

COMPLETION REPORT

An Anthological Study of Revitalization-Oriented Contemporary Art Festivals in Japan

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The three-month fieldwork period (Jun 1 - Aug 27 2018) directly funded by the Sumitomo Grant has constituted an integral part of my overall research in Japan that lasted until late 2019. In this three-month period, 1.) I went to Tokyo for library research, and conducted interviews with Kanto-based artists; 2.) using Kyoto as a base, I conducted interviews with Kansai-based artists and other informants; 3.) I spent one month in Tokamachi, Niigata Prefecture, conducting participant observations and interviews especially during the preparation stage of Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale 2018; 4.) I proceeded to the Setouchi area (Kagawa and Okayama Prefecture) to interview local people residing at the venues of Setouchi Triennale. During my fieldwork, I identified four groups of actors as my major subjects: 1.) local people; 2.) volunteers and supporters; 3.) artists; 4) festival organizers, including officials of local governments and gallery staff. This three-month period has engendered 45 interviews, out of the total number of 158 of my overall research. Significantly, it has been my only chance to closely observe the social and artistic process of Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale. I have observed that revitalization-oriented art festivals in Japan, as exemplified by Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale and Setouchi Triennale, are innovative attempts of municipal and prefectural governments to solve socioeconomic problems in the context that the neoliberal governance of the national government has prompted the devolution of responsibility in both cultural and local affairs. The results are complicated, and I scrutinize their relation with the artistic process. In these art festivals, local villages and islands are transformed as global spotlights, receiving international artists and a large number of visitors. At the same time, the process of artist selection was such implemented that the artists are expected to engage with local people and local cultures in the process of artmaking. Not all the artworks, however, are equally inclusive in the process of making, and different artistic approaches would result in contrasting socioeconomic effects. I identify two categories of artworks in Japanese art festivals for analysis: 1.) artworks made by highly-regarded gallery artists who are not used to work with local communities; 2.) artworks made by project-based artists who are good at mingling with local communities. The first type of artworks are usually monumental and permanent, capable to draw a great number of visitors, while the process of making is exclusive to professionals. Localities where this type of artworks are installed would generally better benefit from tourism, and some residents can further capitalize from it by starting new tourism business. The second type of artworks are usually processual, stressing on local participation and subjectivities in the making. Because of the temporary nature, these artworks are less likely to bring substantial economic opportunities to the communities; however, senior residents who have participated in the making process report that they felt rejuvenated by lively engaging with young artists. I find that preferences for artworks are mixed even in a small communities, and each community relies on top-down decisions regarding which type of artworks would be placed. These decisions might ultimately shape the path to revitalization of the community.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)

Sep 7 2018, University of Sheffield (U.K.), British Association for Japanese Studies Conference 2018

- Title of Presentation: *Contemporary Art as Remedy? An Anthropological Examination of Revitalization-oriented Art Festivals in Rural Japan*
- Presenter: Shiu Hong Simon Tu

Apr 16 2019, Aarhus University (Denmark), Japan Anthropology Workshop Conference 2019

- Title of Presentation: *Networked Art, Networked Happiness? Ethnographic Cases from Revitalization-oriented Art Festivals in Rural Japan*
- Presenter: Shiu Hong Simon Tu

Jul 16 2019, Leiden University (Netherlands), The 11th International Convention of Asia Scholars

- Title of Presentation: *Artists in the Field: How Artists Negotiate with Revitalization-oriented Art Festivals of Rural Japan*
- Presenter: Shiu Hong Simon Tu

Feb 18 2020, Wakayama University (Japan), The 2nd International Conference of Critical Tourism Studies Asia Pacific

- Title of Presentation: *Volunteering in Art Festivals of Rural Japan: An Ethnographic Overview*
- Presenter: Shiu Hong Simon Tu

Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)

(Doctoral dissertation pending in late 2020)

Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)