumination works, fireworks, and music bands.

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<sup>41</sup> Tohoku’s Three Great Festivals 東北三大まつり *Tōhoku san dai matsuri*: the Sendai Tanabata Festival 仙台七夕まつり, the Aomori Nebuta Festival 青森ねぶた祭 and the Akita Kanto Festival 秋田竿燈まつり.

The festival organizer began to calculate the profit made by the number of visitors and called it “*otoshita kane*” (落した金, dropped money) (Anami, 2009). The festival itself became an economic success. For example, in 1965, the number of tourists exceeded 2 million for the first time in history resulting a profit of 600 million yen. And in 1969, it recorded 1.2 billion yen in profit. For tourists, however, the festival started to become dull and monotonous. The decorations were the same for three days that was enough to experience in a single day. They also complaint about heavy traffic, insufficient hotels, overpriced products, disappointing services and the lack of parking spaces.

The rising number of tourists tempted the festival organizer to levy more fees from shops opening during the festival but it was strongly opposed by shop owners who also had divided voices. Shop owners from the central shopping streets thought they own the festival decoration tradition, therefore, they deserved more attention, such as a higher decoration contest prize different from the surrounding shopping streets. The festival organizer agreed and even offered financial assistance to help them with decorations. However, they used the fund to order decorations directly from specialty stores to avoid all the troubles to make by themselves which had completely deviated from the festival organizer’s original intention (Research report No. 29, 12 August 1977). Maintaining tradition had more difficulties in the surrounding shopping streets. They accused the festival organizer of barely focusing on them and in order to compete with the central area, they had to put in so much money, time, and effort, which had never paid off. It is not difficult to understand why they lost interest in participating and eventually gave up.

With the development of urbanization, many shops in shopping streets were demolished and became modern shopping malls. Chain stores with external capital replaced most of the long-established shops that suffered an aging problem and lack of successors. Most new owners of the shops were hired staff who had no sense of belonging to the tradition of the Sendai Tanabata Festival. The traditional connotation and even the significance of commercial revitalization had gradually faded over time.

Through trial and error, the growing scale and influence of the Sendai Tanabata Festival started to attract various groups to take the opportunity for self-promotion. In 1972, Tokushima, the sister city of Sendai, brought its traditional *Awa Odori* (阿波おどり, Awa dance) to the festival, hoping the tremendous tourists would pay a visit to Tokushima as well.

Similarly, in 1976, Hiroshima sent 40,000 paper cranes to the festival to advocate peaceful Tanabata linking Hiroshima Peace Memorial Ceremony that fell on the same day on August 6. The impact of the festival expanded overseas as well. For instance, in 1978, it was held in Sao Paulo, Brazil, became a winter tradition to this present day.

In terms of festival evaluation, *Kahoku Shimpō* started criticizing about the festival becoming a show for tourists that filled with the taste of money. The festival decorations that required family members spending months in the making could now be easily purchased in a store. *Kahoku Shimpō* also questioned the festival's ownership by the lack of residents' participation. Despite various activities arranged during the festival, the degree of support was not steady due to the festival date and weather. For a weekday, it was not easy to find anyone to participate in activities such as *mikoshi* and parades. Appropriately over half of the participants in the 1980's parade were from the Japan Self-Defense Force. Since heavy rain would reduce the number of visitors remarkably, the festival organizer turned to god for help by praying for sunny weather in the shrine (Research report, No. 29). Interestingly, this ritual has now become a new tradition in the Sendai Tanabata Festival.

### **3.5 The unexpected 2011**

In 2011, Japan was confronted with an unprecedented crisis. On March 11, the most powerful earthquake in history hit the Tohoku region and took over ten thousand people's lives. The earthquake also triggered a devastating tsunami that caused a series of disasters, including a nuclear meltdown in the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant. Many buildings had collapsed, roads and railways were in ruin. "It is the toughest and most difficult crisis in Japan since World War II," said the Japanese Prime Minister at the time of the event. After the disaster, the number of tourists to the Tohoku region dropped sharply. Usually, in a time of crisis like this, where the whole country was immersed in sadness, any celebratory event would be out of imagination. But the Tohoku people had a different idea. For reconstruction, in July they held a newly redesigned festival in Sendai, the Tohoku Rokkon Festival (*Tōhoku rokkonsai*, 東北六魂祭), combining six representative festivals from the region. This new festival received strong support that encouraged the continuation of Tanabata festival the same year. Since it was already too late to prepare, *Kahoku Shimpō* made an appeal across the country and collected a total of 790,000 paper cranes and 60,000 paper cards for festival decoration. At the

same time, all elementary and middle school students in Sendai made 88,000 paper cranes to remember the tragedy and pray for recovery. Now, this event has become a vital part of the hometown revival project of the Sendai City Board of Education. With the theme of requiescat and reconstruction, Tanabata has received support from the Kyoto *Gion Matsuri* (京都祇園祭), the Hakata *Dontaku Matsuri* (博多どんたくまつり), and the Tokushima *Awa Odori*. A total of 1.75 million people were invited to witness a spirited and confident Tohoku and encouraged to rethink the definition of peace in a tough time. Different from the past, the decorations were simple but contained a new meaning of reconstructing the Tohoku region. Although most activities were suspended, festival fireworks managed to proceed by soliciting funds from residents for the first time. People believed that fireworks would bring vitality to the entire Tohoku region and light up the way to regional revival.

The following years of the festival were about pray, hope, and gratitude, emphasizing traditional culture as well as promoting local tourist resources and souvenirs. The recycled paper cranes from the previous year were made into a thank-you card given to all the tourists to promote Sendai. Tourists also loved to contribute to the revival by purchasing souvenirs. The Sendai Tanabata Festival had placed great hopes on revitalizing the economy and brought new customers to the traditional shopping streets. The festival organizers turned their focus to foreigners and the young, adding new elements such as popular animation to festival activities. Some the residents felt responsible for creating a splendid festival for tourists from all over the world. They continued to innovate in the decoration designs, such as the 2019 Gold Award used LED lights. But many residents felt they were unable to do as much as they used to. Traditional handmade decorations were becoming a burden for the shrinking and aging neighborhood. It was not possible to recapture the previous splendor from the past. People started questioning: Whose Tanabata is it? Why pursue the luxury decorations if no one has fun making them? Does the size matter? Isn't it more important to decorate with individuality and love, to inherit the spirit of tradition? (*Kahoku Shimpō*, 5 August 2015). The paradox between inheritance of the tradition and tourism revenue caused unexpected extra expenses. For instance, fireworks as an essential entertainment program mainly depend on sponsors' fundings. The increasing number of tourists every year had caused financial problems in security fees. It was impossible to reduce the scale of the event because the festival was also intended

for children. In the end, the festival organizers had to seek new ways of funding, such as advertisements in the tourist service and online fundraising.

A local survey conducted by East Japan Research showed that the Sendai Tanabata Festival ranked No.1 in both evaluations of pride and regional contribution. It, however, also became first place in dissatisfaction (*Kahoku Shimpō*, 3 August 2018). Most people still felt it was more than enough to participate only once. How to inherit the traditional Sendai Tanabata culture had become a problem, but it could not be solved solely by the festival organizer. It requires the effort by everyone (*Kahoku Shimpō*, 5 August 2019).

### **3.6 A pause in 2020**

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, most events, including the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, were postponed or canceled to help keep an outbreak from spreading. Soon after the Japanese government declared the state of emergency in April, the Sendai Tanabata Festival was immediately postponed, which was done for the first time after World War II. The Miyagi Prefecture and the Sendai city government considered the summer festivals in the Tohoku region as a whole where they had to cancel all the events for the safety of citizens and tourists. The decision was made in April for the handmade decorations that often took a long time to prepare. According to the 77 Research and Consulting, the economic loss in the Tohoku region due to COVID-19 was over 145 billion yen for tourism alone and over 36 billion yen for the Sendai Tanabata Festival<sup>42</sup>. The government and the festival organizer decided to look for an alternative plan to change the situation. The festival organizer took carrying on the festival as their mission by justifying the original meaning of it to use decorations to pray, and added *Amabie* (アマビエ), a traditional Japanese monster who could help cure disease into the decorations in 2020.

Instead of sponsors, this year the Sendai government provided funds to support the festival. With the support of local parliamentarians, the Sendai Tanabata Festival of 2020 was held but scaled down. The festival organizer felt it was important to hold this tradition for the children and distributed decoration material kits to elementary schools and held festival events online which later turned out to become a new revenue model. The festival supplier,

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<sup>42</sup> For more information: 77 Research and Consulting Co., Ltd's monthly report [https://www.77rc.co.jp/pdf/monthly\\_report202007.pdf](https://www.77rc.co.jp/pdf/monthly_report202007.pdf)



*NarumiyaKamiShoji*, which has two-thirds of the decoration market, said they would support the festival no matter how it would be held (*Kahoku Shimpō*, 9 April 2020). Since social distancing, quarantine, and self-isolation kept people at home, they mainly focused on the production of decoration material kits and helped with the online Tanabata workshop held by the festival organizer. Their staff taught how to make traditional decorations and talked about the history and significance of Tanabata. The event was a success. Although there was less order in large-scaled decorations, the turnover of handmade decoration material kits for families went over four times and were mainly purchased by residents. More shops joined in making decorations to pray, with even those who didn't participate in the past. *Kahoku Shimpō* commented that the festival returned to be an event for everyone and created a website of Tanabata to review its history and significance<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> For more information <https://www.kahoku.co.jp/tanabata/#>

## Chapter IV Discussions

The Sendai Tanabata Festival started in the Edo period when the Tanabata festival in Japan was celebrated as an annual event by ordinary people instead of a ceremony for court aristocrats. However, tradition is not preserved intact but recreated based on the past (Eric, 1983). Although branding its 400-year long history, the festival today is not exactly a replica of what it was in the Edo period. In the process of urbanization, the religious factors of the festival and the love legend have faded. The festival date, customs, and meaning have all been modified or replaced. In fact, since the revival of the Sendai Tanabata Festival in 1946, it has already become a tourist-oriented, commercialized festival event with a traditional guise.

The festival organizer focused on more of the economic profits generated by visitors who came to see festival decorations and participate in entertainment activities. This focus resulted in a change of the key stakeholders from local residents to tourists. The increasing number of tourists enabled the festival to create a specific time and space that not only allowed all the stakeholders to express themselves and interact with each other but also shared the festival publicity with other festivals and events.

To have a better understanding of the Sendai Tanabata Festival today, after examining its history, I identified eight relevant stakeholders and put them into the stakeholder power and interest matrix (Figure 8). Weighing by the stakeholders' power, interests, and the relationship with each other, I categorized them into two groups and marked them in red and green, each representing primary and secondary stakeholders.

Primary stakeholders are the festival organizer, government, and shop owners from the central shopping streets. They have the most power and interest in the festival. With the highest legitimacy, they can define what the festival is and control its development. Secondary stakeholders include local residents, the local newspaper (e.g. *Kahoku Shimpo*), suppliers (e.g. NarumiyaKamiShoji Co. Ltd), shop owners from the surrounding shopping streets, and tourists. Their functions and roles in the festival sometimes are not directly manifested until put into historical context. When revived after the war, the event mainly targeted the residents. The stakeholders at that time were only shop owners and residents. The power and legitimacy of the festival shifted when the festival organizer was established. As an economic organization, it was deeply drawn to the economic benefits from tourists and resulted in commercial-

ization and touristification of the traditional festival. In this process, as I discussed earlier, the high-power-less-interest residents and local newspapers are potential threats, while the low-power-high-interest surrounding shops are potential collaborators.

There are other latent stakeholders, including coworkers and sponsors, but I will not analyze them in this paper. What caught my attention is that every stakeholder has their own narrative of what tradition is (Sato, 2012) and what the festival should be.

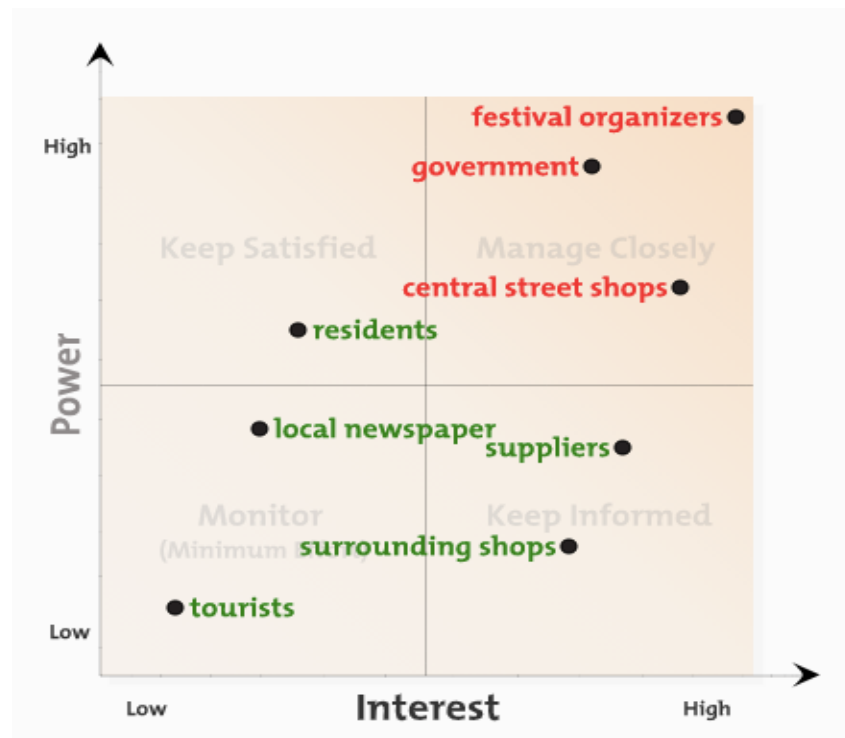


Figure 8: The stakeholder power and interest matrix of the Sendai Tanabata Festival

Initially, there was no restraint on how to decorate for the festival and they were made as luxurious and exaggerating as possible to win the contest and attract customers. After the festival gradually gained fame, its success generated the Sendai Tanabata boom causing imitators of the festival from all over Japan and started threatening its status. Tradition, which was the advantage of the Sendai Tanabata Festival, had also become a constraint. This forced the festival to change its strategy and emphasized the tradition to declare legitimacy as the first and later the biggest Tanabata festival celebration in Japan.

Since 1957, the festival suppliers joined the festival network as a stakeholder to sell more decorations where it replaced handmade decorations from the household. Together with

the festival organizer, they took the decoration style of the Edo period as orthodox and used it as a requirement in the decoration contest to enhance the legitimacy. They demanded the decorations to have seven kinds of handicrafts made from *washi* and use on the *Mōsōchiku*. But this Edo tradition they insisted was not what the festival truly looked like during that time. In the Edo period, the decoration was simple, not luxurious. People used *sasatake*, not *Mōsōchiku*. They are used now to hold the giant paper balls, which didn't even exist until the design won the decoration contest in 1947.

Furthermore, the festival today has also lost the significance of a traditional event in the Edo period. *Kahoku Shimpō* has been strongly criticizing this issue, arguing that the festival in the past was for families to make decorations and pray for themselves and it was not a show for tourists. However, such self-entertainment style would not be a successful tourism resource. The value of the Sendai Tanabata Festival as a tourist event is to present to people the decoration contest that was revived after the war in the shopping streets. Therefore, the festival today has abandoned the traditional customs such as the focus on love legend and only kept what is convenient for tourists: writing down their wishes on the paper cards and appreciating rather than making the decorations by themselves. Even though some workshops during the festival are offering people to experience and learn how to make these decorations, the aim is not to return to the self-entertainment style. This might explain the paradox of what the festival organizer claims to do and what they are doing. They aim to inherit the festival tradition as a *matsuri* in the Edo period, but in fact, it is a tourism event from 1946.

The Sendai government went along with the festival organizer for the local popularity and economic benefits generated by the festival. Especially after 2011, it has become a symbolic hope of regional revitalization. The Sendai Board of Education added the festival to elementary education to ensure that children would inherit the traditional culture.

What about the shop owners who revived the festival after the war? In the beginning, they agreed with the festival organizer to attract tourists through luxurious and exaggerating decorations and revitalize the economy. But under the pressure of more shopping malls and chain stores replaced the old shops, and the problems of aging and lacking successors, they could not keep the same enthusiasm about the festival. On the one hand, the decorations that the festival organizer request is beyond profit. One decoration made of *washi* will cost a hundred thousand to several million yen, and they need to hand make five of them as one set,

which usually takes at least a few months. It has become a burden for many shops. More shop owners are willing to buy decorations directly, and the proportion of hand-made products in 2017 was down to only 20 to 30%. On the other hand, the direct economic benefits are reflected in the tourism-related industry, such as accommodation and restaurants, shops in other business do not feel the urge to follow the decoration rules. Also, shops in the surrounding shopping streets can rarely attract tourists or enough attention to the festival organizer during the festival. They feel no sense of festival belonging and the responsibility to carry on the tradition defined by the festival organizer. This decline in the enthusiasm of shop owners will affect the sustainable development of the festival in the long run.

The sustainable development of the festival is inseparable from the support of residents. For residents, the festival enhances their community pride, generates their sense of identity, and gives them a sense of belonging. But at the same time, the festival touristification also causes environmental and transportation problems, which is not beneficial to community development. Moreover, the festival organizer often prioritizes tourists for economic benefits, resulting in less participation of residents. The lack of support from the local residents will reduce the festival's charm and significance for tourists. For an intangible culture such as the Sendai Tanabata Festival, its cultural value realizes in the fact that local residents hand-make decorations with their families and celebrate the festival together. Tourists long for the nostalgia of the traditional culture, not just the entertainment. Without the profound meaning, no matter how many activities are arranged, the three-day festival appears the same to them. The festival organizer is over-dependent on tourists for the regional revitalization and does not hesitate to adjust or change the tradition, or even damage the authenticity of the festival culture and history for them. Moreover, the 2020 pandemic has proved that crisis brings economic instability in tourism and the Sendai Tanabata Festival should rely more on its local residents, not tourists.

## **Conclusion and implications**

The Sendai Tanabata Festival today is a consequence of interactions happening among all the relevant stakeholders. Their conflict can be seen through festival ownership and the narrative of tradition. In festival tourism, the festival organizer is the most crucial stakeholder with the highest power and interest in the festival. Their prioritization of tourists has not only damaged the authenticity of the tradition but also lost the support of shopping street owners and residents, which ultimately diminished the charm of the traditional festival as a tourism resource. Moreover, if a crisis arises, all the relevant stakeholders are more inclined to unite for the same purpose of inheriting and sustaining the tradition. The festival organizer should first improve tourism management and event management skills for overcoming challenges and obstacles. Instead of pursuing the tourism event with luxurious decorations, they should also give more consideration to the demands of local residents and shopping street owners to understand the festival they desire and strengthen their sense of belonging. More assistance should be given to the shopping street owners, especially the surrounding shopping streets. On the economic front, more effective crisis response strategies should be explored to offset the instability and over-reliance on tourists.

Unfortunately, I did not have the means to get in touch with all relevant stakeholders for intensive interviews. I believe that these preliminary results indicate that the touristification of traditional festivals could be observed as a phenomenon. The difficulties and challenges in festival tourism could be understood better through the interaction of relevant stakeholders. I hope this approach could inspire future research to examine topics of Japanese studies from multiple disciplines.

## Glossary of *Japanese* and Chinese terms

<i>Aichi ken</i>	愛知県	Aichi Prefecture
<i>Akitakantōmatsuri</i>	秋田竿燈まつり	the Akita Kanto Festival
<i>Amabie</i>	アマビエ	a traditional Japanese monster who can help cure disease
<i>anime</i>	アニメ	Japanese animation
<i>Anjō Tanabata Matsuri</i>	安城七夕まつり	Anjō Tanabata Festival
<i>Aomori Nebuta matsuri</i>	青森ねぶた祭	the Aomori Nebuta Festival
<i>asobi</i>	遊び	to play
<i>Awa Odori</i>	阿波おどり	Awa dance, Tokushima Prefecture's annual summer tradition of dance
<i>chō-kai</i>	町会	neighborhood association
<i>Date Masamune</i>	伊達政宗	name
<i>dentō bunka</i>	伝統文化	traditional culture
<i>Digital Daijise</i>	デジタル大辞泉	dictionary
<i>fujin-kai</i>	婦人会	Women's association
<i>fukinagashi</i>	吹き流し	paper windsock
<i>Furukawa Matsuri</i>	古川祭り	the Furukawa Festival
<i>furusato</i>	故郷・ふるさと・古里	hometown
<i>goryōe</i>	御霊会	a ceremony that held to calm and appease evil gods and the spirits of the dead
<i>Gosekku</i>	五節句	the five annual events, the 7th of Jan ( <i>Jinjitsu</i> 人日), the 3rd of Mar ( <i>Joshi</i> 上巳), the 5th of May ( <i>Tango</i> 端午), the 7th of July ( <i>Tanabata</i> 七夕), and the 9th of Sep ( <i>Choyo</i> 重陽) in Chinese lunar calendar in the Edo period.
<i>Gushi shijiushou</i>	古诗十九首	Nineteen Old Poems

<i>hanzi</i>	汉字	Chinese characters
<i>Hakata Dontaku Matsuri</i>	博多どんたくまつり	the Dontaku Festival
<i>hare</i>	ハレ	daily life, the opposite of <i>ke</i>
<i>Hidari Daimonji</i>	左大文字	bonfire festival in Kyoto
<i>Hikoboshi</i>	彦星	the Cowherd, Star Altair
<i>hoshi matsuri</i>	星祭り	the Star Festival
<i>ibento</i>	イベント	events
<i>Ichibanchō Tōri</i>	一番町通	Ichibancho Street
<i>ikko ippon</i>	一户一本	one family one (bamboo) pole
<i>inori</i>	祈り	prayer
<i>jichikai</i>	自治会	neighborhood association
<i>Kahoku Shimpō</i>	河北新報	daily newspaper, Kahoku Shimpō Publishing Co
<i>kaji no ha</i>	梶の葉	paper mulberry leaves
<i>kami</i>	神	the divine God(s)
<i>kana</i>	かな	phonetic writing (hiragana or katakana)
<i>Kanagawa ken</i>	神奈川県	Kanagawa Prefecture
<i>Kanazu Tanabata</i>	金津七夕	the Kanazu Tanabata Festival
<i>kanji</i>	漢字	Chinese characters
<i>karatake</i>	唐竹・カラタケ	Sinobambusa tootsik
<i>ke</i>	ケ	a non-daily-space-time that can make one both nervous and excited
<i>kodomo-kai</i>	子供会	Children's Association
<i>Kojiki</i>	古事記	Record of Ancient Matters
<i>Kokka Shintō</i>	国家神道	State Shinto
<i>kokoro</i>	心・こころ	heart, mind, spirit
<i>Kokushi Daijiten</i>	国史大辞典	dictionary
<i>kōryū jinkō business</i>	交流人口ビジネス	nonresident population business



<i>Kusudama</i>	薬玉	a paper ball
<i>Kyoto Gion Matsuri</i>	京都祇園祭	the Gion Festival
<i>Man'yōshū</i>	万葉集	oldest extant collection of Japanese <i>Waka</i> 和歌
<i>matsuri</i>	祭・祭り・祀り	Shrine festival; ritual worship
<i>matsuru</i>	まつる	to serve, to take care of, to attend to, or to entertain
<i>mikoshi</i>	神輿	a scared palanquin serving as a portable <i>Shintō</i> shrine
<i>Miyagi ken</i>	宮城県	Miyagi Prefecture
<i>Minzokugaku</i>	民俗学・民族学	folklore studies; ethnology
<i>Mōsōchiku</i>	孟宗竹・モウソウチク	<i>Phyllostachys edulis</i>
<i>mukei bunka isan</i>	無形文化遺産	intangible cultural heritage
<i>mukei bunkazai</i>	無形文化財	intangible cultural property
<i>mura</i>	村	village
<i>Muromachi bakufu</i>	室町幕府	Muromachi shogunate period
<i>NarumiyaKamiShoji</i>	鳴海屋紙商事	NarumiyaKamiShoji Co.Ltd
<i>nendjūgyōji</i>	年中行事	annual events
<i>Nihon kokugo daijiten</i>	日本国語大辞典	<i>Nikkoku</i> , Shogakukan Japanese Dictionary
Niulang	牛郎	the Cowherd, Star Altair
<i>Obon</i>	お盆	ancestral observances
<i>Omachi Gochome Kyo-dokai</i>	大町五丁目共同会	<i>Omachi Gochome</i> Joint Association
<i>Omachi Yonchome</i>	大町四丁目	street name
<i>Orihime</i>	織り姫	the Weaver Girl, Star Vega
<i>otoshita kane</i>	落した金	dropped money
Qi	七	seven
Qiqiao Dian	乞巧奠	a ritual to pray for dexterity in needlework during the Qixi Festival

Qixi	七夕	the Double Seventh Festival, the Star Festival, the Qiqiao Festival, the Seventh of July Festival and the Tanabata Festival.
<i>sairei</i>	祭礼	display
<i>sake</i>	酒	Japanese alcoholic drink made from fermented rice
<i>sasatake</i>	笹竹・ささたけ	small bamboo
<i>sawagi</i>	騒ぎ	festival uproar
<i>Sendai-shi</i>	仙台市	Sendai city
<i>Shintō</i>	神道	Shinto
<i>shomin</i>	庶民	ordinary people
<i>Shōnan Hiratsuka Tanabata Matsuri</i>	湘南ひらつか七夕まつり	Shōnan Hiratsuka Tanabata Festival
<i>tanabata</i>	七夕・しちせき・たなばた・しっせき・棚機・タナバタ	the Star Festival, Qixi, July-7th, the Seventh of July Festival
<i>Tanabatahime</i>	棚机织女	the weaver girl next to the shelf, the weaver girl, Star Vega (Orihime)
<i>Tanabatatsume</i>	棚機津女	the woman weaving by the water, the weaver girl, Star Vega (Orihime)
<i>terakoya</i>	寺子屋	temple schools
<i>Tōhoku</i>	東北	Northeast Japan
<i>Tōhoku rokkonsai</i>	東北六魂祭	the Tohoku Rokkon Festival
<i>Tōhoku san dai matsuri</i>	東北三大まつり	Tohoku's Three Great Festivals
<i>Tokushima ken</i>	徳島県	Tokushima prefecture
<i>Ukiyo-e</i>	浮世絵・うきよえ	Japanese Woodblock print
<i>washi</i>	和紙	Japanese paper
<i>wasshoi</i>	わっしょい	heave-ho, heave, heave-ho!
<i>yonaoshi</i>	世直し	rehabilitation
Zhinü	织女	the Weaver Girl, Star Vega

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## Website links

Anjō Tanabata Festival <https://www.anjo-tanabata.jp/>

Kahoku Shimpō online 河北新報 <https://www.kahoku.co.jp/>

PR video the Sendai Tanabata Festival <https://www.youtube.com/user/sendaitanabatamatsur>

Sendai city <http://www.city.sendai.jp/>

Sendai Museum of History and Folklore. <http://www.city.sendai.jp/kyouiku/rekimin/Sendai>

Sendai Tourism, Convention and International Association <https://www.senia-sendai.jp/english-guide/>

Shōnan Hiratsuka Tanabata Festival <http://www.tanabata-hiratsuka.com/>

The “DATE Culture” <http://datebunka.jp/cp/42/>

The Sendai Chamber of Commerce and Industry <https://www.sendaicci.or.jp/>

The Sendai Tanabata Festival <http://www.sendaitanabata.com/>

Tourism, Convention and International Association. <http://int.senia-sendai.jp/e/>

77 Research and Consulting Co., Ltd’s monthly report [https://www.77rc.co.jp/pdf/monthly\\_report202007.pdf](https://www.77rc.co.jp/pdf/monthly_report202007.pdf)

## Dictionaries

Cambridge Dictionary

Collins English Dictionary

Digital Daijise

Japanese Folklore Dictionary

*Kokushi Daijiten*

Shogakukan Japanese Dictionary (*Nikkoku*)

## Appendices

### Field Report<sup>44</sup>

**Title** Festival tourism research on the Sendai Tanabata Festival

**Period** August 6 to August 9, 2019

**Observer** the author

#### Objectives

to visit the main decorated shopping streets on the festival map, the festival event park, historical sites, and museums.

### Methodology

#### 1. Preliminary work

- get in touch with a local informant
- internet research on the selected objects (location, decorations, history)
- previous research on the Sendai Tanabata Festival
- book a hotel close to the shopping street
- daily plan:

Schedule	Activities
Day 1	observe, participate
Day 2	informal interview, observe
Day 3	data collect, observe
Day 4	observe

#### 2. Interview: an informal interview with a local informant

- type: face to face, unstructured interview (no prepared questions)
- informant's description: Female, 50s, fluent in Chinese and Japanese, has been living in Sendai for more than 20 years. Strong interest in traditional Japanese culture and actively participate in community activities.

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<sup>44</sup> This report is completed under the guidance of <https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/fieldreport>.

### 3. Sample selection method

Based on the festival map provided by the official website, the main decorated shopping streets were identified as the first observation objects. Ad Libitum method of sampling (the observer writes down anything that looks interesting) was adopted, for it does not require an organized observation system, only needs to focus on the content related to the research paper. It can also observe rare or abnormal conditions more easily.

### 4. Observation: describe the festival as it occur in the setting

- the structured form for recording the information observed

What to observe	festival locations, festival events, preparations, people's reactions, number of participants, decorations, scale, weather, etc.
When to observe	before, during and after the festival
How to observe	participate in festival activities and experience the festive atmosphere as a tourist; also sometimes be a silent observer

- recording techniques: Note taking and image taking

A mobile phone was used to record personal findings and ideas. Photos or videos would be taken at first if time was limited, followed by completed notes. It had been confirmed that permissions were not required for photos of the decorations and festival events.

### 5. Questions that used for observation

What did I found? What does that mean? Why did it happen?

Is there any typical event or behavior? Is there anything out of ordinary?

Is there any connection?

How did the people act? Why? What are the implications?

Does evidence support the assumption?

What were the strengths and flaws of my observations?

What is the connection between the observation results and the previous literature?

### 6. Ethical codes

- be neutral and transparent
- cannot interfere with or hinder the progress of the festival

- obtain informed consent from the informant
- be fully aware of publicity right and copyright
- all results must be fully in line with the facts, and no information can be covered up or tampered

## Notes

total visitors in 2019: around 2,249,000

the average temperature from August 6 to August 9: 33.5°C

1st Sendai Tanabata Festival in the Reiwa era, extraordinary decorations

decorations: everywhere, every two meters in shopping streets, around ten meters tall, hang on a bamboo pole, five decorations as a set, made of *washi*, take time and effort

bamboo: start from August 4, hang up on August 6, clean up from August 8 night to August 9

decoration contest: winners marked with golden boards, 1st is the LED decorations from Future Tanabata Project of *Kanezaki* 鐘崎

platform: Shimane prefecture, Tokushima prefecture tourism PR

anime to attract fans (the young), pokemon

surrounding shopping streets (one street away 国分寺): no decorations, no visitors

2011: decorations were very simple, not very colorful, show confidence in reconstruction

Hiroshima Peace Memorial Ceremony: August 6, peaceful Tanabata, paper cranes from all over Japan, paper cranes necklaces for tourists as gifts before, now sell for 50000 yen.

Hawaii concert: why?

residents participation: *Chō-kai*, *kodomo-kai*, *fujin-kai* preparing from April, take turns

venders in the shopping street, permission needed (for occupying the streets?), different content, but festival-related

the love legend is not so important as decorations. no kami, no traditional ritual

festival square, activities for three days, workshop for making decorations

paper cards with wishes in different languages collected from all over the world

firework need to purchase a spot in advance, crowded

Sendai City Museum of History and Folklore: books, photos, research reports

*Kahoku Shimpō* booth: focus on festival's history

*Kahoku Shimpō*: difficult to do research, time limit, need permission to make a copy

Figure 9: The Sendai Tanabata Festival Map<sup>45</sup>



<sup>45</sup> Figure from <https://www.sendaitanabata.com/en>

**Figure 10: The decoration style and meanings in the Edo period<sup>46</sup>**



	<b>Tanzaku</b>	Paper Cards   Academic progress and progress in calligraphy skills
	<b>Kamigoromo</b>	Paper Kimonos   Healing, calamity and progress in sewing skills.
	<b>Orizuru</b>	Paper Cranes   Family safety and longevity
	<b>Kinchaku</b>	Paper Purses   Business prosperity
	<b>Toami</b>	Paper Fishnets   Fishing and harvest
	<b>Kuzukago</b>	Paper Garbage Cans   Cleanliness and frugality
	<b>Fukinagashi</b>	Paper Windsock   Represents the Tanabata legend's Weaver Girl's yarn.

<sup>46</sup> Figure from <https://www.sendaitanabata.com/english/pc/outline/feature/index.html>  
also <https://www.sendaitanabata.com/english/pc/outline/decoration/>



**Figure 11: Some decorations of the Sendai Tanabata Festival in 2019<sup>47</sup>**



<sup>47</sup> Photos were taken by the author, top: from Tohoku University, bottom left: from pokemon center Tohoku, bottom right: the LED decorations from Kanezaki.