

PREFACE

Japan. An island nation that, at one point in history, was almost completely sealed off from the outside world for over two hundred years. A nation that would suffer the misfortune to be the first victim of nuclear weapons not once, but twice, and yet to follow that devastation with not only recovery, but ultimate success upon the world stage as an economic superpower. Japan's strengths and weaknesses have been poked and prodded through endless forms of analyses by academics and businessmen the world over. Yet, the names associated with Japan today invariably acknowledge inspiration from previous generations of Japanologists. And those, in turn, aspired to continue the work begun by another generation of "Japanologists" in whose case, possibly the title "missionary," "seafarer," or "trader" may have been more applicable. It was those early students of Japan that saw her through a unique perspective as outside observers. In doing so, they also helped educate the rest of the world about a country that, even today, is the subject of numerous volumes regularly written about how to explain her to the rest of the world. It is my hope then that "Dyeing to Dance" will add to that particular body of literature which increases understanding and hence, friendship, between the people of Japan and those who live across the sea.

Dyeing to Dance

For an event that extols such a long and interesting history, the story of the *Awa* Dance Festival, or *Awa Odori* (*Odori* means "dance,") still remains surprisingly inaccessible within the English language medium.

There are indeed many websites introducing the numerous dance troops along with the various activities and events that are associated with the *Awa Odori*. The problem, however, is that there has been no one comprehensive source tracing the origin and history of this spectacle compiled within the English language. Coming to Tokushima as a Visiting Assistant Professor at Tokushima Arts & Sciences University and realising that there might be a need for such a source, I began to research local Japanese documents and books on the *Awa Odori*. I soon discovered, however, that there is a marked lack of resources on the subject in Japanese as well! Nonetheless, the sources I did find were complete and informative and much of the contents of the *Awa Odori* sections are based upon my translations of the sources cited at the back.

During my research on the dance, I kept coming upon information about the other “industry” within the *Awa* region. Unfortunately, not as energetic or as profitable as it once was, the *Awa* Indigo, or *Awa Ai*, Industry has been inextricably linked with the history of the *Awa Odori*. So dependent were the dyeing industry and the dance festival on each other throughout Tokushima’s history that there were times when one could literally not exist without the other. The money brought into the *Awa* region by indigo merchants kept the dance alive throughout many points of its turbulent history and, in turn, it was the loyal support of locally dyed products by *Awa Odori* dance troops that kept the indigo industry alive. It would thus be remiss to examine this one integral part of Tokushima’s history and not to include the other. Therefore, the aim of *Dyeing to Dance* is to serve as a comprehensive analysis of the

colourful history surrounding one of the most famous festivals in Japan, as well as to provide an overview of just how some of the most beautiful naturally dyed products in Japan are made.

On the English Text

In order to try and retain as much of the original cultural nuance as possible, following their explanation, I have kept to the original Japanese terminology to describe events and objects. Other than in the case of well-known place names and vocabulary, I have rendered Japanese words that are not part of the established English lexicon in italics and incorporated capitals when placing the words in the context of proper nouns. Although I have done my best to crosscheck any controversial events in the history of the dance from the original Japanese sources, I take sole responsibility for any errors or factual omissions in the English version.

All direct translations within the English text are by the author except where noted otherwise.

On the Japanese Translation

This work is somewhat unique in the sense that I went through the original sources in Japanese, gleaned facts, figures and descriptions of historical events. I then condensed, translated and reorganised them into my own literary style. Thus, the Japanese version contained here is the translation of my English version of the original Japanese sources.

Although a bilingual publication, rather than confuse the reader with a word-for-word translation between two very different languages and

cultures, the translators of the Japanese text have sought to preserve the nuance of the original English meaning throughout and thus some text will contain slightly different words in each language.

Note on Name Order

I have kept the order of the Japanese names in the original Japanese order, that is, family name first.

Thanks

The wonderful Japanese translation of the *Awa Odori* section is a result of the conscientious efforts of the HIROBA International Group members: Usuzumi Yuriko, Yamada Takako and Umetsu Yōko. I am indebted to them with regard to, not only the Japanese text itself, but for their research and fact checking as well.

The Japanese translation of the Preface and sections of the *Awa Indigo* chapters were done by HIROBA member Kohno Nayoko. This project would not have been possible without her kind help, effort and guidance throughout.

All the people cited above had taken precious time out of their busy schedules to work on this project and I thank them sincerely.

Finally, a special thanks to local historian Professor Miyoshi Shōichirō. It was his detailed research into the history of the dance that inspired me to look beyond the *Awa Odori* as simply a tourist event and to see it as a dynamic part of the history of this region.

AWA DANCE: ORIGINS

We're fools whether we dance or not, so we may as well dance!

From the *Yoshikono Bushi*, a popular song during the Edo Period incorporated into the Awa Dance

The Festival Today

Tokushima. When talking to people from other parts of Japan, not to mention the world, the name of this town usually doesn't ring too many bells on its own. This may be partly due to the fact that Tokushima rests on Shikoku Island, an area that has had no direct connection to the rest of Japan until as recently as 1988. Put Tokushima in the context of indigo dyeing and you may earn a puzzled expression. Drop the Shikoku Pilgrimage and you might be rewarded with an; "Oh, I've heard of Tokushima!" Mention the Awa Dance Festival, however, chances are you will get a, "Yeah! Now that's a party!"

This is most certainly the case when compared to the sedentary pace of life that makes up the rest of the 361 days of the year in Tokushima. Witnessing this annual event, one may almost be persuaded to agree with some *Awa Odori* proponents' somewhat ambitious claims comparing the Tokushima version to that of Rio de Janeiro's annual extravaganza. The whole mood of the city clearly changes come festival time. People seem different somehow, less serious, more open. But, still...Rio? Viewing the short promotional film at the local multi-purpose

¹ A more literal, though somewhat awkward, translation of this famous quote may be: "As the fool watching the fool dancing are both fools, one may as well dance." The official translation above flows better and is therefore more widely accepted.

hall, where footage of the *Awa* Dance is interspersed with that of the Rio Festival, I couldn't help but notice a certain restrained politeness and passivity in the Tokushima crowds, that simply wasn't present in the South American version.

The population of Tokushima has been known to quadruple during the festival (reaching up to 1,300,000 people.) This inevitably brings along related problems and inconveniences. The present 10:30 p.m. curfew on celebrations is mostly a result of the logistical problems encountered with traffic and parking. Also, as is the case with any festival or large gathering, certain shady elements are inevitably drawn to the action and, consequently, the number of police increases. Pickpockets come out and things get broken. In terms of physical violence, however, the most partygoers may witness at the festival itself is the personal violence *bōsōzoku* (teenage gangs) initiates do to themselves during the “*nonde, nonde, nonde*” (drink! drink! drink!) parties. Here, each initiate challenges the other to who can hold down the most saké in full view (and compliance?) of the local authorities - and to think that when I was a teenager we had to sneak about in parking lots and back alleys! Check out the fun every night of the festival on the outdoor stage next to *Ryōgoku* Bridge!

Outside of Japan, regional Japanese communities perform it on occasion all over the world, and it certainly has a fan base in Portugal. The latter mostly as a result of Tokushima being the final resting place of Portuguese ex-pat Wenceslau de Moraes (1854-1929) - a writer on the dance.

In Japan, however, this dance festival is considered one of the top festivals in the country. The *Awa Odori* has over 950 registered dance troops, or *ren*, with some seventy-three practising for the festival year-round. Most groups, however, tend to gear up a couple of months before August. These are broken down into company-sponsored groups (a constant reminder of the strong ties to business this festival has had throughout its history) as well as schools, communities and various organisations that use practise time as a great way simply to socialise and network.

But how did this event get to be so big? *Awa Odori* coincides with *Bon*, a Buddhist holiday and festival in mid-August that all of Japan celebrates, when the spirits of the dead are believed to return to their ancestral homes. It is a time when the bullet trains and highways are jammed with people trying to get home for this summer holiday. Is this event, then, more than just another reason to get away from the in-laws and watch people in funny hats and hankies on their heads? It most certainly is, and there is a long and colourful history to this annual event. One filled with over four hundred years of dramatic events. Though it often contains such heroic elements as struggles for power, money, and love - it is also, in many ways, simply a chronicle of people fighting for their “right to party!”

Origins of the Festival

The *Awa* Dance has its roots in the *Bon* Festival Dance. In his book *Awa Odori*, the late author Matsumoto Susumu explains that today’s dance has its seeds in the *Bon* festivals of the *Kamakura* Period (1185-

1333) - which were gatherings filled with Buddhist chants. Thus, throughout Japan the *Bon* Dance began as a spiritual dance - a dance meant to “coax” the spirits of the dearly departed back to earth. On the coastal regions (of which Tokushima is one) there is also the belief that the *Bon* Dance is meant to call back home those lost at sea.

Of the two early types of *Bon* Dance; a marching *Kōshin Odori*, and a revolving *Mawari Odori*, the marching style (slightly more interesting than the simple, repeated turns-in-place of the revolving version) survived to continue on in popularity. Religious as well as animistic aspects of the *Mawari Odori* were incorporated in the *Kami Odori*, or “Dance of the Gods.” Here, prayers were offered for good weather, successful harvests and healthy crops as well as reverence for the moon. *Kami Odori* was known in Tokushima as the *Taiko Odori*, or “Japanese Drum Dance,” and the *Kasa Odori*, or “Hat Dance,” until the visit of the Crown Prince Hirohito (the future Shōwa Emperor) to Tokushima in 1922. The name *Kamiyo Odori*, or “Dance from the Age of the Gods,” was then finally decided upon.

The first record of the *Bon* Dance in Tokushima comes from Sogō Masayasu, a local baron who organized a performance of the summer festival that included the *Furyū* Dance on July² 16, 1578 for a *Furyū* Dance group from Kyōto. Out of the numerous artistic presentations of the time, *Furyū* was the most popular with the people. The precursor to *Noh*, *Furyū* was a performing art originating in the Heian Period (794-

²The month is July in accordance with the Chinese Lunar Calendar but August in the Gregorian Calendar.

1185) and widely performed in the Kyōto-Ōsaka district. It was the *Awa* region's *ren*, or group, style dance that was characteristic of *Furyū*. Sogō, in publicising this event to promote his castle and show his influence, also inadvertently increased the profile of the dance beginning from that year.

However, the party didn't officially begin, so to speak, until the feudal lord Hachisuka Iemasa celebrated the completion of Tokushima Castle in July 1586. Eating and drinking were in full swing and the people were allowed (relatively) unlimited reign on their behaviour. This is widely held to be the true beginning of today's *Awa Odori* and is even celebrated in a lyric from the *Yoshikono Bushi*, a song popular in the Edo Period (1603-1868) "Lord Hachisuka has left us today's *Awa Odori*."

AWA DANCE: HISTORY

July 9, 1674

It is proclaimed that dancing be permitted for a three-day period from the 14th to the 16th. Outside of that, dancing is prohibited. It is forbidden for dancers and spectators to carry swords (wooden or otherwise,) daggers or poles. The three-day restriction is effective in areas surrounding the Castle Town as well.

From Awa Odori Konjaku Monogatari

Restrictions Shape the Dance's History

It is ironic to reflect that today's *Awa Odori* owes its very existence to the many attempts in suppressing it throughout the centuries. As it stands today, the most comprehensive chronological record of the dance is based on the numerous "Declarations of Restriction" that have marked various points of its four-hundred-year history.

The dance was held regularly and without major disruption until the middle of the seventeenth century. By this time, however, nervous feudal authorities - in constant fear of rioting or being overthrown, began declaring restrictions on the *Bon* Dance. This was not so much to curb the dancing in the streets as to simply discourage gatherings of large groups of people. Considering the heavy burdens of taxation and food production placed on commoners, their fears were quite justified. However, the heavier the taxes and workload, the more people sought an outlet for their frustration and respite from their labours. So, thus began the "dance" between the authorities' restrictions and the peoples' violations of them. As the dance was held during the *Bon*

festival season and was therefore considered a religious event (as well as a lucrative money-maker for the local merchants!) the authorities would have had great difficulty eliminating it completely. For a long time, however, they did make themselves a pain about it being performed. Particularly with respect to those dance forms not considered “spiritual,” such as the *Kumi Odori* (“Group Dance,”) or the *Niwaka Odori* (“Impromptu Dance.”)

The oldest record of restrictions placed on the dance are found in a declaration in 1656 limiting the dance period to the three days of the *Bon* Festival. For the samurai class, dancing was only permitted inside and there was to be no dancing on temple grounds. By 1674, further restrictions were placed on the carrying of any potential weapons to the dance by spectators. The noose of restrictions was tightened even further by 1685, when dancing after midnight was forbidden, and no one was allowed to wear any covering for the face or head. This restriction was particularly harsh, given the blazing heat of summer in Japan. However, come what restrictions may, the people were nonetheless determined in continuing the dance and even openly defied the authorities by dancing across New Street Bridge, taunting them with chants of; “Won’t you go to New Street Bridge? Come on! Come on!”

The strict hierarchy that made up feudal Japan existed amidst constant tensions between the classes. By the mid-1600’s, the continuing power struggle between the samurai and merchant classes manifested itself in the *Awa* region through the opposing views regarding the performance of the dance. While the samurai lords were in favour of curtailing the

dance for fear of their being overthrown, the merchants, for their part, had tapped into a booming indigo trade in the region. Most came from Ōsaka, an area that had a reputation for being slightly more cosmopolitan than Tokushima. These Kansai merchants as well were well aware of the more practical monetary aspect of attracting more customers to their shops during the festival season. There was indeed a lot of money to be made, not only from the tourists coming to see the dance, but by supplying the dancers themselves with costumes (many made from local indigo-dyed cloth) and accessories.

It would still take the Shogunate over two hundred years to relinquish power and, until then, restrictions not only remained in place but were made even more stringent. Permission for children to engage in dancing was revoked and restrictions reached their peak by 1841. Even the nobleman Hachisuka Ikkaku's family was punished when he was found dancing in the street. It may not strike one as surprising that, by the mid-nineteenth century, the summer festival of *Bon* became, not so much a time of celebration, as much as a time of fear.

During the period known as the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912,) things changed, and they changed quickly. Even at the very beginning of the Meiji Period, things relaxed to an alarming degree. Not only was your house not about to get burned down for doing the two-step but, one could participate in a somewhat low-key annual street dance without fear of repercussion.

Unfortunately, as Japan was working overtime to catch up with the rest of the world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the

dance that had been steadily gaining in popularity, once again came under threat. This time, not because of a local ban, but because of the outbreak in 1894 of the Sino-Japanese War. From then on, various conflicts kept the dance on hiatus for many of the years that made up the first half of the twentieth century. Variations on this theme also came in the form of cancellation due to the threat of the spread of infectious disease, national mourning for the victims of war or various regional disturbances.

The Two-Day Dance of 1942

By 1935, the dance had become a four-day affair - on the odd year that it was held, that is. The 1930's and '40s were troubled times for the world and, as in the rest of the country, war fever had caught on in Tokushima. Cancelled for many of the years leading up to and including the Second World War, during the summer of 1942, however, with Japan's military forces advancing steadily throughout the rest of Asia, the dance went ahead in celebration of these successes. Shortened to only two days, it nonetheless reflected the growing nationalistic tone of the day. That year's dance stood as an example of how things traditional can be used to suit particular aims, and is illustrated through the following excerpt, where even traditional lyrics became heavily politicised:

*Half the world under the Rising Sun,
 You've won, you've won, Mr. Soldier,
 We will protect the home front,
 Best of luck!
 Go! Great Japan! Go!*
*The dancing soldier seen by the common man
 Registering wasn't simply for show
 We may as well dance to refresh ourselves for tomorrow.*
From Awa Odori

Awa Odori's Post-war Recovery

Unfortunately, the “tomorrow” in the above lyrics may not have been as bright as promised as there were many dark days ahead for Japan. By 1946, the people of Tokushima needed cheering up and this time, ironically, the authorities called upon the newly re-named *Awa Odori*. Until this time, the dance was always simply known as the *Bon* Festival Dance. However, Hayashi Korō - the main proponent for changing the name, felt that this celebration should not be limited to the summer season of *Bon*. So, the dance that was once deemed by the feudal authorities to be a threat to public morals was now, following the destruction of the Second World War, called upon by the local authorities to be resurrected in order to bolster public morale. With true Yamato spirit, the local dancers used the most rudimentary materials (sometimes even including paper) for their costumes and proceeded to invigorate, not only the dance itself, but the whole mood of the town of Tokushima, which had suffered heavy bombing right at the end of the war.

By the 1950's, the dance was being held regularly and drew in more and

more tourists with every coming year. *Awa Odori* associations were incorporated and the number of *ren* (dance troops) exploded. Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, the dance has steadily grown into, not only one of the biggest spectacles in the whole of the country, but also provides a nice economic boost (along, of course, with the Shikoku Pilgrimage and the Awa Indigo Dyeing Industry) for the city.

Once something people had to wait until the cover of night to go out do furtively, had now become the centrepiece of the city. Straight down the road from the station, at the foot of Mt. Bizan, stands the Mecca of the dance, the *Awa Odori Kaikan* (Hall,) which houses all things *Awa Odori* - including a nice little museum and reading corner (both in Japanese, though.) Inside the *Awa Odori Kaikan*, there are daily performances of the dance for those who just can't get enough of it but once a year. There are also a number of artistic designs throughout the city devoted to the dance, some emblazoned in the sidewalk under one's feet, others, both futuristic and traditional, perched on bridges and walkways. Certainly, when you talk about Tokushima with the locals you inevitably end up on the subject of *Awa Odori*. It is in the city not only as a tangible presence because of such artistic reminders, but it permeates through with an equally strong intangibility as well. People break out in little shuffles when walking through the park, especially when they hear the two-beat rhythm of the songs that make up the dance. It is not hyperbole to say that the *Awa Odori* is in the people's blood. The people of Tokushima literally start dancing soon after learning to walk and it is even a regular part of local school events. Ironically, the very event that was once restricted, and even feared, has today become actively supported and promoted.

AWA DANCE: STYLES

The right hand is put forward along with the right leg. The left comes forward just as the left leg does...

Straighten your back and push out your chest while looking forward. Dancing along to the two - beat rhythm, don't let your elbows fall below your shoulder and stretch your hands out high, all the while flitting your palms back and forth.

From *Awa Odori*

Although their offshoots are innumerable, there are three basic types of dance; the *Kumi*, *Zomeki* and *Niwaka Odori* styles. The oldest, by far, is the *Kumi Odori*, or “Group Dance.”

“Group Dance” Style (*Kumi Odori*)

September in seventeenth century Japan was a busy month and, once the fall harvests were in, it was party time. There were festivals in various local shrines and, as one festival would end, another would begin. The party would continue, at times, non-stop. There were reports of *Kumi Odori* taking place in various parts of the town every day for days on end - invariably disrupting regular town life. So, inevitably, the authorities stepped in. All the while cracking down on the dances, the authorities were not ignorant of the merchants’ pleas to keep the dance going (and of their own cut through increased taxes which would follow.) So, allowances had to be made and the dance was reduced to the three-day period of the summer festival of *Bon*.

Based on the *Furyū* Dance, *Kumi Odori* groups would consist of the

surrounding dancers and the select few who made up the *Naka Odori*, or “Inside Dance.” These individuals would perform on a brightly coloured platform while the rest of the performers circled about the stage. This, under the ever watchful eyes of local authorities - always around just in case things got out of hand. In his seminal work on the history of the dance; *Awa Odori Shi Kenkyū* (Historical Research of The Awa Dance,) Miyoshi Shōichirō states that a main part of the interest in the *Kumi Odori* was to, in fact, revive the fading *Furyū Odori*.

“Noisy Dance” Style (*Zomeki Odori*)

Zomeki means “noisy” and, true to its name, refers to a bright and lively style of dance. Boasting a cheerful two-beat rhythm, it is considered the precursor of the most popular form of dance seen at the *Awa Odori* today. Not officially named *Zomeki* until after the Meiji Restoration, this type of dance was referred to as the *Arikitari no Odori*, or “Common Dance,” found in the historical *ofure*, or “Declarations of Restriction” that were placed on the dance throughout the centuries by feudal authorities. It is also the style captured in the oldest known painting of the dance by Suzuki Fuyō in 1798. As the economy and population grew, the once static *Bon* Dance went mobile and began to resemble more of the style and shape of today’s version.

The *Nagashi Zomeki* (literally, “Cruising Dance”) style became a travelling offshoot of the *Zomeki*. In this version, travelling groups of housewives, company workers, and geisha who were skilled in samisen, or the native guitar, would go from gate to gate of officials’ residences. In many of these residences, it is interesting to note, lived the patrons of

these very same geisha. A popular activity up until the time of the Second World War, this Japanese version of Christmas carolling died out following the war.

“Impromptu Dance” Style (*Niwaka Odori*)

Niwaka means “spontaneous,” or “impromptu,” and it was to the traditional *Bon* Dance what Elvis, or the Beatles, were to music. As the indigo merchants became an emerging economic power, the *Kumi Odori* lost its allure and was replaced by the fresh new *Niwaka Odori*.

The Tokushima *Niwaka Odori* was originally an import from the Kansai region and its basics lay in spontaneity and improvisation. One and all could jump up and dance, perform little skits satirising social conditions, or even do a little magic. Merchants would walk about with their costumes tucked underneath their arms and do an impromptu dance or play...of course while soliciting donations of food, drink or cash from passers-by in the process.

The term *niwaka* itself probably came from Hakata in Fukuoka. The local delicacy, a *senbei* (rice cracker) product called *niwaka senbei* would contain a Zorro-like mask in its box to be used during *Niwaka Odori* to hide the impromptu dancer’s identity. These dancers would then attach themselves to *Zomeki* Dance troops and drop off at will. Initially, the *Niwaka* style appealed to the more adventurous at heart and was supported by the new merchants. These young turks thought that, although the *Zomeki* was beautiful to watch and participate in, it nonetheless was somehow too...predictable. There wasn’t much

spontaneity involved and spectators expected some social satire and frivolity in their festivals. The *Niwaka* provided this. It is necessary to note that the routes taken by the *Niwaka* dancers were different and were never intended to supersede the *Zomeki*, that is, there were no aspirations to take over what the *Zomeki* had begun. The *Niwaka* was simply an alternative party avenue.

An interesting aside is the use of the brightly coloured umbrella in *Niwaka Odori*. The authorities were constantly cracking down and banning any dances that were not religious-based and so, up came the umbrella. Originally used as a type of marker to call the spirits back to earth in invitation during the *Bon* Festival, it provided clever camouflage for the *Niwaka* dancers. At particular risk was the *Ishō* (“Costume”) *Niwaka* - due to its gaudy and luxurious costumes. The authorities meanwhile, were on the constant lookout for showy displays that might get the commoners thinking about their own desperate situation. In essence, today’s colourful version of the *Awa Odori* is the result of, in many ways, the livening up of the *Zomeki Odori* through the *Niwaka Odori*.

As Tokushima grew in size, so did the many influences on the dance from various regions. Individually, merchants from various areas had subtle influences on their neighbourhood troops. Collectively, however, they markedly changed basic aspects of the dance. The days of a few troops with samisen and shoulder-drums making the rounds through the village were over. Practise began to move indoors - into confined quarters and consequently, the size of the instruments was affected.

The samisen became smaller and the shoulder-drum technique became more refined.

Other Dance Styles

In his book *Awa Odori*, Matsumoto Susumu explains that the original meaning of the dancers' hands lifted up in the air was to symbolise the dancer's wish to reach up to the heavens where the spirits of the ancestors were. Originally there was no difference between the male and female dance forms and today, although the basic form is shared, some differences between the male and female dance styles have evolved.

During the large fibre boom in Japan during the Korean War (1950-53,) many female factory workers would don their own products and participate in what would become know as the *Awa Odori* Line Dance. The Line Dance, performed in somewhat of a box-like formation, allowed the less-than-talented dancers to be placed in the middle while the skilled dancers held up the front and sides. Without a doubt, the female dancers are a spectacular sight to behold, what with the synchronised movements of the arms and legs, the loud clacking of the *geta* sandals all accompanied by lilting shouts. Also, to add some variety, there are the female dancers dressed in male costumes. Known as *Chibikko Odori*, this is a dance style usually reserved for young girls - a kind of tomboy dance style they can opt for before donning the female costume as adults. The lanterns that the male and *chibikko* dancers carry originate from the days of dark country roads and have become a quaint staple of the dance.

Costumes

Now where did those funny hats come from? Known today as *amigasa* (literally “net hats,”) originally these hats, made from straw, or sedge, were used on scarecrows. The story goes that before going out, female dancers would put on their required two layers of kimono, for freedom of movement however, they would hike up their costume and leave their right shoulder covered by only one layer. This was at the time of course perceived as a sign of loose virtue and, in order not to be stigmatised as a “loose” woman, they searched for a type of hat that would adequately cover their face. The costumes themselves would be a wonderful blue courtesy of the local indigo industry. An added bonus for making use of the local industry was that the dyed cloth would be more resilient to insects (the indigo plant being a natural repellent) as well as keeping the dancers cool in the summer heat.

Oral Traditions

The song that is associated with the *Awa Odori* is the *Yoshikono Bushi*. The *Yoshikono Bushi* is said to have come along with the indigo tradesmen during the Tenpō Period (1830-44.) Some theories place the original from songs boatmen used to sing in Kumamoto, a region in the southern island of Kyūshū, from where it spread to many parts of Japan. The Tokushima version has its roots in the *Itako* region of Ibaraki (a prefecture north of Tōkyō) from where it then migrated back south to Nagoya. It finally came to rest in Tokushima and became associated with the dance. Interestingly, the battle cry of today’s *Awa Odori*: “We’re fools whether we dance or not, so we may as well dance!” - has its origins, not in Tokushima, but the Nagoya *Yoshikono Bushi*.

In order to create atmosphere and urge each other on (dancing the *Awa Odori* is a physically taxing affair and don't let anyone tell you otherwise!) there would be a lively interaction of shouts and their returns between the dancers. This is known as *hayashi kotoba* (shouted jeers) and one that you will hear most often is; "*Eraiattcha!*" Originally a call by those preceding the carriers of portable shrines during town festivals to clear the streets spiritually for the passing of the shrine, the call became a staple of the dance and is used as a cheer (and check!) for strength throughout the procession.

Instruments

The mainstays of today's *Awa Odori* in terms of instruments are the samisen, shoulder-drum, flute, small and large drum. Looking at pictures and paintings from the Meiji Period though, only the samisen and shoulder drums are present. It was the Taishō Period (1912-26) that saw an explosion in the variety of instruments accompanying the dancers. Even classical instruments such as the violin, mandolin, and clarinet made short-lived appearances in the history of the dance. Basically, anything that was portable (oil drums included!) made their way into the procession at various times during this era.

Originally, it was the number of samisen players that determined whether a "dance outing" was going to go ahead, as the samisen literally set the tone for the procession. Today, with the prevalence of "loud" instruments such as the gong and large drum along with the echoes created within the confines of a shopping arcade the procession can make for a fearsome cacophony of sound. As the dance troops

have become increasingly larger and larger (some troops boasting over two hundred members) the beat kept in the back by the instruments and that followed by the lead dancers can end up being of a very differing variety. Add on to this is the confusion of other processions doing their thing a few metres away and the situation can become so disorientating that, at times, dancers literally dance to the beat of competing drums!

So, there you have it. Hopefully, a bit more than a cursory look at the history and origins of the *Awa Odori*. Tokushima may be a quiet and laid-back place the rest of the year, but come the middle of August, it is definitely Party Central!

AWA INDIGO: THE DYEING METHOD

A Brief History

Toward the end of the Third Cenozoic Period (three to five million years ago) smartweed plants began to emerge from among the ferns on the surface of the planet. By the Fourth Period, two distinct kinds of indigo began to appear. The first, “mountain indigo,” comes from tree indigo discovered in the mountains of Indonesia. The second, “water indigo, ” originates from the Ganges riverside in Bangladesh. These plants began to be used as a dye for clothing and came to Japan via Southeast Asia, China and Korea.

Around the middle of the seventh century, the Inbe Family clan came to what is now known as *Kawashima* town in a part of *Mitsujima* and began to cultivate indigo. By 1586, as feudal lord Hachisuka Iemasa settled in the *Awa* region, he invited Harimaya Yoemon from the *Harima* district (present day *Kōbē* and surroundings) and others who began cultivating indigo on a larger scale.

During the 1800’s, the northern part of the *Awa* region was well known throughout the rest of Japan as a quality producer of indigo and indigo dye crafts and, by the turn of the twentieth century, the indigo industry had made the region wealthy. Unfortunately, starting in 1903, large quantities of cheap artificial dye products were beginning to be imported from Germany. Easy and quick to make, the local dye masters couldn’t compete with these products and the local industry suffered as a result.

Recently, however, with a growing demand for natural, one-of-a-kind products of fine craftsmanship, the local *Awa Ai* Industry is making an energetic comeback.

The Dye

To make the dye you must first dissolve the indigo plant into a liquid form. Although a raw indigo dyeing method exists where raw plant leaves are used in the dyeing process, the more popular method is using a solution of composted indigo leaves, or *sukumo*. Depending on the *sukumo*, the construct of the liquid dye varies. This means that, depending on the fermentation process; the amount of indigotine that will dissolve in the water will vary, thus affecting the dye-colour (indigo leaves, on average, contain about three to four percent indigotine.)

At the start of the process, there is what is called the “set up” phase and the ingredients used during this stage are *sukumo*, ash-lye, slaked lime and wheat bran. The dye vat is filled with ash lye until it is half full. Then, while mixing the solution, the *sukumo* is added. Next, Japanese saké is mixed in and the mixture is left to settle. Two to five days after the saké has been added, a noticeable change in the dye mixture becomes apparent. A certain viscosity emerges in the dye solution and it becomes more difficult to control the froth. More slaked lime, ash lye, as well as hot water are added, increasing the dye solution to about eighty percent of the capacity of the vat. After two to three days, the dye solution’s surface emits an even more noticeable shine as well as having a slightly reddish tinge to it. It is here that the final amounts of slaked lime, ash lye and hot water are added, filling the vat to capacity.

The Many Uses and Benefits of Indigo

Not only does the indigo plant dye fabric a beautiful sky or dark blue colour, but it is also said to have the following practical and medicinal properties:

- ▶ Indigo can prevent skin irritations, improve poor blood circulation, and even prevent infertility.
- ▶ It can protect against insect infestations in clothing and Japanese paper.
- ▶ Applied to Japanese *tabi* socks, indigo helps prevent athlete's foot and bites from *mamushi* (a type of poisonous snake native to Japan.)
- ▶ It is said to have medicinal properties as a sedative so applying it to a pillow or futon cover will help you sleep well.
- ▶ It contains disinfectant properties so it can be used as a bandage.
- ▶ The plant's leaves are effective when rubbed over bites from poisonous insects.
- ▶ The leaves of the young plant are edible (they contain a pleasant bitterness) and can be used as decoration for *sashimi* (sliced raw fish.)
- ▶ Indigo seeds contain antipyretic properties and can be used to prevent colds.

- ▶ Because of the indigo plant's antipyretic properties, it can be used as a treatment against blowfish poisoning.

Taking Care of Your Product

According to the dye master Furushō Toshiharu, the following points are some suggestions for taking care of Awa Indigo products:

- ▶ The colour of indigo is considered to be a traditional Japanese blue and because it is a natural product, like fine wine, the colour will mellow over time.
- ▶ As this product's colour comes from natural Awa Indigo, fermented into a dye containing ash, please refrain from dry cleaning. Using a mild household soap, hand wash and hang out to dry (out of direct sunlight) and finally, iron.
- ▶ Avoid washing dyed products together with other items.
- ▶ Avoid using any bleaching products on dyed products.
- ▶ The colour may fade substantially if the dyed article is left in a damp area for a long time.

AWA INDIGO: BEHIND THE SCENES

MARCH: Sowing the Seeds

Indigo seeds are two millimetres in size and are sown at the beginning of March. Incidentally, this is also the time of year that the swallows return to the Tokushima region from the South and many indigo growers choose an auspicious day to begin this activity. These small seeds are sown at about seven grams for one metre squared. The seeds are distributed equally in a prepared nursery bed and lightly covered with soil. After the sowing of the seeds is completed, Japanese saké is offered to the grower's field shrine in the hope of a rich harvest for the coming year.

APRIL: Growing the Seedlings

Approximately one month later, when the seedlings are two to three centimetres tall, the seedlings are thinned out to leave about two to three plants within an area of two centimetres all around. When the plants reach approximately twenty centimetres in height, they are ready for transplanting. Before moving them to a larger field, water is sprinkled on the bed to soften the earth and four or five seedlings are bundled together and pulled out. They are then bundled into a convenient size. In order for the seedlings to take to their new environment, the roots are kept moist during the transfer of the seedlings to the larger fields.

MAY: Re-Planting the Seedlings

The best time to pick the transplanted seeds is usually at the end of April

or the beginning of May. The main growing fields contain compost and limestone, are well cultivated, and consist of rows at eighty-centimetre intervals. The prepared seedlings are planted in intervals of forty centimetres in bundles of four to five plants. The tips of the seedlings are re-planted facing either the Western or Northern direction. After replanting the seedlings, the soil is thoroughly tamped down.

JUNE: Spreading Manure and Weeding

The transplanted seedlings then begin to thrive under the sun and rain. The indigo farmers continue their weeding and fertilizing during the rainy season as well as raking the ground to help the indigo grow larger.

JULY: Harvesting

As the rainy season passes, the time of the first harvest approaches. This is known as the “First Cut.” The most opportune time for harvesting indigo is on fair weather days in the period between the end of June and the beginning of July.

In the past, a large sickle with an eighteen-centimetre-long blade was used to harvest the indigo. Recently, however, more specialized equipment has been used in the harvesting process.

After the cut indigo is dried on both sides in the sun, it is taken into the garden and cut into lengths of five centimetres. Fanning then separates the leaves from the stalks. This process is called *ai konashi*, or “separating the indigo leaves from their stems.”

AUGUST: Preparing the Indigo Leaves

Following the “First Cut,” about a month passes where the indigo growers spread manure, weed and perform pest control. Then, a new batch of indigo is ready for harvesting and so the time for the second harvest, or “Second Cut,” approaches.

The “Second Cut” usually takes place from the end of July through to the beginning of August. The leaves are separated in the same way as the “First Cut.” The leaves are then placed in a specialized preservative straw bag called a *zugin* for safe storage until the fermentation process.

SEPTEMBER: Fermenting the Indigo Leaves

Upon choosing an auspicious day during the beginning of September the fermentation process begins by turning the leaves into *sukumo*. The first step in the fermentation process is to place the leaves from the “First Cut” in a fermentation structure called a “bed.” Each bed is lined with 3,000 - 3,750 kilograms of indigo leaves. A suitable amount of water is poured and mixed in as well. The resulting volume of the pile rises to about one metre in height.

Work continues by spraying and mixing the *sukumo* with water every five days. The indigo is then mixed with specialized utensils such as wooden rakes and sifted until it returns to its original height. During the fourth sifting process, the indigo leaves from the “Second Cut” are put in. The trick is to repeat the process up to thirteen times. Because the work involved in mixing the water during the fermentation process greatly affects the quality of the *sukumo*, only a craftsman with many

years of experience is placed in charge of this part of the process.

OCTOBER: Indigo Fields in Bloom

During the fermentation process, after having yielded the “Second Cut,” the fields bloom in flower dyeing the landscape the colour of light pastel.

NOVEMBER: The Fermentation of *Sukumo* .

By the twelfth and thirteenth sifting, the fermented *sukumo* is placed on a screen so that it ferments evenly.

In the past, this sifting process was performed three times; consisting of the “Rough Sift,” “Middle Sift,” and the “Final Sift.” Presently, the “Middle Sift” is done at the end of October. The “Final Sift” is done at the end of November - during the seventeenth and eighteenth “sifting of the leaves.” It is important for the fermentation process to keep the leaves at a certain temperature so a straw carpet is placed over the *sukumo*. The sifting continues until the process is completed by the twenty-second or twenty-third time.

DECEMBER: Shipping out the *Sukumo*

Approximately one hundred days following the start of the fermentation process the indigo is placed in straw sacks imprinted with the craftsman’s seal. 56.25 kilograms of indigo is measured out and put into each sack. The sack is then tied with rope and shipped out to indigo dyers throughout the country.

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photo; Kevin Watson



1. The population of Tokushima has been known to quadruple during *Awa Odori*.

2. The *Awa Odori* Festival has become an increasingly international event.

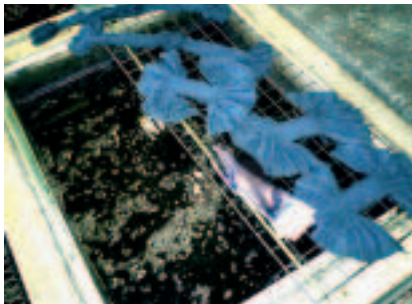


3. The male dance style tends to be overshadowed by the more publicized female dancers but the guys can certainly hold their own come August!



4. Sleepy little Tokushima?





5. The dye used for making
Awa Ai products

6. Once the fermentation process is complete the indigo leaves are packed into special preservative straw sacks. Containing 56.26 kg of fermented indigo leaves, the going price for one sack is approximately 110,000 yen (over US\$1,000.)



7. In the indigo fields...



8. Sifting the fermenting
indigo leaves.