

浜松まつりにおける過去、現在とその未来について

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要 約

日本では1500年以上前に中国からお正月や七夕と同時に伝わってきた「端午の節句」が、季節の変わり目を示す行事であるが、それに関連している慣習が次第に変遷し、さまざまな風習が全国的に見られる。特に戦後に「こどもの日」と呼ばれるようになり、その前の1週間が「ゴールデンウィーク」という大型連休となった。しかし、端午の節句に日本各地で大風の風揚げが行われる風習は、比較的知られていない。その風揚げの代表的な存在である「浜松まつり」は毎年5月に200万人以上が集まる地元の一大イベントである。「端午の節句」の日本での特徴が「男児」を大事にすることであり、浜松では300年以上前より、長男の初節句と呼ばれる初めての端午の節句を祝うために風揚げをする風習がある。明治時代までには、火消し組土士の風合戦の要素や、「御殿屋台の引き回し」、「練り」も加わっていた。戦後にこれが浜松まつりという「都市まつり」型として確立され、市民にとって、「神様のないまつり」として誇りに思われている。そもそも長男を祝うものであり、長男の名前が綴られた大風を天に揚げることがその子供の将来を示す意味があり、男女平等や少子化などの理由により、長男から全ての子供に拡張され、多様な伝統を守りつつも、現代に適合するための工夫により、今もなお意義のあるものとなっている。浜松市全体が盛り上がるイベントでありながら、170以上の「町（ちょう）」の単位で別々の「風揚会」が「ミニまつり」を行っていることもこのまつりの特徴である。町人が争いながら、楽しみながら、生まれた子供たちのために風揚げ、屋台の引き回し、練り歩きを3日間通して行う。

筆者は、2000年よりこの浜松まつりに参加し、2011年より参与観察の研究対象としてきたが、過去・現在を踏まえ、今後どのようにすれば、この伝統を未来の世代に伝承することができるかに関し、考察を加える。

Hamamatsu Festival: Past, present and future

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[Keywords] *Tango-no-sekku*, Hamamatsu Festival, Kite-flying, Folk-lore

1. Introduction

1.1 *Tango-no-Sekku* and Hamamatsu Festival

The set of traditions in early May known in Japan as “*Tango-no-sekku*” (端午の節句) originated in China (*duanwujie*/端午节/端午節) and spread throughout the Chinese character culture sphere (漢字文化圈/*kanjibunkaken*) to countries such as Japan, Korea (단오/*dano*) and Vietnam (*Tết Đuan Ngọ*) and is manifested in many various ways in each of its destination cultures. While Tango is said to have come to Japan in the time of the Empress Suiko (late 6th century/early 7th century), it is also suggested that it became firmly a part of the calendar in the Nara Period during the 8th century.

Tango (of course unrelated to the Latin American dance) in China began as a major festival. The origins are lost to some degree, but it is associated with dragons and purification. It literally refers to the first horse (fifth) day of the fifth (horse) month, which leads to another name

in English: Double Fifth. The association with dragons continues, the official English name in China being the Dragon Boat Festival, as dragon boat racing is conducted in the south. When Japan adopted the traditions of China along with Chinese characters and Buddhism, Tango was adopted as one of five main festivals (1/1 New Year's; 3/3 Peach Festival; 7/7 Star Festival; and 9/9 Chrysanthemum Festival), and the association with purification came with it. Seasonally, this marked the beginning of the rainy season and summer months, therefore, heralding potential illness, in a similar vein to China. With irises thatched into roofs to ward away evil spirits, it became known as the Iris Festival (*ayame-no-hi*). The tradition was appropriated by the samurai after they took political and social control in the Kamakura Period (1185–1367) and beyond, as another name for iris “*shobu* (菖蒲)” is a homophone for 尚武 (valuing martial affairs). Thus, it became “Boy’s Day” following “Girl’s Day” in March and over time traditions seen today such as the iris bath, samurai dolls, and carp banners (*koi-nobori*) evolved. Separation from China was further complicated by the switch from lunar to solar calendar in 1872, which saw the festival officially moved a month earlier and then the move during the postwar occupation period to change the day to Children’s Day (*kodomo-no-hi*) as a more inclusive celebration of the family unit.

On the other hand, less well known both in Japan and abroad are kite-flying festivals held this time of year in various locations throughout the country. The largest, relatively most famous of these is Hamamatsu Festival. Held in Hamamatsu city, Shizuoka prefecture, from May 3–5, the total number of observers/participants is counted at around 2,000,000

people. Children's Day combined with a string of holidays to become "Golden Week" and, apart from Hamamatsu, kite-flying festivals are held in Nagasaki, Ehime, Ishikawa, Kanagawa, Saitama and Hokkaido. One might consider favorable wind or the timing of Golden Week. However, in Shiga and Niigata, kite-flying festivals are held one month later at around the time when *Tango* is celebrated by the lunar calendar, suggesting the link is not mere coincidence. That said, of the many festivals listed, Hamamatsu provides the strongest link between kite-flying and *tango*/Children's Day. (JKA 2019 pp. 234-6)

This celebration of *tango*, Hamamatsu Festival, is a source of pride to the city government and most of its citizens as the largest annual event on the calendar. However, demographic changes to the city have transformed how the festival is run and it was in a state of flux even before the pandemic. Perspectives of the festival vary particularly when comparing that of administrators with that of those on the ground, the citizens of Hamamatsu. Aspects such as tourism, passing down traditions and internationalization are significant factors affecting the current state of the festival in this period of transition. While my research is focused on passing down traditions, here I wish to provide a more general look at the history and current state of the festival and what this means for its future.

1.2 Research Methodology

I pursue research from a combined historical and folkloric perspective analyzing phenomena seen in the case study of Hamamatsu Festival. Folklore studies in Japan focus on generational transmission of traditions,

including elements of sociology and anthropology. While immense numbers of people view the festival from the sidelines at various venues, direct participation is limited to those registered - in principle, citizens of Hamamatsu and related parties. Despite not residing in Hamamatsu, the author has been invited to participate in the festival by various friends, every year since 2000, excepting five occasions (2001, 2009, 2011, 2020, 2021*), for a total of 21 times (*the festival was cancelled in 2011 and in 2020, while, in 2021, it was held in a limited manner). Relating over 20 years of experience attending the festival along with interviews conducted with various stakeholders, the author wishes to explore case studies of a certain way to celebrate *Tango* in Japan. Participation observation is a key methodology in anthropology and folklore studies, an appropriate way to gain understanding with the research subjects. While this festival tends to exclude outsiders, the author has been able to view it from the inside. Moreover, while an outsider as a non-Hamamatsu resident, I am also an outsider in being non-Japanese (Australian). This gives me not only a different perspective and insight into the various traditions, but also a different kind of access to the festival and its participants. Although research studies are not unknown, firsthand accounts are mostly descriptive rather than academic analysis, even in Japanese.

In English, I have so far only encountered five published references to the festival. The only dedicated study dates to 1981, photographs of Hamamatsu Festival with bilingual captions, titled *HAMAMATSU FESTIVAL 浜松祭り* (Koike 1981). In 1985, JTB released pocket-sized, *Festivals of Japan*, that devotes a single (small) page to Hamamatsu Festival (Ueno 2006 p. 63). In 1999, festival photographer Hiroyuki Ozawa (1999)

released a photographic collection with some English explanations. In 2007, Masaaki Modegi (2007 pp. 18–19, 110), Chairman of Japan Kite Association, authored a book *The Making of Japanese Kites: Tradition, Beauty and Creation*, in which he mentions in passing the large kites and various festivals including Hamamatsu Festival. He is also involved in a British introduction to kites in Japan, once again only briefly mentioning the festival as a venue for kite-flying and battling (Skinner 1997 pp. 37, 64–65, 88). An internet search will produce more information in English including the official festival website with an English site and brochure in English, mostly aimed at tourists. An article in a webzine from 2009 describes a visit by kite-flying enthusiasts based in the US, KiteLife.com, “Issue 66: Hamamatsu Kite Festival”.

From 2000–2010, the author participated normally, beginning research in 2011, using the knowledge and connections of the previous ten years. In 2012, I began looking for a location to investigate and found one in 2013, but did not participate directly, instead getting to know the local people. Since 2014, I have been a regular member of the Chitose team; since 2024 as an official staff member. Research is focused on three locations: 1) *takoba* (凧場 lit. “kite place”), a flat, open space by the ocean in an area called Nakatajima, where the kites are flown; 2) *machinaka* (マチナカ), the city center area near the train station where most common evening activities, parades and associated activities are held; and 3) Chitose-chō, a central “town” (町/*chō* in Japanese; closer to a “suburb”) that has a festival “team”. In addition, I gained knowledge as a regular participant in western Kamoe-chō (2000–2010), invited by a friend, and in eastern Sanwa-chō, assisting a friend’s family in conducting their “*hatsugo*”

celebration (2012). I will be forever grateful to both and their respective families for their contributions in introducing me to the festival and its inner workings, and welcoming me into their homes.

As mentioned above, in 2020, COVID-19 saw the festival cancelled and it was only partially revived in 2021. While I visited Hamamatsu to see the atmosphere when the festival was cancelled in 2011, due to various travel restrictions, official and self-imposed, as the different waves of the pandemic hit, I could not visit Hamamatsu for over two years, instead conducting remote interviews using Zoom. Despite participating directly since 2022, I continue to use Zoom as an interview tool at times.

2. Hamamatsu Festival - Past and Present

2.1 History

A local will most likely tell you Hamamatsu Festival traces its history back to the 16th century Muromachi Period, when the Hamamatsu Castle Lord (then Hikima Castle, slightly different site) had a kite flown to celebrate the birth of his firstborn son. However, recent research suggests the document referring to this, 浜松城記 (*Hamamatsu-jo-Ki* or Record of Hamamatsu Castle), was actually fabricated in the early 20th century (Arakawa 2006, pp 15–6). This document relates the story that in celebration of the birth, a resident of Irino-mura village, Sahashi Jingorō (also featured in a story by famous modern novelist, Mori Ogai), raised a large kite with the name of the lord’s son “Yoshihiro-kō” written on the kite (Hamamatsu-shi 1971). While the veracity of the account is questionable and the official explanation adds a disclaimer that “there is little

documentary evidence to support the legend” (website), most locals still believe this version, which I heard when I first participated. The website, brochure and exhibits of Hamamatsu Festival Pavillion, still refer to this as part of the “history”.

The oldest known piece of historiographically verifiable writing dates to the middle of the Edo Period (late 18th century). In 1789, a resident of Hamamatsu and scholar, Takabayashi Michiakira, mentions in his diary during April that he purchased a kite for a firstborn. This makes clear not only the long history of Hamamatsu Festival but also its connection with *Tango*. After the Meiji Restoration, teams of fire fighters in each *chō* surrounding the castle competed against each other in kite battles with a passion that continues to this day. Naming of teams as “XX-*kumi*” (group) or “XX-*ren*” (association) continues as a remnant of that time. While there was a brief cessation of the festival during the Second World War, when industrial Hamamatsu was devastated, in 1948, the pre-war festival was reorganized with over 50 *chō* coming together under the auspices of Hamamatsu-shi Kite-Flying Association League (浜松市連合凧揚会/*Hamamatsu-shi Rengō Takoage-kai*) to hold the first Kite-Flying Battle (凧揚げ合戦/*Takoage-gassen*). Two years later the name was officially changed to Hamamatsu Festival (浜松まつり/*Hamamatsu Matsuri*). (Hamamatsu Tourism Convention Department 1996, p. 78; Yamazaki 1983, p. 25)

2.2 Main Components

The three pillars of Hamamatsu Festival that continue to this day were already well in place in 1948.

The first is of course the kite-flying in the daytime. Every year, on May 3-5, a special venue is set up on the sports ground in the Enshū-nada Kaihin Kōen park in Nakatajima, the *Takoba*, and today over 170 different teams fly kites. In keeping with the tradition of celebrating the birth of the firstborn, kites have three elements: the logo of the *chō* (町紋/*chōmon* or 凧印/*tako-jirushi* lit. “kite mark”); the family crest (家紋/*kamon*) of the child and the name of the child. The kites are usually around 4 *jō* (sheets) of Japanese *washi* paper (48 sheets or 2.4 m²) to 10 *jō* (120 sheets or 3.64 m²) in size with a bamboo chessboard frame and a long spine with a tail of rope. While the tradition involved flying a kite for the firstborn son only, in keeping with the change to Children’s Day from Boys’ Day, it is now open to female offspring and also to other male offspring (if the family are willing to pay) and sometimes multiple children from the same family or even different families are combined on the same kite for convenience, economy or equality. In a traditional sense, the child would be experiencing their first *tango-no-sekku*, known in Japanese as *hatsu-zekku* (初節句; “s” of *sekku* compounds to “z”), and therefore entering the summer months for the first time (except switching to the solar calendar saw it happening a month earlier) and the child is therefore called “*hatsugo*” (初子, lit. “first child” but actually “child experiencing first *tango*”) and they are the true focal points of the festival. In turn the kite (凧/*tako*) of the *hatsugo* is called *hatsu-dako* (初凧) and it is considered the child will have a fortunate future if the kite rises toward the heavens. Of course, it is up to the team of expert kite flyers in the respective town to ensure that the kite makes its way upwards, regardless of the conditions. Before the *hatsu-dako* is raised, however, a

commemorative photograph is taken with the extended family of the *hatsugo* (kitted in festival outfit with sash marking their place as center of attention) along with the *kumi-chō* (組長/group leader), the most important member of the kite flying team, a position of honor that usually changes year upon year (in Chitose, the *kumi-chō* is usually, but not always, head of the *seinenkai* (青年会/young men association); Chitose has not welcomed women into its kite-flying ranks although other *chō* have) and, once the kite has reached a stable height, the town people celebrate the child to the tune of the distinctive drum and bugle music that is a fixture of Hamamatsu Festival before giving the child a *banzai-sanshō* (万歳三唱/Japanese equivalent of three cheers) in order to celebrate this milestone in the life of the child.

While the primary kite flyer cuts a dashing figure pulling at the line, releasing it, and dragging it and at times “folding” it to meet their will, this is indeed a team effort and all members of the team contribute as required: the sub-team holding the kite to be flown; a secondary kite-flyer controlling the kite half-way before handing over reins; the sub-team preparing the kites by tying strings, attaching ropes and ensuring the kite is the correct tautness; the sub-team working to repair damaged kites to return them to the air; the sub-team waiting below the kite to ensure they catch it and return it, hopefully, in one piece, sometimes over a kilometer away (a lucky charm, it must be returned at all costs); the sub-team playing taiko drums and bugles or blowing whistles, celebrating the *hatsugo* and creating a rhythm for the kite-flyers; the people holding the “*tegi*” (cog wheel used to stabilize the kite string and allow others to pull the string behind it); the sub-team of people running

around in circles behind the *tegi* to draw in or let out the kite string as limited space makes it mostly impossible to run backwards in straight lines; other supporters who shout out the alternating chant of “*yoisho*” and “*yaisho*” or variations thereof (slightly different from “*wasshoi*” characteristic of festivals in Tokyo), words without meaning that serve to maintain rhythm; and, of course, the people watching and giving orders, using their experience to ensure a new generation can continue the traditions. Many take on a number of these roles and a rotation is in place. As everyone shares, learns, and passes on the duties (and burdens), it is a true team effort, whereby all members of the team must give their utmost to ensure the child and their family have a prosperous future, be it a symbolic gesture or not.

At the same time, there is a sense of competition as different towns battle their kites, not by crashing them together but by rubbing the “strings” (more like ropes) of the kites (fixed proportions and weighting to ensure no unfair advantages) together and using the friction to cut the strings of rival kites, the winner being the last town with kite string intact or the town with the longest string (the kite that flew away the furthest) in a time-out tie. This involves another skill in letting out and drawing in the line to try to prevent the same place from receiving friction from other lines. Just for more difficulty, the kites are rubbed against powerlines (with the power cut) and lines of people jostle each other to get an advantage over rival teams. While battles get unruly at times, they are much more reserved than they purportedly were in the 20th century. Only certain members of each town in positions of responsibility (green sashes) are allowed to intervene with people of another town, al-

though at times they themselves need to be restrained, and a group of uniformed “festival police” made up of kite-battle veterans, who know all the tricks from years of experience, jump in to settle any disputes. They are members of the 企画統制監理部 (統監部), *Kikaku tōsei kanribu* (lit. Planning/Control Management Section and oversee day-to-day running of the festival. While kite fights are amazing to behold, the most photogenic takoba event is the opening when at 10am on May 3, fireworks are sounded and the majority of the over 170 towns raise their *hatsu-dako* kites simultaneously into the sky. For Chitose, May 3 provides another tradition when at around 12:30pm, there is a special kite battle among the members of a group called the *Fūshinkai* (風心会), consisting of six central *chō* (Daiku-machi, Kaji-machi, Sakana-machi, Ta-machi and Temma-chō), each year fighting for bragging rights (and 6 cases of beer), one of many mini-traditions that have emerged within the overall festival. (Chitose-chō website *1)

Each *chō* has its own tent (*jinya*/陣屋) next to the takoba, locations rotating in blocks (nearby towns grouped together) each year. This place for rest and refreshments in most cases also houses the kites (some *chō* including Chitose arrange a separate location for the kites and tradition sees the youngest members of the *seinenkai* camping over on May 2 to hold the spot, shared with Sakana-machi). Surrounding the takoba are many commercial stalls selling various snacks or chances to play games for prizes as at most other festivals in Japan and indeed these stall proprietors roam from festival to festival. These play host less to the many participants looking for a break than to the many people coming to watch from afar and enjoy the festival atmosphere. Nearby are the Na-

katajima sand dunes and now a long barrier between the takoba and the ocean (Enshū-nada), built in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake. The barrier top provides excellent views of the takoba that could not have been seen before, but its construction saw many beautiful pines being felled to make way for it (also playing havoc with wind conditions at the takoba making it even more difficult to fly kites). A short walk away is Hamamatsu Festival Pavilion, a year-round tribute to the festival and staging area for buses bringing visitors and participants in from central Hamamatsu.

One other event at the takoba deserving mention is on May 5, Children's Day, when kite-fighting is put on hold so children of each town can practice flying the kite, lined up along the string, an event known as *Kodomo-dako* (子供凧 lit. children's kite). While the adults enjoy the kite-flying and battles, there is no doubt that this festival is about children, be they the hatsugo or just regular children, who will hopefully continue the kite-flying traditions with a love for the festival.

While kites rule the daytime, the second and third pillars are both from evening to night. The second pillar is float parades. Over 80 towns have each spent an incredible amount of money to create ornately carved wooden floats designed to look like wheeled palaces called *gotenyatai* (御殿屋台 lit. palace floats) dragged around *machinaka* by 10-40 people. Despite being heavy itself, weight is compounded by an extra two people on the roof ensuring it passes safely past powerlines and the *ohayashi* (お囃子) inside, a group of mostly children playing traditional Japanese instruments and singing the festival theme song along with town songs. Children train for weeks beforehand and only have a certain

age window in which to be involved (a concern when the festival was not held for 1-2 years and potentially longer during the pandemic). Inside allows more luxury than a regular marching *ohayashi* and shamisen and other instruments are included along with the taiko and flute, more like a kabuki lineup.

As there are too many *goten-yatai*, not all are out for the full three evenings and a roster directs each town with regard to *machinaka*. There is also a practical concern, as floats are immensely heavy, and it is difficult enough to bring the Chitose float from its nearby home into *machinaka*, let alone for towns further away. Many choose to just move the float around their own town for one or two of the three nights. The Chitose float is a source of pride, reconstructed after the war in April 1952 and taking 3 years to complete at a cost of approximately 3 million yen (about 18,000,000 yen or US\$125,000 today). The float is built in a style known as *Momoyama-shiki-Mitesaki-Dekumi-Yatai* (桃山式三手崎出組屋台 referring to the various architectural forms involved) by *mi-ya-daiku* (宮大工, a team of carpenters who normally build shrines and temples) with wooden carvings made by a father/son team, depicting the *tengu*, a legendary spiritual creature which is said to reside in the local Matsu-no-o-jinja Shrine (boasting a history of 1300 years) and forms the basis for both the Chitose-chō kite logo and team nickname, “*Tengu-ren*” (天狗連), as well as a depiction of Minamoto-no-Yoshitsune, a famous warrior, in the Battle of Gempei, who was said to have been trained by the Lord of the Tengu (the song used by the *ohayashi* called *Kurama-yama* refers to where Yoshitsune supposedly was trained, dating to 1856, composed for *nagauta* and *rakugo hayashi*), and other beings

including *Fujin/Raijin* (風神雷神/gods of wind and thunder). (Chitosechō website *2)

The third pillar is the “*neri*” (練り, lit. to knead dough, it is short for *neri-aruku*/練り歩く which means “to parade” or more closely “walk for a long time”) and this *neri* has various components. In early evening, in conjunction with the float parades, the *shichū-neri* (市中練り or parade through *machinaka*) is conducted as both a tourist display with crowds of people lining the main streets and many food stalls on the sidewalks. There is also cooperation when, for example, the aforementioned *Fūshinkai* combine for a six column *neri* sprinting down main street. A similar promotional event is held on smaller scale at nearby hotels where the local towns are invited to parade in, out and around the hotel in an arranged order. Naturally, all towns conduct this *neri* in the same manner with the same outfits and the same shuffling march style due to the *ji-ka-tabi* (地下足袋, rubber-soled footwear used by craftspeople made famous by *ninja*) and with a participant or participants carrying the town’s flag(s) at the front of the procession that is led by the *kumi-chō* (aforementioned annual town leader) with a *hittō* (筆頭 normally referring to the top person, in this case, second-in-command) and the bugle/drum performers, following the flag-bearers with regular participants behind. These are all kept in control by the *tasuki* (タスキ or sash-wearer from the Japanese name for a sash 褌/*tasuki*), not only keeping the procession in line but also covering the streets, blocking traffic as necessary and ensuring passersby can get to where they are headed. *Tasuki* are divided into higher-ranked green *tasuki* (with interference rights at the *ta-koba*) and lower-ranked red *tasuki*. At a certain time, the *neri* breaks

away from the float procession and after visiting a number of associated places, heads back into the town. When visiting a location, it is customary to conduct a *geki-neri* (激練り lit. extreme-*neri*), whereby the members of the *neri* walk in concentric circles following the directions of a *tasuki* guide to a point whereby the officials at the front peel off to pay respects to the host, the musicians peel off to allow room to continue playing and the regular participants swarm around the flags like in a rock concert “mosh” (with *tasuki* acting as security, ensuring no-one is crushed). After the *geki-neri* winds down, guided by the musicians, an announcer *tasuki* (often with megaphone) pays respects to the host, wishing for their health and the prosperity of their business before cajoling participants into *banzai-sanshō* (three cheers) after which the *geki-neri* resumes, repeated until all are satisfied. In return, the host provides refreshments (usually snack foods and alcoholic/soft drinks) and there may be a session of drinking *taru-zake* (樽酒/barellled sake). Finally, the participants form up and head off to the next destination.

Once back from the *takoba* and *machinaka*, each town decides the rules for the most part, although the Festival Committee makes overall rules. Thus, each town has a mini-festival within the auspices of the festival and town character makes the festival experience very different, even for neighboring towns. This character comes from size, type (entertainment versus residential, for example), level of stakeholder participation and also the characters of the team organizers (known as the kite-flying association, *takoage-kai*/凧揚げ会), among many other factors. Examples of these “local rules” include use of candles in lanterns being switched to light-globe candles to prevent fires and later, to prevent inju-

ries, Chitose removed lanterns entirely, excepting those of the *kumi-chō*, *hittō* and *tasuki*. The local *neri* used to be endless but restrictions were put in place stopping it at midnight and now 10pm. In town, the *neri* procession continues in the same manner, winding through streets on a seemingly random, actually pre-determined route. Stops are of two types. First, paying respects to the owner of a local establishment like outside the town with the *geki-neri* followed by the *banzai-sanshō*, finally being rewarded with food and drink. Second, the more official, called *hatsu-neri*, involves a visit to the home of the *hatsugo* whose kite had been flown. As the *neri* nears the baby's home, parents and baby join the front of the procession to be congratulated by onlookers, residents of the town not participating in the *neri*. They peel off at their home to welcome the *neri* and then the *geki-neri* is conducted with congratulations for achieving the *hatsu-zekku* and wishes for the future health and prosperity of the baby and family. Once again, the members of the *neri* are rewarded with sustenance. At this time, the parents and some *tasuki* as well as regular participants will be asked to come up to drink taru-zake, either directly or from a ladle. When first attending, I was told this chance to eat and drink alcohol was "break time" and of course not only is this not true as it is the focal point of the *neri*, in a practical sense the amount of alcohol consumed as part of the celebrations means in fact marching time provides a chance for rest and recovery. At times, I have had the honor of flag bearer. As 10pm nears each night, the final destination is always the *kaisho* (会所, translated to "clubhouse", where the kite-flying association is based for the festival). The *geki-neri* is held (repeatedly) for the *kumi-chō* and the future health and prosperity of all. The *geki-neri* is also

conducted on smaller scale at the *takoba* after providing the *banzai-sanshō* for the *hatsugo*.

Finally, festival clothing. First is the *koikuchi* undershirt, plain or patterned, with indigo trousers called *momohiki* that are wound around the loin and tied up tightly, and covering these somewhat is an indigo *haragake* (lit. stomach cover), a vest with a convenient pouch for carrying valuables and gear. A *happi* coat with a town logo on the back rounds it out. A *wappen* (ワッペン or patch) for that year is affixed to the *happi* to prove registration, for entering the *takoba* and the *neri*.

3. A Festival of the People, by the People, for the People

3.1 Non-Religious “City Festival”

Hamamatsu Festival can be considered a festival for the citizens of Hamamatsu and even each *chō*. This is known as a “City Festival” (都市まつり/*toshi matsuri*), distinguished from festivals held in rural areas. One of the biggest indicators of this distinction is that unlike most festivals, the word “MATSURI” is not written in the usual kanji characters (まつり vs 祭り), distancing it from traditional Japanese festivals, despite such a long history. Traditionally, festivals in Japan were designed to allow gods to have fun and in pleasing them, receive a reward. In a rural context, this reward would be a good harvest, but in cities, festivals like Gion Matsuri in Kyoto were established to ward off pestilence. Festivals therefore often have a *mikoshi* (portable shrine) to take gods around town (and bring the gods to those who cannot easily visit the shrine/temple), based from a Shintō shrine/Buddhist temple. The word MATSURI

itself comes from the Shintō concept of enshrining a god - “祀り” evolved to “祭り” but the religious context was still strong and both characters combined form the word for a religious ritual (祭祀 *saiishi*).

When first attending the festival in 2000, the initial element introduced was it being a “festival without gods” - a source of pride. The official website highlights city festival status (Hamamatsu Festival History).

That said, while connection to religion is relatively weak, it is not entirely absent. Chitose-chō has *tengu* as its mascot. A “clubhouse” might be inside shrine grounds, the *hatsugo* and their families receive the blessing of the Shintō priest before the festival, and the idea a kite reaching up to “heaven” will provide a prosperous future. Chitose and 9 other towns take part in the annual festival for Matsu-no-o Shrine a month after Hamamatsu Festival. Also, the night before the festival, the town *neri* pays its respects at the shrine, along with the nearby Gosho Shrine, as it does a local cabaret bar. Also, the *kumi-chō* carries a lantern and *gohei* (御幣), a wand-like piece of wood with paper streamers used to make blessings. The Chitose *goten-yatai* also has paper streamers and *tengu* carvings.

Masaaki Sugata (2007 p.118) categorizes it as “*kiso*” (competition), referring to the battles, but actually introducing it as “kite-flying wishing for a child’s growth,” summarizing it as “a ritual for the year’s fortune, where the higher the kite flies, the more auspicious, but if the string breaks, it is seen as inauspicious.” Furthermore, the emphasis is stronger on celebrating *hatsu-zekku* as a step on the road to a healthy future.

Similarly, the “Japanese Festival Map” by Yawata/Nishimura (2006), emphasizing shrine rituals, omits Hamamatsu Festival, undoubt-

edly intentionally, given that other “city festivals” are also absent. Conversely, when photographer Hiroyuki Ozawa, emphasizing visuals, introduced Hamamatsu Festival in English, he focused on the giant kites and children’s participation (Ozawa 1999, pp 74–5).

City festivals, therefore, are more about community building (many current traditions come from rivalries among the various firefighting teams that were an essential part of each community) and having fun together.

Other city festivals in Japan on a scale with Hamamatsu Festival include Tanabata Festivals like in Sendai and Hiratsuka, also celebrating “sekku” (change of season), Hakata Dontaku (Fukuoka), and YOSAKOI Soran Festival (Kochi) but the majority are much smaller in scale. Kanagawa has citizens’ festivals such as in Yokosuka and Kawasaki but on an even smaller scale my local area has Sakura and autumn festivals for the community to gather.

3.2 Homecoming Groups

I also want to touch on the significance of Hamamatsu Festival for those no longer residing in Hamamatsu. Many return home during the festival. These homecoming groups prefer this timing over the generally more common Obon or New Year’s. Many bring families to enjoy the festival. Those who visit Hamamatsu only once a year for the festival, including the author initially, have “festival buddies,” exchanging promises like, “Let’s meet again at next year’s festival.”

Furthermore, at weddings for Hamamatsu natives, whether in Hamamatsu City or elsewhere, being blessed by a *neri* is common. At Hama-

matsu wedding venues, it is a listed option. I have attended two wedding receptions of Chitose friends, for the *neri* performance, changing in the waiting room, with drinks and light snacks, before providing the blessing. Relatives from elsewhere are often somewhat surprised.

3.3 Anti-Festival People

While Hamamatsu Festival is deeply tied to the identity of many citizens, not all residents necessarily love it. Among my friends, there are some who assert their opposition. Indeed, if not participating, it can feel noisy and prevent sleep. The message “If you join in, it’s no problem” is widely promoted, but still some find it a nuisance. Online forums often feature complaints. On the other hand, such individuals often perform the *hatsugo* ritual for their child, mindful of neighborhood relations. Some find the considerable expense involved unsettling. Another friend remarked, “When I was young, I focused on club activities and didn’t value the festival much.” This reveals an invisible boundary drawn within each neighborhood during the festival. Complaints have seen endtime become 10pm with fines for towns breaking deadline. The police might be called by annoyed neighbors. Also, May 6 was an unofficial recovery holiday in Hamamatsu, but currently, if not a holiday because May 3, 4 or 5 fell on a Sunday, most companies in Hamamatsu will require their workers to attend or take personal leave. While still important for the city and for much of its populace, the festival may no longer be the glue keeping all citizens of Hamamatsu together it once was. Why has this changed?

4. The Changing State of Hamamatsu Festival: Current Issues

4.1 Demographic Changes in Hamamatsu City

Various demographic changes have affected Hamamatsu much as they have the entire nation. Declining birthrate and population increase due to merges with nearby municipalities have altered the fabric of the city.

4.1.1 Declining Birthrate/Aging Population

Now, in consideration of declining birthrate and gender equality, any child may be celebrated. An acquaintance of the author regretted that, under the old system, he could not celebrate his only daughter. He therefore held a grand celebration for her daughter, his grandchild, and another for his second granddaughter. In 2012, I participated in the *hatsugo* of a friend's nephew (third son), my first time on the hosting side. This requires significant financial investment, some families taking out loans. Furthermore, the celebration might be delayed a year or more to coincide with developmental milestones rather than the traditional *hatsu-zekku*. To ease the financial burden, some families celebrate multiple offspring, even cousins, simultaneously, and some towns include all children in one combined celebration. In 2024, the author celebrated the *hatsu* of both his sons (aged 3 and 1 at the time), delayed by the COVID interlude. In the past, Yokohama residents would not be invited this honor. This highlights how various efforts are being made to ensure these demographic changes do not hinder the continuity of the festival.

However, there are concerns that fewer young people possess the kite-flying skills. Additionally, the sheer number of kites has made it harder to perform interesting tricks. Special transmission events are held separately twice a year to provide an opportunity to pass down skills and knowledge.

4.1.2 Municipal Mergers - “New” Hamamatsu City

The former castle town is now an “industrial castle town”, home to major corporations in industries like automobiles, motorcycles, and music. The Heisei mergers saw Hamamatsu incorporate all 11 surrounding municipalities on 1 July 2005, and become a government-designated city on 1 April 2007. Currently, not all areas participate in the festival.

At the time, Yamada (2007, p.132) advocated considering participation by new towns. Yet, 18 years later, it has not happened. Participation requires adherence to conditions stipulated by the Hamamatsu Festival committee and passing on techniques is difficult, so new towns would need a learning period. That said, former Hamakita-shi already has the “Enshū Hamakita Hiriyū Festival”, which features kite-flying, on the last weekend of May.

This expansion has also seen an influx of new residents in Hamamatsu, both long- and short-term, often with little or no knowledge of the festival. This increase in newcomers has had an adverse effect on overall participation in and recognition of importance of the festival.

4.1.3 Multicultural Coexistence

Alongside industrial development, demand for workers in Hamama-

tsu surged. However, local people increasingly shunned manual labor. To counter this, the number of workers from overseas rose sharply from 1990. In Hamamatsu, most were from Brazil, numbers growing large enough to create a Little São Paulo (Matsuo 1997). While Brazilian immigration began with Japanese descendants, third and fourth generation immigrants arrived in Japan unable to speak Japanese. Important signs are now also written in Portuguese.

In 2000, there were few other non-Japanese present. If at the *takoba*, they were on the outside in casual clothes, few actually participating. A generation ago, non-Japanese like myself were featured on TV and this has not changed. Despite the increase in non-Japanese residents, participation in festivals remained low. While language and cultural barriers played a role, the fundamental issue was lack of mechanisms to welcome newcomers. The “World Food Stalls” offer international cuisine from Hamamatsu residents of various countries. However, their involvement in other major events remains somewhat limited.

One issue is that festival participation occurs at the *chō* level. If more Brazilians, Filipinos and Indonesians joined these neighborhood associations, they might participate in festivals too, but this is still uncommon. With the next generation educated in Japan, they might be more inclined to participate alongside classmates. Additionally, I hope neighborhoods with larger Brazilian populations become more welcoming. Finally, however, this year, I observed a larger proportion of participants in different *chō*. Also, the city created a special kite for the Brazilian population to commemorate 130 years of diplomatic relations between Japan and Brazil (Hamamatsu City website).

One reason I moved my research base to Chitose was its approach to interacting with non-Japanese. In 2013, an acquaintance from an international exchange group introduced me to a fellow Australian. From 2014 onward, I became part of a group of about 30 participants affectionately called the “Foreign Legion”. In 2013, when not registered, I joined the “Foreign Legion” in hosting members of the *neri* as a gesture of gratitude to Chitose. Since then, this “hospitality event” (*settai*/接待) has become an annual tradition. My friend is a veteran participant in Chitose since around 1990, and this “Foreign Legion” is centered around the patrons of hospitality venues he operates. Most members are English speakers, primarily language teachers, residing in Hamamatsu, and the membership turnover is quite high. That said, some members come from their home countries specifically for the festival. Japanese spouses, partners, children, and acquaintances also participate through connections with foreigners, creating a sort of “reverse import” situation. This large non-Japanese participation has led to coverage by TV, radio, and newspapers once again. This is a special case born from the bond between this small community and Chitose residents. In most other towns, as was the case with the author previously, there were only a few foreigners, or none at all. Participating in the festival requires money (for gear, registration, transportation, etc.) and sometimes means taking time off work. Brazilians, Peruvians, Filipinos, and Indonesians, whose communities are dominated by workers and commerce, often lacked the means to participate but it is heartening that circumstances finally seem to be improving.

4.2 Tourism and Hamamatsu Festival

Since Hamamatsu Festival was restarted after WWII, the city government has had a strong say in how the festival is run (controlling purse strings). One focus for the city is using the festival as a resource for tourism, despite the lapse due to COVID-19. In 1970, the autonomous operating organization, Youth Association Alliance Management Section (連合青年団統監部/*rengō seinendan tōkanbu*) was dissolved and replaced by the Hamamatsu Festival Headquarters (浜松まつり本部/*Hamamatsu Matsuri Hombu*) that later evolved into the Hamamatsu Festival Organizing Committee (浜松まつり組織委員会/*Hamamatsu-Matsuri-Soshiki-Inkai*), consisting of four members: Hamamatsu City; Tourism Association; Chamber of Commerce; and the Association of Community Groups (自治会連合会/*Jichikai-Rengō-kai*), strengthening consideration of the festival as a tourist resource. While long conducted with 67 towns, the number of participating *chō* increased at a faster pace. By 2025, there were 174, an increase of over 100, more than double in 50 years. This led to a dramatic increase in the number of participants. In 2019, total attendance was 2.1 million, up further from 1.77 million in the previous year. Around 120,000 “*wappen*” (registration badges) were sold (HLHTB 2020). After four years interrupted by COVID-19 and related protocols, the full version resumed in 2024 and attendance was 2,453,000 (Livedoor News), second highest in history after 2023 (2,555,000) which had an abnormally high attendance rate due to a special event in conjunction with the NHK samurai drama featuring Hamamatsu - a parade by the main characters with an attendance of 680,000 with 22,000 in official seating (Sponichi Annex). The figure in 2025, 2,493,000, surpassed 2024, once

again second only to 2023 (TBS NEWS DIG). Although a cumulative total with some overlap, this statistic clearly shows the power of Hamamatsu Festival to attract tourists.

However, some people suggest that, as two-thirds of the towns do not have knowledge of the long traditions of the festival, the meaning and form of the festival has significantly changed. However, for example, in 1985 Kamoe-chō split into two towns, in 1985 and the “new” Kamoe-kita-chō (name not on maps) therefore had experienced hands. Chitose-chō has a strong tradition but, as an entertainment district, few residents and the ratio of non-resident participants is extremely high. At 300–400, numbers are now perhaps 10% that of the “bubble period” of the late 80s and early 90s, when the entertainment district was at its peak (3000–4000) but these participants were mostly residents of Hamamatsu city, providing economic benefit but not as tourism.

Actually, until creation of the Hamamatsu Festival Headquarters, the festival was held over five days, May 1–5, with *machinaka* events held May 3–5. This meant the first two days were in-town and over the last three days almost all towns participated in the *machinaka* events, unlike today. Chitose elders, reminiscing about the old days, suggest activities were rather more vigorous and chaotic. Particularly at the *takoba*, while the rivalries in kite-fights are still passionate, they do not reach the danger levels once seen as the city now promotes the festival to tourists.

In order to increase tourism, the city leverages the festival as capital for other events. For example, a Disney parade in 2013 for the Tokyo Disneyland 30th anniversary and the samurai parade in 2023. More simple efforts include the aforementioned “World Food Stalls”, run by the Cham-

ber of Commerce, street performers and the Miss Hamamatsu pageant. However, even in 2007, Yamada (2007 p.132) suggested large tour groups avoided Hamamatsu accommodation for nearby hot-spring resorts, reducing direct benefit from tourism. Hotel prices are undoubtedly at annual highs in festival time and extra events caused even higher prices and accommodation shortage. While the *takoba* has more participants than observers, *machinaka* has more observers than participants, even without accounting for special events.

Since 2016, Chitose established a chance for the public to try pulling the *goten-yatai*, generally not permitted for those without registration, for promotion and to receive increased manpower to pull the float. The author assists the team by providing English invitations and each night we get a handful of international visitors in addition to many Japanese visitors. In 2019, the Hamamatsu & Lake Hamana Tourism Bureau (HLHTB) arranged with Chitose to include float participation in tour packs, and we received 59 tourists including a handful of non-Japanese (HLHTB 2020), but this was unfortunately curtailed by COVID-19.

The city's biggest effort to make the festival a year-round economic resource is Hamamatsu Festival Pavilion (Hamamatsu-matsuri Kaikan; 浜松まつり会館), opened in April 1985. With the catch cry of "Hamamatsu Festival 365 days," the pavilion can be proud of its beautiful and varied exhibits providing a sound understanding of the festival, with hands-on sections. The annual average number of visitors was 26,166 from 2017-2019, with festival period visitors during the festival period counting for around 6.6% each year. Recent years have seen a renewal of the website and more information available but a lack of information in other lan-

guages limits it as an international tourism resource. Also, archives would increase its benefit in preserving festival traditions and skills.

4.3 Temporary Suspensions of Hamamatsu Festival Since World War II

After progressing smoothly since 1948, in the 21st century it has hit some pitfalls and been cancelled as mentioned. A detailed analysis in Japanese was previously published (John 2022) but a summary of the issues in English is pertinent to the issues at hand.

The first temporary suspension occurred in 2011 due to the Great East Japan Earthquake. While the festival proceeded as usual in 1995 following the January Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, the 2011 earthquake struck in March. A decision had to be made immediately afterward, and the prevailing mood of restraint made cancellation “an unavoidable decision.” Then Hamamatsu Mayor, Yasutomi Suzuki (2007–2023; Shizuoka Prefecture Governor since 2024), made a premature announcement from which he could not back down. Some residents agreed, but many dissented. Despite cancellation, the author visited Hamamatsu during the 2011 holiday period and witnessed the first “non-festival Golden Week” since the war, interviewing workers at Hamamatsu Festival Pavilion and local citizens. Normally, during festival period, Hamamatsu Station transformed into a splendid, colorful, and bustling scene adorned with lanterns and banners. In 2011, it resembled a typical “Sunday”. There were some people, but the sounds and colors were missing. Although the mood of self-restraint had eased and a movement to boost spirits nationwide gained traction, no substitute events were held apart from a market as a fundraiser for disaster relief. The economic impact of

canceling the festival was undoubtedly substantial.

When asked, many Hamamatsu citizens responded, “It is sad, but next year we’ll do it in grand style.” At the tourist information center, a poster out read, “Cancelled this year, but experience it at the Festival Pavilion.” Nevertheless, visitor numbers to the pavilion declined. Attendance over the three days totaled only 1,159, compared to the usual 1,720. With the *takoba* off-limits, people could be seen flying small kites outside the pavilion or at the sand dunes.

In 2012, Hamamatsu Festival was back. However, the atmosphere of the resumed festival was somewhat subdued compared to the pre-earthquake festival. Upon exiting the ticket gates at the station, as in 2011, there were no festival decorations. While there were more people than in 2011, relatively few people wore *happi* coats. Companies like JR, previously heavily promoting the festival to attract passengers, now harbored reservations about gathering large numbers of people in one place due to crisis management concerns. Since then, decorations in the station plaza are limited to small official banners, no different from outside. While this cautious approach by the administration and companies emphasized crisis management, the general public was in a mood to make up for the previous year’s cancellation and revive the festival’s energy.

Given that the main venue is located by the sea, Hamamatsu-shi and the Organizing Committee were likely compelled to consider crisis management. In April 2012, a PDF poster “What to Do if an Earthquake Occurs During the Kite Battle” was published on the website, and appeared in the guidebook. Concerns about earthquakes and tsunamis were clear. The poster stated that a new venue was being considered but a suitable

location had not yet been found. Ultimately, construction of a new seawall was decided upon, leading to the felling of the iconic pine forest. Construction began in 2012 and the entire 17.5 km seawall was completed in March 2020.

Conversely, the cancellation meant two years' worth of kites needed flying. On the first day, rain in the morning and lack of wind in the afternoon led some towns to extend kite-flying times with special permission. The increased number of *hatsugo* kites per *chō* also meant some towns skipped the evening parade. That notwithstanding, the *machinaka* parade had its usual lively atmosphere.

Emphasis on kite-flying and neighborhood processions over the tourist-oriented city procession clearly shows that for residents, internal spirit matters more than external appearances. However, officials from Hamamatsu-shi stated that as long as the festival operates under its jurisdiction and receives subsidies, this “de-touristification” movement is unrealistic.

While the populace had been lulled into a false sense of security, in 2020 a new threat arose, COVID-19. Following months of deliberation amid countermeasures, cancellation of Hamamatsu Festival was announced on March 23. While the decision after the earthquake was too early to anticipate easing of self-restraint moods, this time the correct decision was made. Conversely, many voices urged, “Please decide quickly.” The usually-bustling Chitose district faced significant hardship during the pandemic and festival cancellation dealt a further economic blow. Unlike Golden Week after the earthquake, when people could move about, this time Hamamatsu citizens were confined to their homes. Those who

usually returned home for the holidays could not, with annual class reunions held online. The author also could not visit Hamamatsu for the first time since 2010, forcing research to be conducted remotely for a time. While many expressed a desire to hold a grand festival the next year, similar to 2012, various challenges emerged regarding conduct of the festival in the “with-COVID” era, accounting for anti-COVID measures, as the pandemic wore on and no solution seemed to be in sight.

In 2021, the pandemic persisted but in January an announcement stated, “We intend to hold the festival on a reduced scale while ensuring everyone’s safety, aiming to preserve the traditions of Hamamatsu Festival.” Initially, extension from three to five days was planned. It further stated: “If Hamamatsu City’s infection status is at or below the national Alert Level II, the festival will be held in dispersed format. This means only daytime kite-flying will occur, without kite battles, the number of participating districts per day will be limited, and participation will be restricted to relevant personnel only.” The rationale stated it was to “pass on kite-flying traditions and skills, said to originate from celebrating a child’s birth and wishing for their healthy growth, to the next generation.” However, it also emphasized, “We will continue to work diligently towards holding the event by thoroughly implementing infection control measures, including establishing participation rules and ensuring their thorough dissemination.” Considering the appeal also stated, “As long-time festival organizers, we sincerely ask for your understanding of the rationale behind this decision,” clearly this decision was expected to be met with mixed reactions (Website 2021.01.22). Subsequently, each kite-flying association debated participation and Chitose declined. Ulti-

mately, it was announced, “since 100 towns decided to participate, the extension to five days was canceled,” (Website 2021.04.05). Nevertheless, I still intended to observe the situation in Hamamatsu, as in 2011. However, an announcement made on April 23rd re-emphasized prohibition of entry by non-essential personnel (Website 2021.04.23). Consequently, I chose to refrain from attending, marking the first time without participation for two consecutive years.

In 2022, with the spread of vaccinations, an announcement regarding the festival was made on March 25. It stated kite-flying would be held with spectators, but nighttime activities would be limited to neighborhood *goten-yatai* parades only. *Neri* were prohibited, and a cap of 30,000 spectators was imposed (Website 2022.03.25). Chitose agreed to this, deciding to hold the event with only committee members, excluding general participation. The author was given special dispensation along with several other long-term participants. The floats were included due to a fear there would be detriment to passing down the *ohayashi* music and chanting traditions, limited to elementary school students. Chitose only had one *hatsugo* celebration, twin boys originally scheduled for 2020. My wife and son came, giving them a first taste of the festival. There was also a prohibition on consumption of alcohol in festival garb that continued into 2023 when Chitose again only had one *hatsugo*. 2024 finally saw a resumption of pre-COVID rules and there were 3 celebrations, including for the author, accepted as a committee member after a change in regulations allowing members residing outside Hamamatsu. Now, in 2025, the festival is seen to be returning somewhat to its former glory, but wounds are still present.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Hamamatsu Festival Traditions and Future Challenges

The way *Tango-no-Sekku* is celebrated in Hamamatsu, with its long history, shares commonalities with other city festivals and kite-flying events in Japan while maintaining a unique identity. Even before the pandemic, numerous issues threatened this tradition. Hamamatsu citizens felt a sense of crisis from various perspectives, including demographic and tourism-driven changes. After temporary suspension due to the earthquake, the festival saw renewed enthusiasm the following year, but the pandemic created a crisis not only for tradition transmission but also for the nature of the festival itself. It has been a fascinating period to observe how the headquarters and the kite-flying associations in each town strive to continue this tradition and conduct the festival through trial and error. Examining Hamamatsu Festival offers insights into themes crucial for modern folklore studies in Japan and globally. This festival, a source of pride for Hamamatsu citizens, both unique and representative, embodies diverse customs of Japanese folklore. Moving forward, I will continue research from the perspective of “historical folklore studies”, focus on the challenge of passing this festival down to the next generation, amidst its ongoing sustainability crisis and transformation driven by the various phenomena discussed in this paper.

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