

Tradition, Tourism Development, and Participation: The Awa Odori Festival in Tokushima*

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1. Introduction

This paper aims to explore the impact of so-called “traditional” events by taking Awa Odori in Japan as an example. *Awa* is Tokushima Prefecture’s ancient name, and *Odori* means dance. This was the first case in Japan of a particular region’s traditional dance festival successfully turning into a tourism resource. This traditional Japanese folk dance, which was born centuries ago in Tokushima, attracts more than one million people to its annual festival. Similar events are held all over Japan, among which the Awa Odori festival at Koenji in Tokyo, which began as a way to boost local businesses in 1957, is the most famous.

Previous research on Awa Odori has been conducted from the perspectives of history, folklore, and cultural anthropology, as well as policy making and management. Although this paper owes much to the significant achievements of these prior studies, it focuses on the multi-layered construction of this “traditional” event covering different fields. The paper highlights the key role of economic shifts, geopolitical events, and, most importantly, tourism development in shaping the event’s current form. Furthermore, it analyzes in detail the event’s current management policies, describing the process of its operations becoming privatized in 2019. Finally, the paper highlights the role of such a traditional event in shaping the identity of an otherwise peripheral Japanese region that is negatively affected by population outflow. This study makes a significant contribution in rethinking tradition and tourism in contemporary society by drawing out implications of relevance to many “traditional” events worldwide using a particular case.

To achieve this, Awa Odori will be analyzed based on the relationship among three actors: tourists, performers, and local residents; furthermore, a discourse analysis of the main actors will be conducted. In this regard, the minutes of the festival’s Executive Committee and administrative statistics were used as materials.

In Section 2, we will look at the main characteristics of Awa Odori, some of which are closely related to the spread of the event throughout Japan. Section 3 of this paper introduces Awa Odori in detail from the viewpoint of event management in terms of its venues, dates and times, organizers, and income and expenditure. Section 4 presents the process by which Awa Odori became a tourism resource. Section 5 considers how Awa Odori itself changed alongside the growth of tourism. Finally, in Section 6, the part of “tradition” that is maintained in the middle of development will be discussed.

*Key Words: traditional events, Japanese festivals, Awa, hands-on tourism

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2. Characteristics of Awa Odori

The main characteristic of Awa Odori is the bands and dancer groups that parade to a two-step rhythm through the streets and narrow arcades. At many other *Bon Odori*, which are danced during the *Bon* period in midsummer in different parts of Japan, people place a high wooden scaffold (*Yagura*) made especially for the festival at the center of a park or in a square and dance in a circle around it to musical accompaniment. The parade form has existed since before the Middle Ages, and eventually the circular form was added to become the mainstream (Kobayashi, 2011: 49). In Tokushima, the circular form of dance was called *Shoryo Odori* and differentiated from the parade form of dance that was considered a legitimate *Bon Odori* (Nakamura, 1996: 25). The difference in forms is important because it differentiates the place to perform dances. In the parade form, people can even go through narrow arcades, while the circular form requires more space. This is one main reason why storekeepers in Koenji decided to start Koenji's Awa Dance festival, centered on narrow shopping arcades, even though Koenji was located in western Tokyo, far from Tokushima, where no dancers knew Awa Dance initially (*The Japan Times*, August 25, 2016). In fact, the form of Awa Odori performed at the festival is not limited to the parade form. For example, a formation unique to each group can be seen on the stage in the theater. On unpopulated streets, dancers sometimes make a circle and take turns dancing in it.

It is also characteristic that each group is called *Ren*, comprising dancers and musicians. Generally, there are as many as 850 *Ren* (groups) participating in the Awa Odori festival, and some of them perform several times in different places over four days. The style of dancing is broadly divided into male and female dances, but male dances performed by female dancers can be included. Although the latter was regarded as abnormal and unsightly by the locals about fifty years ago, it is quite common and popular now. In some groups, children (generally 5-12-year-olds) also perform dances. *Shamisen*, *O-daiko* (big drum), *Shime-daiko* (small high-pitched drum), *Kane* (gong), *Fue* (flute), and *Tuzumi* (hand drum) are the main musical instruments used. The size of *Ren* varies from 30 to 500 people, but each group is led by “a leader of *Ren*” who is often charismatic and symbolic. Many of the *Ren* have their headquarters in Tokushima Prefecture. Their members vary in age, place of residence, and occupation, including company employees, civil servants, students, the self-employed, and so on. Some groups were founded before World War II. In the past, many groups were formed on a regional basis, but in recent years, the basis of groups has diversified, including schools, workplaces, and friends. Groups are categorized into *Yumei Ren* (famous groups), student *Ren*, corporate *Ren* (company-based groups), government-related *Ren*, outside-prefecture *Ren*, and so on. Among them, the famous and long-standing *Yumei Ren* plays a central role.

According to the revised definition in 2019, 74 groups belonging to one of the three associations, Tokushima Prefecture Awa Dance Association, Awa Dance Promotion Association, and Tokushima Prefecture Awa Dance Preservation Association, were regarded as *Yumei Ren*. The classification was used as a criterion for priority application to paid theaters and for the participation fee system. It was also decided that from 2020 the groups would be selected based on criteria such as having been invited to several events outside the prefecture to perform, and that they would be called *Yusen Ren* (priority groups) instead of *Yumei Ren* (famous groups). This paper, however, continues to use the established name of *Yumei Ren*. The members of each *Yumei Ren* practice daily and are so highly

skilled that they are often invited to perform outside of Tokushima Prefecture and sometimes abroad.

It is notable that none of them, including the leaders, are professional in the sense that do not earn a living through performances. Around 1980, many of the leaders were self-employed and had free time and money; one, for example, was the owner of a Japanese-style pancake (*Oban-yaki*) shop. In recent years, it has happened that employees of general companies and even employees of Tokushima City Hall serve concurrently as leaders. Most of the heads of famous teams who are often asked to perform on any day of the week assert that, “Awa Odori is not a job. It’s just a hobby.” However, it is also said that “becoming a team leader means getting off the career path” because they sometimes need to take paid vacation or to refuse a transfer order (Minami, 2012: 48, 90).

Some *Ren* have conditions, such as requiring a person to be aged over 16 to become a member, but generally anyone can join if she/he has enough time to participate in rehearsals. Initiation and withdrawal are so unrestricted that people frequently move between different *Ren*. In reality, however, many members of *Yumei Ren* are residents in or near Tokushima City, because they practice almost every day in the parks of Tokushima City on weekday nights in July for the festival, making it difficult to join for distant residents. On the other hand, the prerequisite for student *Ren* and corporate *Ren* is that they belong to a specific university or a company (Takahashi, 2000; Nakamura, 1996). In the case of student *Ren* from outside the prefecture, it is often the case that members from Tokushima Prefecture take the lead. Student *Ren* are often regarded as the opposite of *Yumei Ren*. That is because many members of student *Ren* leave groups when they graduate from universities and that the annual change of members makes it difficult to have stable organizations and develop higher skills, while the members in *Yumei Ren* take time to improve their skills in more stable organizations. The members of corporate *Ren* have changed from generally being owners of small stores to being employees of large nationwide companies. The purpose of their participation in the festival is to utilize Awa Odori’s power to promote their company, in addition to encouraging teambuilding among employees and interaction with local communities.

3. Management of the event

3.1. Locations

Tokushima Prefecture is located on the eastern side of the island of Shikoku, which consists of four prefectures: Ehime, Kagawa, Kochi, and Tokushima. Each prefecture has an airport, and, as of 2020, three of them (excluding Kochi), are connected to the mainland by bridge. Tokushima Prefecture has a population of 740,000 in an area of 4,146 square kilometers, and consists of 8 administrative cities and 16 towns and villages. The largest city is Tokushima City, which has a population of 250,000. This is where the famous Awa Odori event is held. Tokushima welcomes nearly 1.3 million people each year for its annual festival.

The main venues are mostly the same every year, with some changes, such as the installation of temporary stands. In 2018, four paid theaters, three free theaters, and nine open spaces were set up in the city. One of the main venues was located in Aiba-hama park along the Shinmachi River, which had a total length of 122 meters to accommodate about 5,000 people. Additionally, many foods and merchandise stalls appeared around the area during the festival. Another 170-meter-long theater is well known as a “venue to make performers cry” as dancing the length of the venue can easily cause them to become exhausted, although shortening the venue is in contemplation to allow more space for park-

ing. Both are open-air theaters. It is generally easy for visitors to move around the different venues, except when it is very crowded, because they are all located within a 30-minute walk from Tokushima Station.

Koenji's Awa Odori easily attracts more spectators than Tokushima despite its shorter history, because it is located in a metropolitan area. However, one key contrast with Tokushima needs to be described: namely, Tokushima's abundant nature including mountains and rivers in the immediate vicinity of the outdoor venues, which form a beautiful background to the dancers. The venues of Koenji are surrounded by tall buildings and superstores rather than the temporary stalls in Tokushima.

3.2. Dates

The schedule of Awa Odori festival in Tokushima is fixed; it takes place every year from August 12 to 15, during the *Bon* period when Japanese people honor and pacify the souls of ancestors. Therefore, when the date falls on a weekday or during bad weather, the number of visitors generally decreases. In fact, in 2019, despite the fact that management had recently been privatized, which was expected to improve operational efficiency, a typhoon caused a cancelation of two days of the event and a refund of tickets. It is impossible to predict the weather when advance tickets are sold, but setting two days of the event on weekends would certainly increase the number of visitors and, consequently, revenue. It was suggested at the Experts' Meeting that the schedule should be changed to fixed days of the week, including Saturday and Sunday, instead of fixed dates. However, this is still a matter under consideration at present (Awa Odori Project Evaluation Committee, "Proposal for Awa Odori Project Verification Results," November 26, 2019).

Previously, the festival was held from 18:00 to 22:30, but it was decided at the end of 2019 that the ending time would be shifted to 22:00 by advancing the first performance to 17:30. The hours of traffic regulation were changed to 17:30 to 22:30 accordingly. However, performance areas set up on roads had to open at 18:00 as before in order to ensure safety, so performances needed to be shortened there. In addition, they planned to set up free theaters that started at 15:00 to enliven shopping streets and daytime sightseeing.

Several factors influence the determination of performance times. The first concern is complaints from nearby residents about noise at night. Second, the groups of dancers are less keen on performing late. Third, the Executive Committee judged that advancing the ending time of the performance would increase profits by enabling more groups of tourists to come from long distances. They will in turn revitalize the local economy by using local restaurants and shops after watching performances. Starting the event at 17:00 was also considered, but the proposition was not pursued, due to the following concerns: traffic restrictions would hinder the arrival of goods, the potential for heatstroke in the audience, and the difficulty of securing personnel to perform when many have jobs to go to.

In the Executive Committee's process of deliberation, other traditional dance events such as Naruto City Awa Odori (held in Naruto City, Tokushima Prefecture on August 9-11, 19:00-22:00), Ikeda Awa Odori (held in Miyoshi City, Tokushima Prefecture on August 14-16, 19:00-22:00) and Koenji Awa Odori (held in Suginami-ku, Tokyo on August 24-25, 17:00-20:00) were considered, even though some of them start their events much later. In short, the desires of local residents, local storekeepers, spectators, and performers (none of whom are full-time dancers) are taken into consideration, and a compromise between them is always being sought.

3.3. Changes in organizers

The Awa Odori festival was co-organized by the Tokushima City Tourism Association and the Tokushima local newspaper *Tokushima Shimbun* until 2017. However, it was found that the association had accumulated a deficit of over 400 million yen. After that, the festival was organized for the first time by a committee led by the Tokushima municipal government (*The Mainichi*, August 14, 2018; *Yomiuri*, August 14, 2018; *The Japan Times*, August 19, 2018; *Asahi*, February 14, 2019). Despite efforts to reform the performance and venues to eliminate the deficit, in August 2018 Awa Odori ended with a deficit of about 29.5 million yen. Later, following the recommendations of the Council of Experts, it was decided to outsource the Awa Odori project to the private sector with a five-year contract period, so that improvements could be discussed.

In addition, the mayor retired from the chair, and *Tokushima Shimbun*, which had played a central role in the Awa Odori Executive Committee, withdrew. The deficit was compensated by the Awa Odori Promotion Fund created by *Tokushima Shimbun*. At this time, the newspaper's president said, "Awa Odori itself is not a profitable business, so it is better not to think of it in terms of management. As a general incorporated association, one of its duties is public welfare" (*Asahi*, February 2 and February 6, 2019). It was later revealed that *Tokushima Shimbun* did not apply for the post of Awa Odori management operators.

As a result of the selection, operations were outsourced to a joint venture of three companies: Kyodo Tokyo, an event planning giant, Kyodo Factory, an affiliate of the aforementioned company, and Neovient, which plans events in Tokushima Prefecture. Although the preparation period for 2019, which was the first year run by the private sector, was only about four months, many changes were seen: for example, the introduction of wristband-type tickets that allow visitors to go freely in and out of four paid theaters instead of fixed tickets that specify one theater to visit, sale of original goods, sale of premium tickets that allow visitors to see the dances performed only by *Yumei Ren* and face-to-face sales of tickets for people who find it difficult to purchase them online.

In 2020, more improvements were expected, but the festival was called off due to Covid-19. Instead, Awa Odori was performed on November 21st and 22nd on weekends as a "demonstrational event" to verify appropriate measures to combat Covid-19 during the following year's festival. A limited number of spectator seats were set up, and the dancers wore face shields and shouted modestly.

3.4. Income and expenditure

Traditional Japanese events, including the Awa Odori festival, have difficulty generating profits. The Aomori Nebuta Festival, which boasts a higher attendance (about 2.5 million) than Awa Odori (about 1.3 million), recorded a deficit in 2015. The festival organizer in Aomori Prefecture was forced to raise ticket prices for spectator seats because of declining sales and rising labor costs (*The Japan Times*, August 9 and 19, 2018; *Nikkei*, August 1, 2016). As the president of *Tokushima Shimbun* said, most of those traditional festivals are not supposed to be "profitable," but are for "public welfare." Therefore, it is not easy for organizers to decide to raise ticket prices. Nevertheless, if a deficit accumulates, it can become difficult to continue an event.

The biggest source of income for many events is the entrance fee from visitors, and Awa Odori festival is no exception. The current goal is thus to make paid theaters full by setting prices appropriately and establishing temporary stands to meet demand. The second source of income is advertising fees and sponsorship, and the third is subsidies from Tokushima City and Tokushima Prefecture. The

city also lends temporary stands to the Executive Committee. In addition, there is shuttle bus income, and income from a “participation fee” for performers introduced in 2019. In introducing this fee, festivals held in other areas of Japan were referenced again. Some of them, although nominally different (e.g., “participation and cooperation fee” [Kochi Yosakoi festival]; “security fee” [Minami-Koshigaya Awa Odori]), collect what is deemed to be an appropriate participation fee. However, there was considerable opposition to this new measure in Tokushima. Performers have already spent a lot of money buying instruments and costumes, and some groups have also paid to hire a rehearsal space during the year. Above all, the organizer of the festival had previously paid a participation allowance to some selected groups of *Yumei Ren*, rather than collecting a participation fee. This is why the introduction of the participation fee was a dramatic change.

Regarding the collection of participation fees from performers, a proposal at the Experts’ Meeting stated that “Awa Odori is an important tourism resource in Tokushima and a traditional culture that is a part of the lives of citizens. It is fundamental that all participants should reaffirm this and support it together.” It also stated, “since the purpose is not to raise income, it is important to keep the participation fee at a level that is not too burdensome and to make everyone aware that they are supporting Awa Odori” (Awa Odori Project Verification Experts’ Meeting, “Proposal for Awa Odori Project Verification Results,” January 24, 2019; Minutes of the 5th Awa Odori Management Council Meeting, February 12, 2019). In 2019, they abolished the participation allowance, and created a varying participation fee. For example, student groups pay less than general groups, and corporate groups pay more. There is no charge for groups of people with disabilities and for groups coming from outside Tokushima, in recognition of their travel and accommodation expenses.

Needless to say, it is essential to eliminate the deficit by reducing costs and increasing income. The participation allowance used to occupy a large part of the expenses but, as mentioned above, it was abolished. Instead, expenses such as parking and lunch fees are paid to some selected groups. Awa Odori’s expenditure also includes venue installation costs (installation of lighting, temporary stands, and signboards), security fees, venue usage fees, and so on. To reduce installation costs, the expansion of venues not requiring temporary stands is in progress, as storage of temporary stands involves costs every year. Since this amount is too large to ignore, the Executive Committee has often discussed the best storage company to use.

Although it does not appear in the balance of payments, university and high school students living in Tokushima City are involved in the event as volunteers, to make announcements in English at theaters and help visitors at the information desk. There is no doubt that this has contributed significantly to reducing labor costs. Moreover, it should be noted that many city officials are mobilized to run the annual event, whose labor costs are not counted either. That is, the event for “public welfare” has been supported by the public, especially local residents.

4. Awa Dance’s development into a tourism resource

In terms of tourism in Tokushima, Awa indigo is historically well known, and Udatsu Townscape (western Tokushima, Mima City), where people can see traditional houses of indigo merchants, is a tourist destination. Additionally, Tokushima has natural formations such as the Yoshino river and Naruto whirlpools, and cultural resources such as *Awa Ningyo Joruri* (a puppet show). Against this background, why and how did the promotion of Awa Dance into a tourism resource proceed?

Although a volume of the *History of Tokushima City* (Kodama, 1973: 185) carries “the oldest picture of Awa Dance” from 1798, the origin of the Dance remains unclear; there are several theories. One theory, supported by many historians and folklorists, ascribes the origin to a religious event observed during the mid-August *Bon* period to comfort the spirits of the deceased. It is also said that a *Bon Odori*, which had been danced in a limited area of Tokushima City, especially in the urban area, was named Awa Odori by a folk entertainment researcher (Nakamura, 1996; Tatuoka, 2002; Takahashi, 2000). It is certain that indigo traders played a major role in making the local dance more elaborate. They made enormous profits by cultivating indigo plants suitable for the fertile land, after people in Tokushima had suffered from the floods of the Yoshino river (official website of the Tokushima Prefectural Government¹⁾). The inflow of cheap and high-quality Indian indigo began around 1887, and about a decade later, a large amount of artificial indigo using chemical dyes was imported. Consequently, the indigo industry in Tokushima declined rapidly, as did the momentum of the Awa Odori.

The turning point was in 1929, when Tokushima City began full-scale efforts to make Awa Odori a tourism resource (see **Table 1**). It was judged that Awa Odori might be able to restore vitality to Tokushima’s industrial world, where the recession continued. The Tokushima Chamber of Commerce prepared posters and pamphlets for the advertisement of Awa Odori to be distributed outside the prefecture, and discounted fares for railroads, ships, and accommodation fees in order to increase the number of tourists. In the same year, “judgment venues” were set up in Tokushima Park and other places for the first time, where performers competed for a championship. They have undergone several transitions in response to requests from both performers and spectators, and now they have been transformed into theaters for shows, rather than competitions. Moreover, dances that were restricted to the “judgment venues” can now be seen on the streets, as they were originally performed (Tatuoka, 2002). In 1932, a 100-meter-long special spectator stand was set up for tourists coming from outside the prefecture. These efforts were successful, attracting many people from different regions and providing income for inns and transportation. Performers also started to come from outside Tokushima (Takahashi, 2015). This change was facilitated by the opening of Tokushima Broadcasting in 1933 and the rail connection between Takamatsu City (Kagawa Prefecture) and Tokushima City in 1935. At that time, access from Honshu to Shikoku was still limited to sea routes, and Takamatsu had a ferry route connecting them. In 1941, a movie called “Awa’s Dancers” was created, further increasing its popularity throughout Japan.

From 1937, the festival was suspended until the end of the war in 1945. Although the central part of Tokushima City was burned to the ground, Awa Odori was revived immediately after the war with the permission of the occupying forces for the reconstruction of the city and to raise the morale of citizens (Aitani et al., 2012). In 1947, the Tokushima Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Tokushima City Store Federation co-sponsored Awa Odori. After that, various organizations such as the Prefectural Tourism Association and newspapers cooperated with the management organization. Around 1955, the festival was co-organized by the public sector and members of the Dance Association. Moreover; around 1965, along with the introduction of an opening night for the festival, Awa Odori began to be staged during daytime. There had previously been little for visitors to see in Tokushima during the day, leaving them with too much time to kill awaiting evening entertainment.

1) <https://www.pref.tokushima.lg.jp>

One leader describes this period as “the dawn of Awa Odori as a show” (Minami, 2012: 23). In the 1960s, civil aircrafts started to use Tokushima Airport, which was opened in 1941 as the airfield for the Tokushima Navy Air Corps. This coincides with the period when the economy was on the rise and a mass tourism boom occurred in Japan along with rising income levels and more leisure time. After the Tokushima City Tourism Association was established in 1972, the Association established an annual Awa Odori Executive Committee with *Tokushima Shimbun*. The installation and management that had been operated separately for each theater up to that point were unified by the committee. The theaters were divided into free and paid seats. In addition, “dance plazas” using public spaces (roads) was set up, where only lighting was installed. It is supposed that both performers and visitors could dance freely whenever and wherever they wanted (Bandou et al., 2007). Furthermore, the *Niwaka Ren* established in 1977 made great progress as a participatory traditional performing art, where tourists could participate rather than just observe. As the word *Niwaka* means “a sudden change,” it represents a group of people who want to dance and is formed immediately by gathering in a predetermined place on the day of the festival. In other words, no prior application or practice is required because people can receive the guidance of *Yumei Ren* on the day (as of 2019).

Because performance locations began to be fixed from 1986 onwards, shopping districts and local companies set up another dance space independent of the Executive Committee in 1992. Some general local groups often dance there, and sometimes famous groups are asked to join. As Bandou et al. (2007: 35, 36) point out, it certainly shows “the consciousness of trying to make local dance and tourism coexist.” As a result, we see three types of performance spaces in Tokushima: theaters, dance plazas (roads), and street corners.

In 1988, the Seto Bridge finally opened, and it became possible to move between Honshu and Shikoku (Okayama and Kagawa prefectures) by land using both trains and cars. Ten years later, in 1998, the Akashi Kaikyo Bridge opened, creating a land route from Hyogo to Tokushima Prefecture, and in 1999, the third land route appeared between Hiroshima and Ehime Prefectures.

In January 2018, an international terminal was added to Tokushima Airport, and a charter flight from Taipei (Taiwan) to Tokushima Airport was launched after the first route had been established connecting the prefecture with Hong Kong. In particular, the charter flight from Hong Kong proved popular, so it was increased to two scheduled flights a week from December of the same year. Although operating days between Hong Kong and Tokushima are limited to Wednesdays and Saturdays, and it is unclear whether tourists will stay in Tokushima Prefecture, the feasibility of a three- or four-night stay has increased. For the five years from 2012 to 2016, the number of visitors from Taiwan and Hong Kong has already greatly exceeded that of other countries and regions. In addition, visitors from Hong Kong had the highest travel expenditures per person/per day. Therefore, it is expected that the main targets of inbound tourism will continue to be Taiwan and Hong Kong (Draft Tokushima City Business Plan, January 30, 2018). The Executive Committee pointed out the need for announcements and staff using Chinese in addition to English and a multilingual homepage, in order to internationalize the Awa Odori (Minutes of the 6th Awa Odori Executive Committee, September 27, 2019). In Japan, it has been revealed that people living in Osaka and Hyogo often go to Kagawa rather than Tokushima for sightseeing in Shikoku. It takes about two and a half hours by highway bus, for example, from Osaka to Tokushima. Increase the number of visitors from nearby areas, such as Osaka and Hyogo, has become an issue in recent years, as well as from highly populated Tokyo (Draft Tokushima City Business Plan, January 30, 2018).

A questionnaire was administered on the Awa Odori official homepage for approximately one month, from August 11 to September 15, after the Awa Odori event started in 2019. It should be noted that the opening night of the festival was held in an indoor theater on August 11, and the main events were supposed to follow it from August 12 to 15, but all events on the last two days were canceled due to the typhoon. Therefore, the number of participants in the event was much smaller than usual, and the number of responses to the questionnaire was only 370. The answers to some questions are summarized in **Table 2**. This shows that more than half of the visitors came from outside Tokushima Prefecture (60%), and that most visitors were in their 50s (25%) and were with their families (57%). In addition, 76% of the respondents said that this was at least their second visit, indicating that the repeat rate is very high. The conclusion drawn from the questionnaire is that “it is necessary to aim to acquire new visitors” (Minutes of the 6th Awa Odori Executive Committee, September 27, 2019).

Table 1. Outline of Awa Odori tourism development process in Tokushima

Tourism Development Process	Background
1929: Tokushima begins to work on Awa Odori as a tourism resource by developing advertising campaigns and establishing judging areas.	1920 s: Industrial decline in Tokushima City with beginning the creation of a modern city, such as the opening of a city clinic and beginning of a city bus service.
1932: Setting up of special viewing seats for tourists coming from outside the prefecture.	1933: Opening of Tokushima Radio Broadcasting.
1937-1945: Cancellation of the festival due to the war.	1935 : Opening of a railway between Takamatsu and Tokushima.
1947: Co-organization of the festival by the Tokushima Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Tokushima City Store Federation.	1941: Release of the movie, “Awa’s Dancers.”
Ca. 1955: The Dance Association participates in festival management.	1955-1965: The first economic and mass tourism boom in Japan.
1960 s: Emergence of a “female dance” style and the introduction of indoor stages.	1959: Opening of Tokushima TV (state-run) Broadcasting as well as Shikoku TV (commercial) Broadcasting.
Ca. 1965: Introduction of an opening night for the festival and Awa Odori staged during daytime.	1960 s: Beginning of the use of Tokushima Airport by civilians.
1972: Foundation of Tourism Association followed by Awa Odori Executive Committee.	1966-1973: The second economic boom in Japan.
1977: Establishment of <i>Niwaka Ren</i> (groups formed on the day).	1988, 1998, and in 1999: Opening of land routes between Shikoku Island and the Japanese mainland.
Ca.1990: Speeding up the dance to please the crowd.	1990: Opening of Tokushima Cable TV Broadcasting.
2019: Start of private sector management of the festival.	2018: Expansion of the international terminal at Tokushima Airport.

Table 2. Questionnaire: Visitors to the Awa Odori festival in August 2019, n=370

Number of visits	n (%)	Residential Area	n (%)	Age	n (%)	Form of visit	n (%)
More than ten times	136 (37)	Outside Tokushima Prefecture	222 (60)	50s	91 (25)	Family	211 (57)
First time	85 (23)	Inside Tokushima Prefecture	145 (39)	30s	88 (23)	Group	84 (23)
From three to five times	70 (19)	Outside Japan	2 (1)	40s	66 (18)	Alone	58 (16)
Second time	43 (12)	Unanswered	1 (0)	20s	53 (14)	Company	5 (1)
From six to eight times	32 (9)			60s	37 (10)	Group trip	5 (1)
Unanswered	4 (1)			10s	13 (3)	Others	5 (1)
				Over 70	11 (3)	Unanswered	2 (1)
				Unanswered	10 (3)		
				Under 10	1 (0)		

Note: Data sourced from the Awa Odori official homepage.

5. Transformation of Awa Odori: From “dance to do” to “dance to show/watch”

We are going to see how Awa Odori itself changed along with the process of tourism development, relying on previous research. In the latter half of the 19th century, Awa Odori was very active in all cities in Tokushima, but it was still more a “dance to participate in” than a “dance to show or watch.” There was no performance hall like today, and a small group of people danced freely around the city. Police control over the event was lenient. In addition, the style of dance was considerably free, as well as the clothes and musical instruments. As mentioned above, in the middle of the Meiji era (around 1889-1904), Tokushima’s economic power sank. The police tightened control over the dances, and the spread of education led to a tendency to stop children from participating in dances. As a result, Awa Odori fell into decline. In the Taisho era (1912-1926), Awa Odori gradually regained its vibrancy, and unification of costumes began to be seen. This represents the growing awareness of “being watched” (Ishikawa, 1999; Takahashi, 2015).

Then, in the Showa era, when Tokushima City made a full-scale effort to make Awa Odori a tourist attraction from 1929 and increased the number of “judgment venues,” Awa Odori finally became something “to show” to an increasing number of tourists. In other words, performers no more only enjoyed dancing, but also became aware of showing it. Such a staged setting created the unity of costumes and dances in each group (Takahashi, 2015).

Until the early Showa period, there seemed to be no particular restriction on the style of dance, except for the characteristic marching dance to musical accompaniments while raising both hands and waving. Subsequently, five judging criteria were set out in 1936, when many judging places were set up: “1. The clothes should be classical; 2. A full range of three-stringed instruments should be used; 3. The style of dancing should be unified; 4. The dance, musical instruments, and clothes should be in harmony; 5. The dance group must consist of more than 10 people and be arranged to attract the general public” (*Tokushima Mainichi Shimibun*, August 29, 1936; Kobayashi, 2016).

After the war, the dance that had become a show produced many *Yumei Ren*, which displayed outstanding skills. Furthermore, it was used by the corporate *Ren* to “show” the presence of the company, that is, to promote the company and improve its image. Performers danced in uniforms with the company’s name and logo, and large adverts were displayed on the stands. In the early Showa period,

some company groups used Awa Odori for PR by distributing their own products. However, during the period of high economic growth between 1955 and 1973, many of these local companies were replaced by national companies. This corresponds to the process of transforming a local festival or community event into a mass event (Takahashi, 2015).

In the 1960s, the “female dance” style emerged within Awa Odori, which always had a small gender gap. As a tourist attraction, Awa Odori frequently appeared on television and other media, and here too, the dancer’s consciousness of “being watched” and “showing” led to the pursuit of “feminine” dances. As a result, styles of dancing were differentiated by the gender of the dancers, and the two styles of “female dance” and “male dance” were established. Female dancers, wearing *yukata* (lightweight kimono), *geta* (wooden sandals), and long straw hats, advance with arms held aloft, and with their toes turned in. On the other hand, male dancers parade with the toes turned out and always maintain a low posture, forming a contrast. Furthermore, it was no longer forbidden for female dancers to dress as men, as it had been in the early stages of the tourism policy. Another style of dance named “female dance with *happi* coat” emerged after the war. That is, female dancers dressed in male clothing and danced in a male dance style (Kobayashi, 2016).

When Awa Odori was introduced on an indoor stage as a measure against rainy weather around 1965, each group began to devise its own dances. For example, there was a group that made the movement look bigger by unifying the actions in the male dance. Previously in that group, some dancers with a fan mingled with the others who had bare hands; subsequently, all of them held lanterns in their hands. Another group introduced drums (Minami, 2012: 84). To understand these changes, the stories of leaders of *Yumei Ren* are helpful. According to them, around 1960, there were many applicants for *Ren* even though they did not recruit members in magazines as they do today, because people had no TVs, private cars, or other entertainment. However, during the period of high economic growth, when color TVs and air conditioning were installed in houses, bowling and golf courses were established, and leisure activities could be enjoyed by cars, people no longer showed interest in Awa Odori. In the early 1970s, some *Yumei Ren* even had no applicants, or found only one female dancer. “In the old days, there were many people who wanted to join,” but in recent years many *Ren* have been struggling to recruit members (Minami, 2012: 9-10). On the other hand, as people’s disposable income increased, so did the number of tourists. Around 1990, many *Ren* sped up their dancing due to the positive reception of the audience. Some *Ren* maintained the conventional slow speed, but, probably as a result, the number of applicants to these groups decreased. In such groups, various arrangements were made in the use of musical instruments. In the 21st century, many groups strive to differentiate themselves from others using a novel composition (Minami, 2012: 27-29).

Since the Taisho era, musical instruments have not been limited to traditional Japanese musical instruments, and some groups use violins, mandolins, clarinets, harmonicas, and other instruments. In recent years, performers have also used electric shamisen, mambo, and sambo. In this way, Awa Odori has been sensitive to the dances and music that are currently popular, unlike traditional performing arts that firmly maintain the “normal” style (Takahashi, 2000). One of the leaders said, “To inherit the tradition, we have to protect 90% of the total and create the remaining 10%” (Minami, 2012: 36). Another leader added, “Awa Odori is a traditional performing art, but it declines in the attitude of protecting it. If we do not gradually adopt something new, the audience will eventually get bored with us” (Minami, 2012: 70). Some leaders are caught in a dilemma, choosing between further changes and returning to the dance’s origins.

6. So-called “tradition” and its maintenance

It can be said that Awa Odori has generally been transformed from “dance to do” and “dance to enjoy oneself” to “dance to show and be watched.” However, Awa Odori had the character of “being watched” even before tourism. A drawing of people dancing on the Shinmachi bridge by Katei Yoshinari (1807-1869) during the Edo period clearly shows this point. The Tokushima clan banned people from dancing in neighboring towns, fearing disorderly conduct and riots, and punished any offenders. Under this constraint, people from two towns located on either side of the river danced on the bridge connecting them in order to show off and compete over the extravagance of each dance, to avoid entering the neighboring town (Kobayashi, 2019).

Today, we can still see the same bridge and Bizan mountain, which are symbols of Tokushima City. One difference with the past is that there are now many banners advertising the event and corporate logos. Furthermore, the moon was at its fullest during the festival in the Edo period because people celebrated *Bon* according to the lunar calendar. At that time, people danced more freely than today. It is exactly this act of dancing freely that local people and the Executive Committee want to maintain as “tradition” even in the process of transformation.

It is the attraction of Tokushima Awa Odori that people can participate in dance anytime and anywhere on the street corner. This is what differentiates Tokushima from Koenji and Minami-Koshigaya. We therefore think that excessive regulation or control is not needed. (Opinion of Awa Odori Promotion Association, Minutes of the 7th Awa Odori Executive Committee, November 29, 2019)

Awa Odori in the Edo period was open to everyone, and that was *Niwaka*. (Opinion from the Management Council, Minutes of the 6th Awa Odori Executive Committee, September 27, 2019)

In the above quotes, we clearly see that “dancing freely” is rediscovered as the “tradition” of Tokushima Awa Odori, especially in comparison with imitative events held in other regions such as Koenji. In Koenji, the audience is prohibited from entering the dance areas during the festival (Tokyo Koenji Awa Dance Promotion Association).²⁾ The difference is clear if one experiences both festivals. In Koenji, the big dance “show” which marches on the street ends strictly on time. After that, the work of removing stands starts quickly in order to lift traffic restrictions. Therefore, it is impossible for the audience to dance in the space after the dance program is completed. Dancing freely in Tokushima, as in the past, is also restricted by various regulations such as performance place and time. However, “dance to do,” that local residents think of as a tradition, continues to this day and perfectly satisfies the demand for hands-on tourism, which has become increasingly popular (see **Table 3**). As we confirmed earlier, in the 1970s, both venues where anyone could dance freely and *Niwaka Ren* in which anyone could freely participate on the day were set up. They have been maintained and *Niwaka Ren* performed on two courses with more than 1,000 participants per day in 2019.

2) <http://www.koenji-awaodori.com/language/eng.html>

On the website of “Tokyo Koenji Awa Dance Promotion Association,” you can find the “festival rules” saying that “during the festival, do not enter the dance areas.”

Unlike local people who dance as part of tradition, it is not enough simply to set up venues where tourists can dance for the first time as an experience. Tokushima has already experienced the need for staff to guide dances. Currently, staff members of the secretariat and others support the event as volunteers, but it is necessary to train new dancers and increase the number of experienced people. According to a survey conducted by Kawauchi (2015) in 2013 on 145 elementary school students living in Tokushima City, 63.4% (92 out of 145) of the students had danced Awa Odori at school. In contrast, 71.7% (104 of 145) of their parents had done so. This clearly shows the decrease in opportunities to take up Awa Odori as a regional traditional performing art in the educational field. With the increasing number of children busy attending cram schools for entrance exams and playing video games, it is necessary to introduce more opportunities to learn local traditional performing arts in educational settings.

Table 3. “Dance to show/watch” and “dance to do”

Tourists	Performers: Dancers of <i>Ren</i>	Local residents who are not <i>Ren</i> members
Dance to watch as first-time or repeat visitors	Dance to show outstanding skills by <i>Yumei Ren</i> (famous and long-standing groups)	Dance to watch as experienced observers or families of performers
	Dance to show a company’s presence by corporation <i>Ren</i> (company-based groups)	
	Dance to show the results of a limited period of practice by student <i>Ren</i> (student groups)	
Dance to do as an experience (dancing)	Dance to do in an improvised group by <i>Niwaka Ren</i> (groups formed on the day)	Dance to do freely as tradition (dancing freely)

Note 1: There are other types of *Ren*, but they are omitted here because they are not focused on in this paper.

Note 2: The three agents can easily be swapped and can play two or even three roles at the same time.

7. Conclusion

In this article, we first looked at the characteristics of Awa Odori and the status of the festival, which is one of Tokushima’s traditional performing arts, focusing particularly on the festivals held in 2018 and 2019. Although Tokushima is located in the periphery of Japan and has a much lower population density than metropolitan areas, the increase of tourists due to the event affects traffic regulations and security in Tokushima as much as in metropolitan areas. Residents have also complained about noise caused by this “traditional” event. As with traditional events in other regions, operating costs continue to be a problem.

Next, we looked at the historical process of converting Awa Odori into a tourism resource. Even though Awa Odori itself is unique, the process of tourism development is by no means unique compared to events in other regions. The following four elements made this development possible: advertising, venue maintenance, improved access, and the establishment of an operating organization. They are indispensable elements common to the realization of events in other areas.

This article presented how Awa Odori itself has changed and how the dancers negotiated with tradition and accepted the changes brought about by the process of tourism development. Furthermore, it became clear that the home of Awa Odori constructed the “tradition” of “dancing freely” by comparing itself with other regions. Ironically, that freedom is limited by tighter regulations due to an in-

crease in tourists. As a framework for analysis, the viewpoints of “to do” and “to watch” were positioned as the main axes in order to clarify the relationship among three agents, tourists, performers, and local residents. This framework is also applicable to event analyses worldwide.

Tokushima’s next task is to think about how to satisfy tourists’ desire to watch high-quality dances by *Yumei Ren* and to dance themselves as beginners. To meet this demand, it is necessary to clearly separate “dance to watch” and “dance to do.” In response to the former request, in 2019, there was an attempt to have *Yumei Ren* appear every 30 minutes at paid performance theaters. Regarding the latter request, there has been an increasing demand from foreign tourists to participate in dances. Therefore, in the same year, a proposal was presented to increase performance courses for *Niwaka Ren* and also to establish a world *Ren* for foreigners. The aim was to build a new hands-on program that allows foreigners to experience Awa Odori with dance lessons and announcements using multiple languages (Minutes of the first Awa Odori Executive Committee, April 10, 2019; Minutes of the 7th Awa Odori Executive Committee, November 29, 2019). However, the COVID-19 pandemic that started at the end of 2019 disrupted these plans.

In order to maintain “tradition,” it is essential for Tokushima to solve the problem of the decreasing number of performers above all. The shortage of successors is an issue at every traditional festival in Japan. The Awa Odori Executive Committee considered requesting the student *Ren* to perform at paid theaters to foster the next generation of performers. In addition, as special ticket treatment for Tokushima residents, they discussed the invitation of elementary school students to paid venues with low ticket sales for free. This would be a useful measure not only to fill venues with spectators but also to arouse children’s interest in traditional culture. Currently, all performers, including those of *Yumei Ren*, are amateur dancers, and their families come to see the performance by buying tickets like other visitors.

From the perspective of local residents, the important point is that the easier access between Tokushima and the mainland has succeeded in attracting tourists and, at the same time, led to the outflow of local people. In other words, maintaining tradition is not easy, particularly in peripheral areas such as Tokushima, because the outflow of people greatly exceeds the inflow.³⁾ Needless to say, tourism represents only a temporary influx of people. Even though the history of the Awa Odori festival at Koenji is much shorter than that of Tokushima, which is the origin of Awa Odori, Koenji attracts people very easily because it is in the center of Japan, in Tokyo, and welcomes almost the same number of tourists as Tokushima during half the time. It is time to consider how to bring people not only as tourists but also as residents to the home and the master of a traditional art in a peripheral region.

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Tradition, Tourism Development, and Participation: The Awa Odori Festival in Tokushima

ABSTRACT

This paper considers the impact of the Awa Odori festival, a traditional event in Tokushima, on changing traditions. Awa Odori is said to be the first example in Japan of a successful local tradition that has become a tourism resource. It produced an imitation in Koenji, Tokyo, which developed an Awa Odori festival in an attempt to revitalize a shopping district. Previous research has claimed that Awa Odori changed from “dance to do” to “dance to show/watch” in the process of tourism development. However, it had both aspects even before tourism. Furthermore, the aspect of “dance to do” is regarded and maintained as an important part of “tradition” by performers and local residents while meeting the demand for hands-on tourism. In particular, the tradition of “dance to do freely” (dancing freely) was “discovered” as a result of comparison with more recent events in other regions. Although freedom is constrained by the tightening of regulations as the number of tourists increases, the temporary influx of tourists is an essential part of maintaining tradition and resolving the problem of large outflows of local residents.

Key Words: traditional events, Japanese festivals, Awa, hands-on tourism