# Imagined UNESCOs: Interpreting Intangible Cultural Heritage on a Japanese Island


Michael Dylan Foster

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*Michael Dylan Foster*

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Abstract: Toshidon is a "visiting deity" (*raihōshin*) ritual that takes place every New Year's Eve on a small island off the southwest coast of Japan. Performed for purposes of education, Toshidon is an event in which groups of men, masked and costumed as demon-deity figures, walk from house to house frightening and disciplining children. In 2009, Toshidon was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List, a significant occurrence for this relatively isolated community. Based on ongoing fieldwork on the island, this essay explores specific events and discourses that emerged from this recognition. I conclude that the UNESCO inscription becomes a floating signifier within the community, one of many elements in an ongoing discussion about the broader future of the island itself.

## Location: Shimo-Koshikijima, Kagoshima Prefecture, Japan

Toshidon takes place on the island of Shimo-Koshikijima in Kagoshima Prefecture. Kagoshima is in the southwest of Kyushu, one of the four major islands of Japan. Shimo-Koshikijima is the southernmost of three small islands known collectively as the Koshiki Archipelago (Koshiki rettō). While Kagoshima Prefecture has numerous islands, most are located to the south, between the mainland and the Okinawa region. In contrast, the Koshiki Archipelago is approximately twenty miles off the west coast of the prefecture and therefore somewhat culturally distinct from the mainland and from other islands. Shimo-Koshikijima currently has a total population of 2,459 residents (1,516

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households).[1] There is no airport on the island, but a ferry runs daily from the mainland.

The region is temperate with only occasional snowfall, but it is subject to typhoons in late summer and early autumn. Historically, island residents made their living through farming and fishing, but in recent years construction, public works, and civil administration have become the primary industries. Currently, a bridge is being constructed between Shimo-Koshikijima and its neighboring island (Naka-Koshikijima), a project that will keep numerous residents employed in construction and service fields over the next several years and which will eventually alter the relationship between the three islands. Shimo-Koshikijima has several small hotels and bed-and-breakfast accommodations but few other facilities to accommodate visitors; tourism is relatively limited.

In 2004, all three islands merged administratively with the city of Sendai on the mainland to create a new entity called Satsumasendai City. On Shimo-Koshikijima the merger was decided by a close referendum and remains controversial. One ramification was an influx of non-islanders to work in government offices and, inversely, an outflow of island natives to staff administrative facilities in Satsumasendai City. Ultimately, the merger seems to have contributed to a decrease in population on Shimo-Koshikijima, which remains a major problem for the island. While the overall population decreases every year, the percentage of older residents is rapidly growing. Although this trend is common throughout rural communities in the country (Japan is an "aging society"), it is more extreme in peripheral regions such as islands and rural communities where there is little work for younger residents. Shimo-Koshikijima does not have a high school, and it has long been customary for students to finish their education on the mainland. Many find work and establish families there and never return to live on the island.

The Toshidon ritual takes place in six different communities or neighborhoods, each one with its own set of procedures, protocols, and costumes. My own research is based primarily in the hamlet of Teuchi (population approximately 700), where Toshidon is performed in three neighborhoods: Minato, Fumoto, and Motomachi. Fumoto and Motomachi have the highest populations and are generally most active in terms of Toshidon. The description below is based primarily on these two communities, with reference to several others.[2]

## ICH Element: Koshikijima no Toshidon

Toshidon is one of a number of rituals found throughout Japan in which masked figures travel from house to house scaring children, often on New Year's Eve or another set date early in the new year.[3] The word *Toshidon* refers to both the ritual itself as well as the masked demon-deities. In Fumoto and Motomachi, it is said that on December 31, the last night of the old year, the Toshidon will descend from the "skyworld" (*tenjōkai*) to visit the children of the community, to scold them for their bad behavior throughout the year and to reward them for what they have done well. It is a terrifying rite of passage for the children and a much-anticipated event for the family.

At around six in the evening, while families are preparing at home, men gather at the community center to transform themselves into Toshidon. They help each other dress in costumes made of straw, *sotetsu* palm fronds, and other local plant materials, and they don colorful, oversized cardboard masks with extremely long noses. In groups of four or five, with an entourage of noise-making companions, they walk through the dark night to households where families are gathered. At each house, they rattle *shoji* screens, thump on walls, roar threateningly, and finally enter on their hands and knees, like wild creatures. Once inside, they face the children one by one, making each child stand and recite her name. They scold her for bad behavior—not cleaning up toys, for example, or not eating vegetables—and praise her for good behavior, such as doing her homework or being kind to her younger brother. Then they command the child to sing a song she learned in school. Next, she is challenged to touch a Toshidon's nose, to make contact, literally, with this messenger from the otherworld. Finally, after promising to behave properly during the coming year, she is given a reward—a huge *mochi* rice cake—which she receives by crawling backward toward the Toshidon, who place the rice cake on her back. The Toshidon only spend about twenty minutes in each household, but for children it is an unforgettable encounter, a test of courage fraught with quavering voices and tears—and boasted about with pride the next day.

Costumes, masks, and procedures vary with each neighborhood, but most residents agree that all versions of Toshidon share the objective of "disciplining" children, generally between the ages of four and eight. The disciplinary focus is explicit: in most neighborhoods,

FIGURE 1
Toshidon enter a house in Motomachi on New Year's Eve, 2011. Photograph by author.

families wishing to participate submit a form to the community center on which they list specific points for which they would like each of their children to be scolded or praised. The event itself is a complexly choreographed and improvised physical performance in which the Toshidon, children, and family members enact roles within a broader community structure. Islanders have explained to me that the dialogue between Toshidon and child, often including interactions with parents and other family members, is critical to the success of the "happening."[4] Indeed, the instruction and support provided by parents during the performance is considered important for nurturing appropriate connections within the family and within the broader community.

Beyond the ritual moment itself, Toshidon plays a role in local life throughout the year. Parents remind children that the Toshidon live in the "skyworld," where they are always looking down and making note of their behavior. That is, most of the year they are invisible—existing only as hearsay and memory—making their New Year's Eve appearance all the more powerful. One six-year old girl told me that Toshidon had scolded her friend for playing with matches earlier in the year. "It's *true*," she said with awe. "There was nobody else there, but Toshidon-sama saw it!"[5]

There is no documented evidence attesting to when the tradition began but it is likely that it has taken place in one way or another for at least 130 years and probably much longer. Current residents in their eighties and nineties remember their parents talking about their own experiences receiving Toshidon, and the ritual was also imported to another island, Tanegashima (where it is still performed), by migrants from Shimo-Koshikijima in the 1880s. Many islanders explain that in the past Toshidon was enacted by junior high school boys and other young men, but today the performers, while still only male, are usually at least in their twenties and sometimes significantly older. In the past so many families received visitations from Toshidon that each neighborhood would require several groups to make the rounds; with the decrease in population in recent years, however, only a few families in each neighborhood have a child of appropriate age. Moreover, since involvement in the ritual is entirely voluntary, some families may choose not to be involved (for any number of reasons), further decreasing the number of participating children.

While Toshidon has experienced periods of great liveliness as well as decline, for the past several decades islanders have self-consciously celebrated it as an important cultural asset. In 1977 the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunkachō) selected "Koshikijima no Toshidon" as one of the first "important intangible folk cultural properties" (*Jūyō mukei minzoku bunkazai*) in the nation.[6] This recognition came about during a time when small communities throughout Japan were revitalizing and revaluing their local traditions, and the national government was implementing systems of recognition for traditional cultural products, both tangible and intangible (the Japanese infrastructure greatly influenced the development of these mechanisms within UNESCO). In the 1970s, several island leaders—teachers and village employees—actively worked to get Toshidon recognized on a national level. It was this national-level recognition that would eventually lead to its nomination for UNESCO inscription some three decades later.

## Current Status with Regard to UNESCO: One of the "First Elements" in Japan

Of the seventy-six "first elements" inscribed into the representative list by UNESCO's ICH Committee in September 2009, thirteen were

from Japan, including Koshikijima no Toshidon.[7] The nomination submitted (in English) to UNESCO reads:

> They have a common faith that a deity of a peculiar appearance, called Toshidon, visits the human world on the night of December 31. This simple and innocent faith has sustained the Toshidon practice on Shimo-Koshikijima as an annual event, transmitted from generation to generation up to the present time, and thus it is recognized as part of their cultural heritage collectively transmitted by the community. (UNESCO 2009)

The nomination was not submitted to UNESCO by the islanders but by the Japanese national government. Because Toshidon had been one of the earliest "important intangible folk cultural properties" on a national level, the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs simply sought the approval of local residents and then proceeded to nominate it. Village officials told me that they had the feeling that, as far as the Agency for Cultural Affairs was concerned, it was simply Toshidon's "turn" to be nominated.[8] Other than signing off on the nomination form, the islanders themselves had no direct involvement with the UNESCO selection; in fact, they only realized the inscription was official when a newspaper reporter from the mainland called the village office to ask how they felt about it. It was not until spring of the following year (2010) that they received an official certificate; the original (in English) and a Japanese translation are now displayed in the small history museum in Teuchi.

## On-the-Ground Perspectives: Excitement, Concern, Discussion

The UNESCO selection was a big deal on the island: residents were thrilled and "surprised" (*bikkuri*). One community leader told a mainland newspaper, "It is wonderful that the world knows about this event on an isolated island in the corner of Japan" (*Minami Nippon shinbun* 2009). There were a number of immediate tangible responses to the recognition. First there were signs, literally: banners celebrating the designation were displayed, two on the façade of the town hall and one at the ferry terminal in Teuchi. Posters were placed in various public spaces, such as the town hall and neighborhood community centers. In November, the village office invited Professor Shimono Toshimi,

a leading authority on the folklore of southern Japan, to lecture on Toshidon. The talk was attended by about 150 people, an impressive showing for an island of this size.[9] Shimono discussed the known history of the ritual and also predicted that because of the UNESCO designation hundreds of tourists might come to see Toshidon in the years to come. Finally, for that New Year's Eve (2009), Satsumasendai City commissioned a professional film crew to document the Toshidon performance in all six neighborhoods. The goal was to create a DVD of the events on this particular day, the first performance after the UNESCO inscription. The resulting DVD was not to be sold but simply kept as a record (*kiroku*) in the city administrative offices.[10]

The decision to film Toshidon was notable because, at least since the 1970s, different neighborhoods have had distinct attitudes toward filming and photographing, or even toward allowing tourists to witness Toshidon. In particular, residents of Fumoto have generally prohibited photographs of the ritual and directed inquiries from television and film crews elsewhere. Various reasons are proffered for this ban, but the rationale is, in part, that outside visitors (especially with cameras and flashes) would distract participants, destroy the atmosphere, and attenuate the intensity of the ritual. In contrast, the Motomachi neighborhood has been open to outside attention and, within limits, welcomes photographers, film crews, and tourists.[11] So while the decision to film in all six neighborhoods in 2009 was indicative of how momentous UNESCO recognition was felt to be, it was also significant that the DVD would not be used for commercial purposes or shown on television.[12]

While these were the concrete ramifications of UNESCO recognition, there have also been more abstract and affective responses. For the most part, islanders have embraced the designation as a point of pride: it is mentioned in advertising brochures and public events and the certificate itself is displayed. At the same time, however, many islanders voice concern that UNESCO recognition will cause the performance of Toshidon to stagnate. They argue that the ritual was always "informal" and "personal": you would just ask a neighbor or friend to dress up in a scary fashion "with whatever was at hand" and come scold and praise your children. Masks, costumes, and procedures were flexible and reinvented each year—a tactical response to the needs of the moment. Some islanders fear that the UNESCO designation will freeze Toshidon at this particular juncture in its his-

tory, and the images recorded on the DVD will become the reference for future performances.[13] At this moment of global recognition, they stress, it is particularly critical to remember that flexibility has always been part of the tradition.

Similarly, even before UNESCO recognition became official, there were concerns about losing autonomy and control of Toshidon. One local leader told me that when he first heard that the Agency for Cultural Affairs might nominate Toshidon to UNESCO, he feared they would be forced to adhere to outside standards or change their performance in some way. Only after assurance from Satsumasendai City officials that this was not the case, that UNESCO would have no control over the performance itself, did he sign off on the nomination.

This same leader, however, went on to explain that despite the fact that UNESCO has indeed been completely "hands off," he and others have "internalized" the recognition and feel a certain "burden" because of Toshidon's newfound global status. This "burden" does not extend to how the ritual is actually performed but is manifest as an increased sense of responsibility for the future of the tradition. Since Toshidon is child-oriented and there are fewer and fewer children on the island, it is possible that in years to come they will not be able to perform it regularly, if at all. While they do not want to transform Toshidon into a performance spectacle (*misemono*), some residents feel UNESCO recognition compels them to keep the tradition alive in some form.

The future of Toshidon is something the islanders have been grappling with for a long time, but UNESCO and the intangible sense of responsibility it inspires make this dilemma all the more urgent. The inscription becomes part of a general discussion about the island's wellbeing, inspiring residents to more deeply consider Toshidon's role in a community facing a startling decline in youth population. In 2012 there were only 122 elementary school children on the entire island.[14] In the Motomachi neighborhood, Toshidon visited four households in 2011, five in 2012, and three in 2013; leaders have calculated that, given current family situations, there may be no children of appropriate age left within the next three or four years. What then happens to Toshidon? Most people I spoke with insisted that if there are no longer any children, Toshidon would and *should* disappear. It should not, they asserted, persist only as a tourist attraction.

But in practice Toshidon's inscription on the Representative List is entwined with discussions of tourism. As mentioned above, folklorist Shimono Toshimi predicted a massive increase in tourists—a prediction that was not taken seriously by everybody but was, nevertheless, widely discussed. Although there is a municipal tourist board on the island, all decisions concerning Toshidon and tourism are made by the six neighborhood Toshidon *hozonkai* or "preservation societies." Each society, consisting of four or five members, is responsible for organizing the ritual every year and for thinking through the longer-term issues associated with its performance and, as the name implies, "preservation."

Both the Fumoto and Motomachi preservation societies face the same issues of depopulation, but their responses with regard to tourism have been markedly different. In Fumoto, where photography has long been forbidden, the approach has been relatively straightforward: despite greater pressure to open up to television crews and others, the society remains firm about *not* performing Toshidon for tourists. This notorious ban effectively limits tourist involvement and at the same time gives the Fumoto version an aura of "authenticity," as the thing hidden from sight becomes all the more desired.

In Motomachi, where residents have always been relatively open to visitors, the response has been more complex. As soon as it was suspected that UNESCO would recognize Toshidon, the preservation society began discussions about whether or not they should "open up" the ritual. In the society leader's words, "very strong opinions" were expressed on both sides. Those against "opening up" argued that "children would not focus on Toshidon but on the camera: their concentration would scatter . . . and the original meaning of Toshidon would be lost." They claimed that the "ritual takes place in the family household" and "should not become a spectacle." On the opposing side it was argued that outsiders "would come to understand the importance of Toshidon," that "it was necessary to share it with the public" and that it might be an "important form of local [economic] revitalization."[15]

The Motomachi preservation society was conscious of treading a delicate line between inclusivity and the maintenance of what it considered the integrity and effectiveness of Toshidon; in the end, they decided to open the ritual on a limited basis—so that visitors might

be accommodated but events would not be disrupted. In 2008, the year before the official UNESCO inscription, they began advertising and accepting applications. Significantly, they did not seek "tourists" (*kankōkyaku*) but specifically called for *kengakusha*, a word that can be translated as "visitor" or "observer" but which is constructed from the characters for "see" and "learn," and suggests a purpose beyond mere pleasure or sightseeing. "Unless they have an intense interest," the head of the society explained to me, "nobody is going to make the effort to come all the way to this isolated island on the margins of the country just to see Toshidon."[16]

Still, the preservation society realized that by opening Toshidon to visitors, they risked changing its value for the families and children to whom it was directed. They took strict precautions, refusing commercial tour groups and limiting the number of kengakusha to twenty, a size that might reasonably observe the ritual from inside individual households. The advertising flyer included a sober warning that "the ritual takes place in private households so all kengakusha must follow the guidance of the people in charge."

In practice, preservation society members carefully orchestrate visitors' experiences. At seven o'clock in the evening, kengakusha are welcomed at the community hall and provided with a brief description of Toshidon that emphasizes its educational function. They are then led to several houses, where they are ushered, quietly, to good vantage points inside. Photography is allowed in some houses and forbidden in others, depending on the preferences of the particular family. About an hour later, after the Toshidon have made their rounds and the ritual is complete, visitors are led back to the community hall for discussion with participants, facilitated by beer and sweet potato *shōchū*, the alcohol of choice on the island. Most visitors return to the mainland the following day, the first of January.[17]

## Discussion: Depopulation, Tourism, and the Future of the Island

I have argued elsewhere (Foster 2011) that one effect of the UNESCO designation is *defamiliarization*: the fact that a global body had taken note of Toshidon and added it to a list of similarly important examples of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) around the world makes islanders step back and view their own tradition from a different perspective.

UNESCO contributes an outside voice and added intensity to discussions of depopulation, employment, transportation infrastructure, and tourism development. During debates in the Satsumasendai City council, for example, Eguchi Konohiko, the representative from the islands, reminds other councilors that they should remember Toshidon's UNESCO designation when considering economic and administrative policies.

Certainly, being singled out by UNESCO has reinforced Toshidon's position within a broader discourse about the past, present, and future of the island, but the designation is by no means a deciding factor in this discourse. Nor has it really affected the day-to-day lives of the islanders. Even as tourism is embraced by the Motomachi preservation society, other neighborhoods tend to get few outside visitors.[18] In fact, tourists face numerous obstacles: ferries are frequently cancelled due to inclement weather, the largest hotel in Teuchi only has fourteen guestrooms, and the few shops and restaurants on the island are closed over the New Year's holidays.

Even in Motomachi, experiences over the last few years only illustrate ongoing challenges for both visitor and host. In 2009, the year of the designation and concomitant media attention, nineteen people preregistered to visit, but ferries were canceled because of rough weather on December 31. As a result, only nine tourists, who had made the crossing the day before, witnessed the event. In 2010, a winter storm caused ferries to be cancelled for two consecutive days and not a single tourist arrived in time. In 2011 the weather held and there were twelve kengakusha, and in 2012 there were fourteen. In 2013 the weather was excellent, but because the Toshidon were only visiting three houses that year, the Motomachi Preservation Society decided this would not provide an interesting experience and did not formally invite kengakusha. Instead, a professional photographer and several film crews (a documentary filmmaker and a local Kagoshima television station) were the only outside visitors.

Ultimately the event itself may not bring many tourists at all; there are places much more accessible for domestic tourists with only a few days off over the New Year's holidays. At the same time, however, the head of the island tourist board suggested to me that the *fact* of Toshidon—and its heralded association with UNESCO—is valuable in branding the island as a unique destination, regardless of whether one actually gets a chance to see the ritual itself. In this context,

UNESCO is a powerful brand; many people in Japan have long been keenly interested in "world heritage sites" (*sekai-isan*)—the tangible kind, that is. Moreover, nationally designated ICHs have been part of domestic tourist consciousness for decades. So the fact that Shimo-Koshikijima has a UNESCO-designated ICH—regardless of whether one gets to see it or not—makes great advertising copy for the island, for Satsumasendai City, and for Kagoshima Prefecture.[19] Having said this, however, there is also a disconnect between islanders' perceptions of the importance of UNESCO recognition and the understanding of Toshidon off the island. Despite national media coverage of Toshidon's inscription, very few people in Japan (outside the folkloric community) have actually heard of Toshidon. Even a Buddhist priest born and bred in Kushikino, the small port city where the ferry leaves for Shimo-Koshikijima, told me he had only vaguely heard of it.

At the same time, my impression is that islanders feel—or want to feel—that Toshidon is known throughout the country. This was brought home to me when, after several months living on the island, I was asked by the preservation societies to give a public lecture about my research. Rather than discuss Toshidon itself, I felt I could be more helpful by talking about UNESCO and ICH generally. With the intention of putting Toshidon's selection into a broader context, I showed slides of the twelve other ICHs from Japan selected in 2009. Most of these traditions from disparate parts of the country are very local and, unsurprisingly, almost completely unknown to the islanders. The only really famous element on the list is "Yamahoko, the float ceremony of the Kyoto Gion festival," part of a grand summer event that receives tens of thousands of visitors each year.[20] I expected the islanders to be disappointed by the list, concluding that just as they had never heard of most of these other ICHs, perhaps people elsewhere had never heard of Toshidon. Several islanders did indeed respond to the list I presented, but to my surprise it was not because they had never heard of the other traditions: rather, they were excited to learn that UNESCO had put Toshidon on par with a festival as famous as Gion in Kyoto.

I hesitate to generalize here, but at least to some islanders, Toshidon's inscription elevates it into exclusive company, placing it into both a national and global "heritage-scape" (Di Giovine 2009) with similarly distinguished traditions.[21] One island friend described the selection not as a point of "pride" but rather as a reason for "confidence" or *jishin*. I have written of this before (Foster 2011), but the characterization

continues to ring true. The word *jishin* might be literally translated as "self belief," and implies a deep sense that what one is doing has meaning. My friend explained that the UNESCO designation may be a label imposed by distant authorities, but it confirmed what he already felt: that Toshidon is a meaningful tradition. UNESCO provided what he saw as an objective confirmation of his own subjective values.

In the final analysis, the only conclusion I can draw at this stage is that the effect of UNESCO and the ICH designation on the ground in Shimo-Koshikijima is varied, complex, and emerging. For many people UNESCO is seen as performing a kind of critical gaze, reminding islanders of a world outside the island and at the same time, because of its semiotic openness, serving as a mutable element within local discussions. Ultimately, it is the malleability and open-endedness of the term that is most striking. *UNESCO* (or *Yunesuko* in Japanese) is a floating signifier open to multiple and conflicting interpretations, imbued with different meanings by different actors in different discursive contexts. Despite UNESCO's existence as a real organization—with employees, a budget, and a brick-and-mortar headquarters in Paris—what it refers to on the island varies from person to person. To some it is a sign of global standing, or inspiration for local pride, or a reason for confidence; to others it is a catalyst for tourism, or a way to leverage municipal funding, or a burden to shoulder for future generations. That is, there are many different UNESCOs, and all of them are, as it were, imagined. For better or for worse, islanders realize that UNESCO recognition cannot be undone; it is up to them to make it their own, to interpret it to their advantage, and to wield it with tactical flexibility as they negotiate the realities and future of life on a small island in contemporary Japan.

*Indiana University*
*Bloomington*

## Notes

1. All population statistics are from December 1, 2014 (Satsumasendai-shi, http://www.city.satsumasendai.lg.jp/www/contents/1300087101977/index.html).

2. I have been researching Toshidon since 1999 and have observed the ritual in 1999, 2000, 2009, 2011, 2012, and 2013. I have also conducted fieldwork on the island at other times of the year and was in fulltime residence from December 2011 to May 2012; I am grateful for the generous support of a Fulbright Fellowship that funded my research during that period. My descriptions here are based

primarily on the ritual as performed in the neighborhoods of Fumoto and Motomachi and on numerous formal and informal interviews with island residents as well as visitors. I am profoundly grateful to my friends in these communities for generously putting up with me, and my questions, for so many years. For a more detailed discussion of the ritual and its touristic context, see Foster 2011 and 2013. See also Tsuchiya 2014a and 2014b. Please note: throughout this essay Japanese proper names are written in Japanese order, with family name first. All translations from Japanese, whether oral or written, are my own.

3. In the Ryūkyū island area in the south of Japan, similar observances take place during late summer.

4. Interview with island resident (O. Y.) conducted in January 2000.

5. The suffix *-sama* is an honorific attached to names and titles of people and gods to show respect. It is commonly used by islanders when speaking of Toshidon.

6. As of June 2015, there were 290 designated important intangible folk cultural properties in Japan, including 7 from Kagoshima Prefecture. See http://kunishitei.bunka.go.jp/bsys/categorylist.asp. For more on intangible cultural properties and preservation law in Japan, see Ōshima 2007; Thornbury 1993, 1994, 1995, 1997, 55–74; Hashimoto 1998, 2003; Cang 2007; and Aikawa-Faure 2014. Japanese cultural properties policies influenced the development of UNESCO's ICH conceptions and programs (Kurin 2004, 67–68). Moreover the Masterpieces Program and the 2003 ICH Convention were both formalized by UNESCO while Kōichirō Matsuura, a Japanese diplomat, was serving as Director-General.

7. The elements added in 2009 are Akiu no Taue Odori; Chakkirako; Daimokutate; Dainichido Bugaku; Gagaku; Hayachine Kagura; Hitachi Furyumono; Koshikijima no Toshidon; Ojiya-chijimi, Echigo-jofu; Oku-noto no Aenokoto; Sekishu-Banshi; Traditional Ainu Dance; and Yamahoko, the float ceremony of the Kyoto Gion festival. (I render them here the way they are translated and transliterated in the UNESCO list itself; see http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00011).

8. This seems to be a fairly accurate characterization of the process at the time. More recently, however, the Agency for Cultural Affairs has started to exercise greater selectivity in its nomination process.

9. There is some dispute as to how many people actually attended the lecture; some people claim there were no more than one hundred attendees while other say there were almost two hundred. Either number attests to significant interest.

10. For more on the visual documentation of tradition in Japan, see Hyōki Satoru 2007.

11. For more on the reasons for these distinctions, see Foster 2011.

12. In May 2012, I attended a joint meeting of the Toshidon Preservation Societies in which members chose to deny a request made by a local television station to broadcast the DVD publically.

13. This may have happened to a certain extent with the 1977 recognition by the Agency for Cultural Affairs; a film made at that time is sometimes used as a reference source.

14. The extent of the decline can be seen in records from Teuchi Primary School: in 1948 there were 667 students; in 2012 only 55 students.

15. I was not present at the meetings where these issues were discussed but am grateful to the head of the Motomachi preservation society, quoted here, for recounting them to me. Interview with U. K., January 2012.

16. Interview with U. K., January 2012.

17. The description here is based on participant observation in 2011, 2012, and 2013.

18. In 2012, for example, when I attended the Toshidon event in the Aose neighborhood, I was the only nonresident present.

19. Toshidon is notably the only UNESCO-recognized ICH in Kagoshima Prefecture, or indeed, within all of Kyushu. The notion of World Heritage is very popular in Japan; the phrase *sekai-isan* is known even by elementary school children (Sataki 2009, 4), and there are numerous television shows documenting visits to heritage sites throughout the world. The inscription of Mount Fuji onto UNESCO's World Heritage List of cultural properties ("Fujisan, sacred place and source of artistic inspiration") was national news in 2013, inspiring major public discussions of UNESCO and tourism. The subsequent inscription in late 2013 of Washoku, or Japanese food, onto the ICH Representative List also made headlines but seemed of less immediate interest to the media; this may be in part because of uncertainty of what recognition of a "national" element entails.

20. In 2013, for example, an estimated 140,000 people lined the streets to witness the procession of floats. In comparison to Toshidon, almost no mention of the festival's UNESCO status is made—presumably because it is simply not needed to drum up tourist interest.

21. For discussion of the power and importance of lists, see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004 and Hafstein 2009.

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Michael Dylan Foster is associate professor of Folklore and East Asian Studies at Indiana University. He is the author of *Pandemonium and Parade: Japanese Monsters and the Culture of Yōkai* (2009), *The Book of Yōkai: Mysterious Creatures of Japanese Folklore* (2015), and numerous articles on Japanese folklore, literature, and media. (fosterm@indiana.edu)