MITIGATING THREATS, EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES: MARITIME INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF MATSUSHIMA BAY, JAPAN

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INTRODUCTION

This paper presents an overview of the current situation of intangible maritime cultural heritage among coastal residents and fishing cooperative association members who work and live in the Matsushima Bay region of Miyagi, Japan.

The Matsushima Bay has a rich history of peoples living around and accessing the sea's resources since at least the Middle Jomon Period (4000 to 2500 BC). The Bay, named a quasi-national park and known as one of the three most scenic places in Japan, was made famous by the poet Basho who visited the area in 1690.

Today, however, the area suffers from high population density in the surrounding mainland, intense industry along the coast, demographic change in the coastal communities, and the impacts of the tsunami generated by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake.

With these challenges, maritime ICH is at risk, and with it, communities and ways of life since, if ICH can help strengthen social cohesion and inclusion, the loss of ICH can weaken it. Social practices, rituals, and festive events structure the lives of coastal communities, strengthening shared understandings of the local culture and environment. Two communities, maritime events, "Minato Matsuri" and "Hama O-bon", will be presented to highlight the importance of such activities.

Maritime ICH also provides an opportunity for environmental sustainability and resilience. The paper thus also touches upon local concepts of "fisher-forests" and "sato-umi" and presents local examples of coastal community activities which, along with fishers' local ecological knowledge, supports resilience and sustainability goals.

MATSUSHIMA BAY

The Matsushima Bay region's land- and seascapes have nurtured unique cultures and livelihoods for centuries. The area is rich in marine and maritime resources with the sea forming the backbone of livelihoods and ways of life. The area is also protected by legislation (Protection of Cultural Properties Act).

Tourism is one of the most important industries in the region, with nearly 8.4 million tourists from Japan and abroad in 2014 (Miyagi Prefecture 2016) in the pre-COVID 19 pandemic era. The fisheries (and

aquaculture) sector has played a key role in the formation of the socio-ecological production landscapes and seascapes (SEPLS) found around Matsushima Bay. Archaeological excavations have uncovered more than 70 shell mounds in the area. This suggests that some 6,000 years ago the region was already home to satoumi communities, where people caught available fish and shellfish, many of which are still commonly consumed in the region, including oysters and clams (Okumatsushima Jomon-mura History Museum 2002). Excavated pottery shows that a salt-making culture had been developed at this point as well. The shallow and calm waters of Matsushima Bay have allowed people to make their livelihoods from farming oysters and seaweed, and this has played a considerable role in shaping the SEPLS of the bay.

Figure 1. View of the Matsushima Bay (Source: Alyne Delaney)

Oyster farming in the Matsushima Bay began in pre-modern times, and its history can be traced back as far as the late 17th century (Miyagi Prefecture 1994). Seaweed (nori and wakame) aquaculture started prior to WWII but its scale increased dramatically in the post-WWII era (Miyagi Prefecture 1993 and 1995). Oysters and seaweed (nori) produced in this region are both considered among the highest quality in Japan. While products from Matsushima Bay are currently sold in the domestic market, the bay was once tightly connected with international markets. A variety of fish are caught in the bay by small-scale fishers. Matsushima Bay also provides rich grounds for eelgrass (amamo), which is often referred to as “a cradle of the sea” as it provides spawning grounds as well as habitats for juvenile fish.

The tsunami generated by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake (3.11) severely affected the ecosystems of Matsushima Bay. The tsunami not only washed away homes, aquaculture facilities and boats, but also uprooted eelgrass (90% destroyed), resulting in ecological changes to the marine environment. Yet, continued efforts by local people and a variety of stakeholders, combined with the resilience of nature, have resulted in the fisheries and aquaculture sector rebounding, leading one oyster farmer to proudly state that "since Matsushima Bay contains a lot of high quality seaweed and makes a good 'soup', oysters grown inside the bay (naiwan) are so tasty!" (Minohara & Blasiak 2018).

As one would expect in such a coastal, marine region, fisheries and aquaculture form the nexus of food security, livelihoods and human well-being. Less well-known, but just as important, is that these also shape critical features of cultural heritage and community cohesion (Coulthard, Johnson & McGregor 2011; Minohara & Blasiak 2015).

FISHING, SEPLS, AND CULTURE

Any discussion of coastal environmental resilience and sustainability must necessarily include focus on maritime ICH and the production of socio-ecological landscapes and seascapes (SEPLS).

In Japan, entry into fisheries and aquaculture is limited by the allocation of fishery rights and fishery licenses by the government (national and local). For coastal fisheries, rights are managed by fishery cooperatives (FCAs), and only individuals who meet certain conditions, such as being resident locally and engaging in fishing for a minimum number of working days, can be considered for membership to participate in fisheries and aquaculture activities in the cooperative's fishing grounds. Thus, the FCA member becomes de facto bound to one landscape/seascape (SEPLS) for as long as they continue fishing or cultivating. This is why – aside from a few new entrants – the vast majority of fishing families in this sector have been engaged in these activities for generations.

The area hosts many local festivals and activities, which are a part of not only the broader Japanese culture, but also are specific customs and rituals born from being a part of the local SEPL and socio-ecological system. This includes the Minato (port) festival; and Hama (beach)

O-bon. The Minato festival was begun in the post-WWII to revive the fisheries industry and well-being of local residents. It includes Shinto rituals, including the kami being placed in a portable shrine and carried down from the Shiogama Shrine and taken aboard a boat and taken around a portion of the Shiogama and Matsushima Bays in a flotilla. This has antecedents in history as visits and offerings were historically made from the Shiogama Shrine to the Hanabuchi Shrine (Shichigahama; history of 2400 years) by boat.

The Minato matsuri includes aspects of the native, Shinto "religion" while the next to be discussed ceremony includes those of Buddhism. O-bon, is the "day of the dead" where Japanese commemorate their ancestors. Actually it usually includes 3 days in mid-August. Hama-o-bon, meanwhile, is a ceremony specifically held for those who have died at sea by drowning. The ceremonies witnessed included commemorating not only family members, but also those unknown who washed ashore.

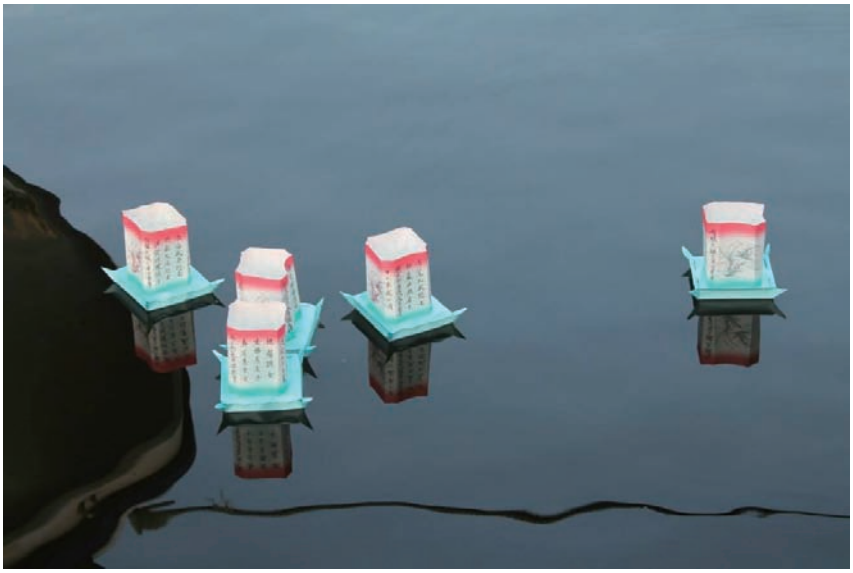

Figure 2. Sending souls back during *Hama O-bon* (Source: Alyne Delaney)

In addition to these specifical CH festivals and ceremonies, the maritime ICH also includes environmental aspects. Socio-ecological landscapes and seascapes SEPLS often contain what the Japanese term as sato-umi. Sato-umi is a coastal area where biological productivity and biodiversity has increased through human interaction. In Japanese, "SATO" means the area where people live, and "UMI" means the sea. Sato-umi is an important sea-area which has been supporting

culture and cultural exchanges through such things as fisheries and the distribution of products.

Thus, these are Socioecological systems which include both nature and human-beings. They are often areas in with high biological productivity and biodiversity. In order for it to be considered Sato-umi, it requires substance circulation, ecosystems and contact with people, and activity spheres and entities that perform activities.

Many of these areas have also seen rise of Fisherman's Forest movements. These began in the 1980. 森は海の恋人 (The forest is a lover of the sea), Miyagi Prefecture, was the first to gain national attention. For it to be successful, volunteerism is key, but maintaining this is difficult. Accessing and maintaining ties to people in the mountains is of critical importance. Some areas have now worked on mutual aid—planting trees in the mountains one year, with a beach clean up the next.

The maritime ICH found in these regions—as evidence by the SELPS and sato-umi-- also had a role to play in saving lives in the area during 3.11. Minohara & Blasiak (2015) investigated how how loss of life under such extreme conditions was minimized in the Matsushima Bay's Urato Islands and the potential role that SEPLS and cultural linkages played in mitigating the damage. In their study, they also focus on the resilience of these SEPLS in the years following the 2011 disasters. Within the context of climate change and the projected increase in frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, understanding and promoting resilience in the face of disasters is of crucial importance (Murray and Ebi 2012).

CONCLUSION

Though it has taken longer in Japan than in other areas of the world (e.g., Denmark where I lived for 17 years), intangible Maritime CH is currently at risk, and with it, communities and ways of life. I state this since, if ICH can help strengthen social cohesion and inclusion, the loss of ICH can weaken it. Social practices, rituals and festive events structure the lives of coastal community members and strengthen shared understandings of the local culture and environment. Changes are taking place, however, in how these festivals and practices are viewed and practiced.

Maritime ICH also provides an opportunity for environmental sustainability and resilience. The paper thus also touched upon local concepts of "fisher-forests" and "sato-umi" and presented local examples of coastal community activities which, along with fishers' local ecological knowledge, supports resilience and sustainability goals. Today, these activities seen through citizen movements and environmental education campaigns, are undertaken in many areas as a way to reach the broader society and get people interested in preserving the environment through people's individual actions (e.g., eelgrass planting).

Map 1. Japan and Tohoku region (Wikipedia)

Map 2. Matsushima Bay area of Miyagi, Tohoku (Source: Minohara, Cooling, and Blasiak 2018)

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