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# Community-Based Museum and Intangible Cultural Resources: From the Perspective of the Concept of Post-Museum

Hiroya Ichikawa

Keywords:

*Ecomuseum; Intangible Culture; Yokai; Landscape; Folklore*

## ABSTRACT:

This study investigated museum activities that utilized intangible cultural resources. In particular, this study focuses on resident participation in museums as bearers of regional culture. Interpreting the term “participation” literally, users are presumed to engage in activities inside the museum; nevertheless, we also need to consider the museum itself engaging with the community. As a research method, fieldwork, including action research, was conducted in two regions. The first was Tono City in Iwate Prefecture, and the second was Miyoshi City in Tokushima Prefecture. The former has utilized *The Legends of Tono*, written by Kunio Yanagita, as a tourism resource. The latter utilized the yokai (monstrous beings) folklore, passed down orally through generations, as a local resource. Both are characterized by the positioning of invisible beings as cultural resources; however, the direction of museum activities differs. Through these case studies, two types of practical models for the preservation and utilization of intangible cultures were constructed. First, Tono represents a network-type model that connects various facilities, centered around government-led museums. Second, Miyoshi presents an intangible model that deconstructs a museum’s functions and incorporates them into the local community. By focusing on intangible culture as “local knowledge,” this study presents issues aimed at the post-museum.

L’articolo analizza attività museali che utilizzano risorse culturali immateriali e si concentra, in particolare, sulla partecipazione dei residenti ai programmi dei musei in quanto portatori della cultura locale. Interpretando il termine “partecipazione” in senso letterale, si tende a presupporre che gli utenti prendano parte ad attività all’interno del museo; tuttavia, è necessario considerare anche il museo stesso come soggetto attivo nel coinvolgimento della comunità. Come metodo di ricerca è stato condotto un lavoro sul campo, comprensivo di ricerca-azione, in due contesti territoriali: la città di Tono, nella prefettura di Iwate, e la città di Miyoshi, nella prefettura di Tokushima. Nel primo caso, *Le leggende di Tono*, opera di Kunio Yanagita, sono state utilizzate come risorsa turistica; nel secondo, il folklore degli yōkai (esseri mostruosi), trasmesso oralmente di generazione in generazione, è stato valorizzato come risorsa locale. Entrambi i casi sono caratterizzati dal riconoscimento di esseri invisibili come risorse culturali; tuttavia, l’orientamento delle attività museali risulta differente. Attraverso questi studi di caso sono stati elaborati due modelli operativi per la conservazione e la valorizzazione delle culture immateriali. Da un lato, Tono rappresenta un modello di tipo reticolare che collega diverse strutture, con al centro musei promossi dall’amministrazione pubblica. Dall’altro, Miyoshi propone un modello immateriale che decostruisce le funzioni del museo, integrandole all’interno della comunità locale. Ponendo l’attenzione sulla cultura immateriale come forma di “conoscenza locale”, questo studio solleva alcune questioni orientate alla prospettiva del post-museo.

## Hiroya Ichikawa

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Opening Picture:

Fig. 18: A Statue of the Baby of Akago-buchi.

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## Introduction

This study investigated museum activities that utilize community-based intangible cultural resources. This study specifically focused on the participation of residents in museum activities as bearers of regional culture. The current museum definition at International Council of Museums, held in 2019, states that museums are “participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities.” Interpreting the term “participation” literally suggests that users engage in activities inside the museum; conversely, we also need to consider the museum’s engagement with the community as well. Here, we can find the expanded concept of modernist museums as discussed by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill as the “post-museum.”

Hooper-Greenhill presents several points of comparison between the “modernist museum” and the “post-museum.” A significant assertion in this study is that “the post-museum will be equally interested in intangible heritage.”<sup>1</sup> Although traditional museums have focused on the acquisition, preservation, and exhibition of tangible cultural properties, post-museums address intangible culture and utilize it, hosting a variety of events to communicate with visitors. These events may involve the establishment of community and organizational partnerships.<sup>2</sup>

Several studies investigated the relationship between museums and intangible cultural heritage. As Marilena Alivizatou points out, “drawing on the vision of the ‘post-museum,’ the concept of in-

tangible heritage will be used to clarify and assess the basic museum functions of collecting, making exhibitions, and working with communities.<sup>3</sup> This “unconventional” relationship reveals the potential to reinvent the practice of museums to include elements of living culture in the fields of collecting and creating exhibitions.<sup>4</sup> The term “living culture” used here could serve as an important point of discussion when considering the new role of museums.

Marta Wróblewska contended that the present museum practices prove “the necessity not only to satisfy the intellectual and emotional needs of contemporary audiences but also to depart from being the cemeteries of arts to correspond with the lively everydayness embodied increasingly within the notion of the intangible heritage.”<sup>5</sup> Here, overlapping these two approaches with cultural heritage in museums becomes a possibility. Shimona Bodo has suggested two models. One is the “essentialist” model, which considers heritage as unchangeable and permanent. The other approach is based on a “dialogical paradigm” that views material and immaterial cultural heritage from a processual stance.<sup>6</sup> In this context, Saphinaz-Amal Naguib points out that this dialogical model “entails not merely the protection and transmission of heritage, but also brings forth questioning, renegotiations, alternative interpretations, and considerations of sustainability understood here as an ongoing process of social and cultural learning.”<sup>7</sup>

In the background, it is suggested that “museum Studies are currently making a big leap toward social

studies, especially anthropology or ethnography, adapting the methods of fieldwork and surveys.”<sup>8</sup> Marta Wróblewska’s use of the term “cemeteries” implies that museums are not merely preserving cultural properties whose value has already been established; rather, museums themselves actively engage with the communities surrounding them in a dynamic manner. Janet Blake emphasizes the importance for cultural institutions such as museums “to rethink their role vis-à-vis not only the heritage they hold and display but also the communities that create it.”<sup>9</sup>

### Purpose and Scope of this Study

As mentioned above, based on the concept of new types of museums, including the “post-museum,” case studies grounded in various countries have been undertaken. Janet Blake focused on the growing interest in “community museums, which include museums of minority and immigrant cultures, and, in the UK, the USA, Latin America, as well as the Caribbean and West Africa, museums addressing the slave trade,” as methods developed for museums to address challenges related to intangible cultural heritage.<sup>10</sup>

In Japan, although there is an accumulation of research on intangible culture itself, such as folk performing arts, community-based festivals, annual events, and folk traditions, little prior research connects these to museums, particularly practices such as post-museum initiatives. That said, at the practical level, there are cases where, while engaging with the “living culture” that people across the region have inherited,

they are positioned in a way that can be described as post-museum.

Here, we provide an overview of the measures for the protection of intangible cultural heritage in Japan. As a basic legal foundation, *the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties* divides cultural properties into six categories: tangible, intangible, and folk cultural properties, in addition to monuments, cultural landscapes, and traditional building groups. In this category, folk cultural properties are divided into tangible and intangible folk cultural properties. When this law was enacted in 1950, folk cultural properties were positioned as part of the tangible cultural properties of folk materials.

In traditional museums, tangible materials were the focus of collection, and consequently, “intangible culture” has been positioned on the periphery of museum activities. In 1975, an amendment to *the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties* added new categories to folk cultural properties and traditional building groups. This change reflects a growing interest in the local culture, including the initiative to preserve the local community.

However, some local cultures are difficult to designate as cultural properties. One example is the memories or narratives accumulated by residents in each region. This study focuses not only on intangible cultural heritage designated as cultural properties but also on other invisible cultures that fall outside of this scope.

As a case study, this study focused on two areas. The first was Tono City in Iwate Prefecture, and the second was Miyoshi City in Tokushima Prefecture. The former uti-

lized *The Legends of Tono*, written by Kunio Yanagita, as a regional cultural resource. The latter employed the folklore of *yokai* that has been transmitted orally through generations as a cultural resource. Both are characterized by the positioning of invisible beings as cultural resources; however, the direction of museum activities differs.

### ***The Legends of Tono as Cultural Resources***

*The Legends of Tono* was published in 1910, written by Kunio Yanagita (1875–1962) based on stories narrated by Kizen Sasaki (1886–1933), who was from Tono. It contains stories about “Oshira-sama,” a god passed down in households, or “Kappa,” a creature that appears near water and plays tricks on people and horses. These were narrated not as imaginary stories but as contemporary events. Therefore, these stories have concrete locations.

Tono is characterized by its basin topography surrounded by mountains. In particular, Mount Hayachine, Mount Rokkoushi, and Mount Ishigami are mentioned in the folktales about the three mountains of Tono.<sup>11</sup> This folklore, which reflects the geographical characteristics of Tono, includes a legend that describes how the Tono Basin was once a lake and stimulates imagination about the origins of the region. In the preface of the book, Yanagita wrote the following:

*I went across the valley of Tsukumoushi, and from there, Mt. Hayachine, which was off in a thin mist and appeared shaped as a pointed grass hat or like the shape of the Japanese phonetic katakana alphabet letter he.*<sup>12</sup>



**Fig. 1:** Landscape of Tsuchibuchi district.

Even today, by visiting Tono, we can find a series of he-shaped mountains in the distance above the rural landscape (Fig. 1). In Tsuchibuchi District, a torii gate that marks the ancient road leading to Mt. Hayachine has become one of the iconic sights of Tono (Fig. 2).

These landscapes were not created specifically for public display but have been nurtured alongside people's daily lives and beliefs. *The Legends of Tono* emerged from an external examination of this previously neglected phenomenon. In fact, for some time after publication, *The Legends of Tono* was not recognized as a local resource.

For example, in a booklet published in 1964 by Tono City documenting the city's 10 years of history, the townscape around the castle, centered around the ruins of Nabekura Castle, was listed as a local tourist attraction; however, "The Legends of Tono" was not mentioned.<sup>13</sup> The city directory published in 1960 stat-

ed that in addition to being a castle town as a tourist attraction, it was also the city featured in *The Legends of Tono*, which had been nurtured over a long period of life.<sup>14</sup>

During these six years, a regional plan was promoted to network the entire area as an open-air museum park under the leadership of the administration. This plan formulated in 1968 was called the "Tonopia Plan," and as part of this, district centers with the function of social education facilities were established in each former village. The August 29, 1968, edition of the *Iwate Nippo Newspaper* included an article outlining the development policy for Tono, a town based on agriculture and forestry. This article stated that the entire area would be turned into a natural park, where agriculture would be utilized as a tourist resource, and an open-air museum would be established.



**Fig. 2:**  
Torii gate to Mt.  
Hayachine.

## Open-Air Museum, Ecomuseum, and Indigenous Museum

The history of open-air museums in Japan is said to have begun with the “Open-Air Museum of Old Japanese Farmhouses” in Toyonaka City, Osaka Prefecture, in 1956. This facility consisted of relocated folk houses from all over Japan. In 1965, an open-air museum, “Meiji Mura,” opened in Inuyama City, Aichi Prefecture, which housed modern architecture constructed during the Meiji period.

Tomoko Ochiai classifies open-air museums into three types: first, the on-site preservation type; second, the relocation and collection type; and third, the restoration and construction type.<sup>15</sup> The above-mentioned “Open-Air Museum of Old Japanese Farmhouses” and “Meiji Mura” can be categorized as the second type. There, buildings or houses are gathered in one place as a type of tangible cultural heritage that is closely related to the collection of materials in modernist museums. Conversely, examples of on-site preservation-type open-air museums include ruins, historic sites, and national parks. In addition to this, “traditional building groups”<sup>16</sup> and “cultural landscapes” under *the Law for Cultural Properties Protection* are also cited as examples.

In this context, the term “ecomuseum” refers to the place being considered as a museum. The term “ecomuseum” originated in France in the 1960s, based on the idea of reaffirming regional culture and rejecting centralization.<sup>17</sup> This scenario also resonated with the renewed interest in local culture and the growing movement to preserve townscapes in Japan throughout

the 1960s and 1970s. According to Georges Henri Rivière, “an ecomuseum is an instrument conceived, fashioned, and operated jointly by a public authority and a local population.” There, “the public authority’s involvement is through the experts, facilities, and resources it provides; the local population’s involvement depends on its aspirations, knowledge, and individual approach.”<sup>18</sup>

Since 1991, Asahi Town in Yamagata Prefecture, Japan, has advocated for the “eco-museum” as a basic concept for town development, implementing it through collaboration between the local government and residents. Asahi Town, based on the concept of coexistence between nature and humans, has set its town development’s core theme as “an enjoyable living environment concept of ecomuseum.” The world’s first “Air Shrine,” dedicated to air, was built in this town in 1990. This can be described as a form of fiction, a system for visualizing invisible air. Thus, the practice of ecomuseums is less about consolidating the knowledge of experts and more about the playful spirit of the local residents. In fact, when planning and implementing the project, particular attention was placed not only on highlighting the “things” themselves but also on placing the spotlight on the “people” involved with them.<sup>19</sup>

A report on *Ecomuseum* published by the Tansei General Research Institute in 1993 noted that certain museums had been operating under similar concepts to the ecomuseum, even before the concept arrived in Japan, and classified them into eight categories. The first example is Asahi Town mentioned above, which was established based on the con-

cept of an ecomuseum. Second, it involves efforts to advance the idea, and third, areas that are interested in ecomuseums.

All three above-mentioned are examples of attempts to develop them under the name of “ecomuseums”; however, there is also a fourth category of examples that are not named “ecomuseums” but are conceived with a common concept. Fifth, there are onsite conservation and utilization museums that focus on natural heritage, sometimes referred to as natural science open-air museums or field museums. The sixth type is an open-air museum that preserves and utilizes ruins and historical sites in situ. When ruins or historical sites exist independently, they are sometimes called “site museums”; however, if they form a network and have a core museum, they can technically become an ecomuseum. The seventh type includes townscapes and small museum networks and the eighth type focuses on lifelong learning and environmental development.<sup>20</sup>

Ecomuseums can be considered a type of open-air museum. However, although traditional open-air museums fit the framework of modernist museums, ecomuseums can also be interpreted as a type of post-museum. Specifically, in ecomuseums, the focus of museum activities is shifting from “tangible heritage” to “people.” Therefore, there are constraints on the type of museum that can be built in a limited area, and people’s living spaces may also serve as museums.

In this context, it is necessary to reconsider the position of curators as professional museum staff members. For example, in Asahi Town,

every resident can take on the role of a curator. The word “curator” comes from the Latin word *cura*, which means “to take care of.” Christina Kreps returns to the original meaning of the word and points out that if we consider curators as caretakers and guardians of culture, we can see how certain individuals in many societies, such as priests, ritual specialists, shamans, and the elderly, are curators.<sup>21</sup> Here, Kreps terms this role “indigenous curation” and states that they “may possess specialized knowledge on the care and treatment of certain types of objects and are entrusted with keeping these objects safe on behalf of a community, family, or clan.”<sup>22</sup>

The “indigenous curators” referred to here are not “curators” as professional museum staff members but rather play a role in protecting cultural artifacts in their respective living spaces. Therefore, there exists no museum in the form of a building; rather, only a private home that can be described as an invisible museum. For example, in Chapter 14 of *The Legends of Tono*, the text discusses *kami* (gods), called *Okunai-sama* and *Oshira-sama*.

*In every village, there is always one old household that worships the kami (spirit) Okunai-sama. This old family is referred to as daido. The image of the kami is carved from mulberry wood and has a face drawn on it. A hole is punched in the middle of a square piece of cloth, and the cloth is pulled down over the image to create a garment. On the fifteenth*

*day of the New Year, immediate neighbors gather in the house to worship this kami.*<sup>23</sup>

This statue of a deity is based on the faith of each community. These are privately owned and therefore not open to the general public. Today, statues of *Okunai-sama* and *Oshira-sama* are sometimes donated or deposited in museums and displayed in the Tono Municipal Museum. Because these were objects of faith as well as exhibits, sacred *sake* liquor was offered inside the display cases (Fig. 3).

Worshipping *Okunai-sama* and *Oshira-sama* in each household can be considered examples of “indigenous curation.” Moreover, such “indigenous curation” itself possesses characteristics as an intangible cultural heritage. Kreps refers to Hoop-

er-Greenhill’s “post-museum” and points out that “in the ‘post-museum,’ curatorial authority is shared by community members and other stakeholders because the museum is more engaged with and integrated into the community, contributing to its vitality.”<sup>24</sup>

Based on the discussion thus far, a comparative table illustrating the relationship between open-air museums, ecomuseums, and indigenous museums can be constructed (Table 1). Traditional museums are characterized by the collection and exhibition of tangible cultural properties within an indoor space that is essentially isolated from the outside. From the perspective of cultural heritage preservation, this is an inevitable structure. Among the three types of open-air museums mentioned above, the restoration and construction type, along with the relocation and collection type,

**Fig. 3:** Exhibition of *Okunai-sama* and *Oshira-sama* at the Tono Municipal Museum.



3

is characterized as similar to traditional museums in that they gather tangible cultural heritage assets, including buildings, within a limited area through relocation or restoration. In on-site preservation-type open-air museums, ruins and historic sites, as well as natural parks, are preserved in situ, making the establishment of a network connecting them important. Furthermore, along the same lines as this type of open-air museum, ecomuseums highlight not only tangible culture but also intangible heritage, such as residents' memories. Furthermore, regardless of the presence or absence of a formal museum framework, the practice of indigenous museums within each home or community holds intrinsic value as intangible cultural heritage.

**Network-type of museums led by the government**

In the above report, Tono was not cited as an example, but ideas that led to an ecomuseum could be found. The illustrated report published in 1979 outlined the "Tono Basin Folk Museum Park Plan." The plan consists of five functions. The first is a natural museum park that focuses on topography and geology. The second is a historical museum park that displays ruins, the origins of the village, and the town's history. Third is a folk museum park that preserves faith, traditions, folk performing arts, etc. Fourth is an agricultural museum park where visitors can experience farming, traditional housing, and daily activities. Fifth is an academic, recreational museum park for studying nature and folklore.

**Table 1:**

	Indoor	Off-site	Tangible Heritage	Traditional museums
<b>Modernist museum</b>	Open-air	Off-site	Tangible Heritage	Restoration and construction type open-air museums, relocation and collection type open-air museums
	Open-air	On-site	Tangible Heritage	On-site preservation type open-air museums (natural science open-air museums, ruins, historic sites)
<b>Post-museum</b>	Open-air	On-site	Tangible/Intangible Heritage	Ecomuseums
	Open-air	On-site	Intangible Heritage	Indigenous museums

In response, we envisaged the establishment of local museums in each district. The original plan envisaged the construction of a folklore museum in the Tsuchibuchi area, a folk art museum in the Aozasa area, a local performing arts museum in the Kamigo area, a livestock museum in the Tsukumoushi area, an archaeological museum in the Matsuzaki area, an agricultural museum in the Ayaori area, and a mountain museum in the Otomo area.<sup>25</sup> The museum park plan in Tono was based on the premise of utilizing the local environment as it is, rather than relocating buildings and other structures from other areas.

The original plan envisioned that each community center would also function as a museum. For example, in 1984, “Densho-en (Folk Tale Park),” a relocation- and collection-type open-air museum, was built adjacent to the Tsuchibuchi district center. A Nanbu Magari-ya house, a traditional architectural style of the region, was relocated to the site. Furthermore, the site also included a garden made up of plants described in *The Legends of Tono* and a memorial hall exhibiting materials related to Kizen Sasaki, who was born in Tsuchibuchi. Here is touted as being primarily an experiential learning facility, with local residents demonstrating sericulture, folk craft making, and folk tales, as well as reenacting annual events for each season to keep the “furusato (hometown)” alive in the present and pass it on to the next generation.<sup>26</sup> In this sense, Densho-en became one of the places that embodied the concept of “Tono Basin Folk Museum Park Plan.” However, the realization of a utopia, in which all district centers

have museum functions, has not yet been achieved.

Conversely, the Tono Municipal Museum, which covers the entire city area, was established in 1980. This museum, as a specialized folklore institution, not only collects and exhibits tangible cultural assets, such as folk tools and ancient documents, but also records audiovisual materials related to intangible folk culture, such as annual events and folk tales. In 1986, a facility specializing in folktales called “Tono Folk Tale Village” opened, and facilities with museum functions were built in various parts of the city.

The “*Tonopia* Plan” continued to serve as a guideline for regional development and was carried over into the “Tono City Tourism Development Plan” compiled in 1989. In this plan, Tono City was divided into seven zones based on regional characteristics, such as “Castle Town,” “Kappa,” and “Mountain God.” In particular, the “Kappa Zone” includes the Tsuchibuchi district and is positioned as an important tourist area. It has also been proposed that the “Densho-en” located in this area be developed into a “Storytelling Museum.”<sup>27</sup>

In 1981, Takamuro Suikouen, a hot spring facility offering overnight stays, was built in the Takamuro area of the Tsuchibuchi district. This was constructed as part of the water purification management center built as part of the city’s water supply expansion project, which is a facility that pursues the ideals of the *Tonopia* Plan and is equipped with a solar system that uses solar heat and a hydroelectric power generation system. This was a new development in forming a community

connected by water, and it was expected to become a place of solidarity, cooperation, and interaction, second only to the civic center around the museum.<sup>28</sup>

Throughout the 1980s, several public facilities were built around the city, and networks were established between them. In 1992, the World Folktale Exposition was held in Tono, in which the previously mentioned “Densho-en” and “Takamuro Suikouen” were also used as satellite venues. Although traditional expositions often focused on “things,” this exposition aimed to exhibit the “spirit.” According to the report, the achievement of this exposition includes “a local area without regional resources utilizing intangible oral traditions, such as ‘folktales,’ as resources for a new type of exposition” and “the widespread recognition that ‘folktales’ are an intangible and valuable heritage common to all humanity.”<sup>29</sup>

In 1996, Tono Furusato Village opened as a new open-air museum in Tsukumoushi District. Traditional buildings from the Edo period to the Taisho period that remained in Tono City were relocated to a forest site, which covers an area of over 8 ha, recreating the scenery of a rural mountain village.

### **Community-specific Heritage Certification**

In 2007, the “Tono Heritage Certification” was initiated. This featured a bottom-up system in which residents themselves recommend the “treasures” of their hometown, unlike traditional cultural property preservation administration. The conditions for the recommen-

dation of Tono Heritage are that it “expresses the charm of Tono” and that “it will continue to be protected and utilized by local residents.” The contact point for the application was the nearest district center. As mentioned earlier, even the centers without museums play an important role in supporting residents’ efforts to preserve and utilize the “heritage.” This certification system is not limited to the framework of citizen participation in museums but is based on the continuous activities of the people living there, and it can also be considered an expansion of the concept of museums.

The Tono Heritage Certification Ordinance was enacted in 2007 in Tono City, defining Tono Heritage in four categories. The first is a tangible cultural heritage site that includes buildings, historical sites, monuments, crafts, and archaeological materials. Second is an intangible cultural heritage, which includes customs, traditional performing arts, and traditional techniques. Third is a natural heritage site that includes animals, plants, geological minerals, landforms, and natural phenomena. Fourth applies to complex heritage, formed by the integration of multiple tangible and intangible cultural and natural heritages.

As an example of tangible cultural heritage, “Haseki River and *Kappa-buchi* Pool,” designated as Tono Heritage No. 22, can be mentioned (Fig. 4). This landscape is related to the 58<sup>th</sup> chapter of *The Legends of Tono*. A nearby sign explains the story in Japanese and English. The English text is as follows:



4

Near the Obako Deepwater Pool on the Kogarase River, there is a home called the New House. One day, a child took a horse to cool off in the deep pool and then went off to play. A “Kappa” appeared and tried to pull the horse deeper into the water, but instead the Kappa was pulled out of the water by the horse and dragged off to the stable. The Kappa hid under the horse’s feed bucket.<sup>30</sup>

This is a historic site associated with *The Legends of Tono*; however, it is difficult to objectively demonstrate its authenticity, and it is not easily considered a target for general cultural property protection. However, under the Tono Heritage Certification System, this place has become the subject of designation as some-

thing that represents the uniqueness of Tono.<sup>31</sup> Nowadays, when visiting *Kappa-buchi*, we can see many tourists trying to catch *kappa* by attaching cucumbers to the ends of their fishing rods. Here, by sharing a kind of fantasy that “*kappa* might exist,” a site is created where people can enjoy the water environment itself.

Thus, in Tono, the *kappa* is used to symbolize *The Legends of Tono* beyond the original folklore. At Jouken Temple, which is adjacent to *Kappa-buchi*, there is also a stone statue called a “*Kappa Komainu*,” whose head is indented to resemble the plate on a *kappa*’s head (Fig. 5). Additionally, near the “Densho-en,” there is a wooden *kappa* statue named “Anzen Taro” (Fig. 6). This was made in 1984 to protect road safety. As was previously highlighted in the case of the “Air Shrine” in Asahi Town, this can also be considered a created tradition.

**Fig. 4:**  
Kappa-buchi.

Hiroya Ichikawa

Community-Based Museum and Intangible Cultural Resources: From the Perspective of the Concept of Post-Museum



**Fig. 5:**  
Kappa Komainu.



**Fig. 6:**  
Wooden Statue  
of Kappa (Anzen  
Taro).

An example of intangible cultural heritage is the “*Aozasa Shishi-Odori* (Deer Dance),” which has been designated as Tono Heritage No. 27. Amid the risk of ancestral local performing arts like *Shishi-Odori* declining, a preservation society consisting of several traditional groups was established in 1964. The *Aozasa Shishi-Odori* was designated as an intangible cultural asset in Tono City. Subsequently, in 1974, it was designated as an intangible cultural property of Iwate Prefecture, and in 1978, it was selected as an intangible folk cultural property for which measures, such as record creation, should be taken based on *the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties*.

In that sense, even if it is not necessarily recognized as a Tono Heritage, it is already protected as a “cultural property.” However, in recent years, because of the consolidation and closure of junior high schools,

there has been a sense of crisis regarding the training of successors, and a commemorative magazine has been published to record the 50 years since the preservation society was founded as a local cultural heritage site. Thus, the essence of intangible culture lies in the local residents themselves becoming transmitters and passing them on as local pride.<sup>32</sup>

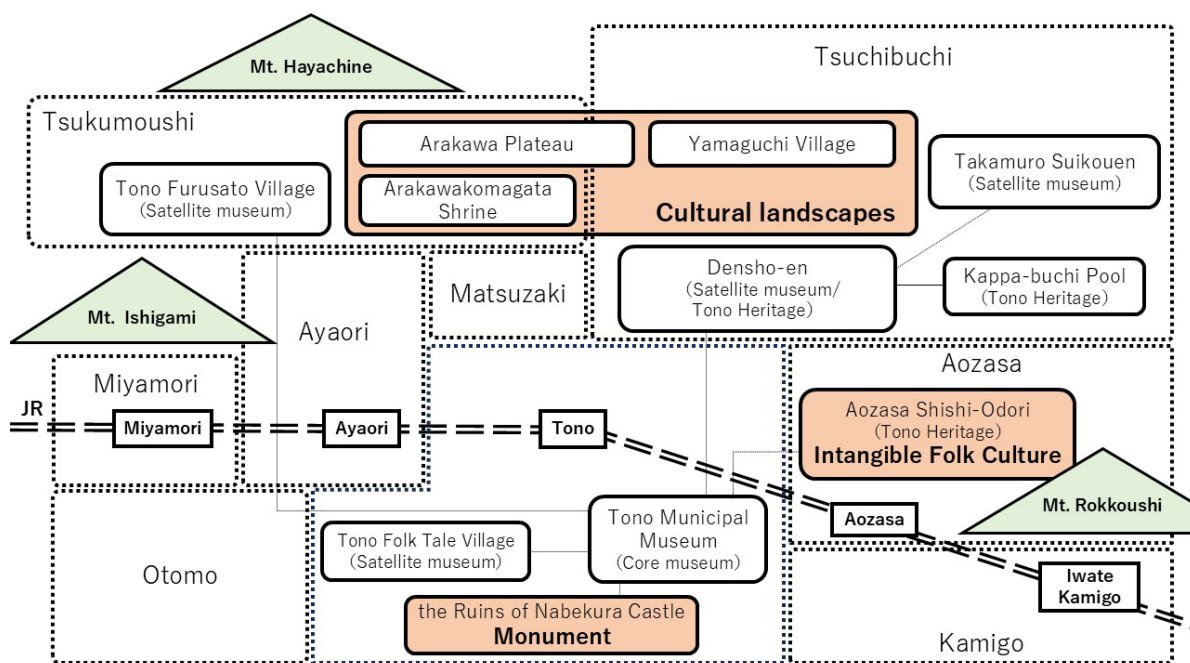
In 2010, marking the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of *The Legends of Tono*, the Tono Municipal Museum was renovated. During the renovation, efforts were made to deepen visitors’ understanding by exhibiting not only original tangible materials, such as folk tools and documents, but also various audio-visual materials and dioramas. For example, at the entrance of the permanent exhibition room, a 3D map showing the topography of Tono has been installed, and by projecting movies onto it, stories such



7



8



9

as the Three Mountains of Tono are depicted (Fig. 7). Additionally, the dioramas depict rural landscapes and annual events that change seasonally (Fig. 8).

The renewal was based on the concept of a core museum that would take a fresh look at the region through *The Legends of Tono* and work with local residents to discover the region’s unique characteristics and resources, disseminate information, and build a traditional culture.<sup>33</sup> The term “core museum” used here can be interpreted as a concept positioning the story locations scattered throughout the regions as “satellite museums.”

In 2010, the “1000 Tono *Kataribe* Project” was launched as part of the centennial celebrations of *The Legends of Tono*. In Tono, a *Kataribe* is a storyteller who recites folktales that have been passed orally. This was once performed within the home; however, these days it is often performed for tourists.

On March 11, 2011, the Great East Japan Earthquake caused significant damage to Tohoku’s coastal areas. Located inland, Tono City suffered relatively little damage from the earthquake and became a logistical support base for reconstruction. The formation of this flexible reception system is attributed not just to its geographical location but also to its longstanding status as a tourist destination, making it accessible to people from outside the region.

In Tono, leveraging *The Legends of Tono*, first published in 1910, initiatives have been made to develop the community by focusing on both visible tourist spots and intangible heritage. By constructing government-led facilities throughout the city and connecting them, the entire area functions as an on-site preservation-type open-air museum. Fig. 9 illustrates the network across the entire city.

**Fig. 7:** Projection of a 3D map of Tono City.

**Fig. 8:** A Part of the Dioramas (Deer Dance).

**Fig. 9:** A network-type museum model of Tono City.

### **Yokai as local cultural resources**

In the next case study of Miyoshi City, community activities led by the residents have taken precedence over the museum established by the administration. This area has been known for the scenic beauty of *Oboke/Kobo* over the years and has attracted visitors as a tourist destination. In 2024, this area was certified as a Japan Geopark under the name “Miyoshi Geopark.” The landscape of the steep slopes formed by the erosion of the Yoshino River created a historic village and traditional farming practices (Fig. 10).

Despite having a wide range of regional resources spanning from the natural sciences to the humanities and social sciences, there is no comprehensive museum in Miyoshi City. Under such circumstances, “Roadside Station *Oboke*” can be cited as one of the facilities with museum functions in this city. This facility was originally built in 1996 as the tourist information center “Lapis *Oboke*.” A part of this building was operated as a “Stone Museum” that exhibited the geology of the surrounding area and minerals from around the world. Initially, directors and curators were assigned; however, by the time the author started fieldwork in 2009, there were no staff specializing in stones. At this point, although it was named “museum,” it was merely a tourist center with exhibition functions and was not functioning for research and collection.

However, around 1999, surveys on the local legends of *yokai* carried out by community residents began to progress. This turning point can be attributed to the discovery of the

folklore of the *Konakijiji* by a local historian in Tokushima Prefecture. *Konakijiji* is a character that appeared in the manga *GeGeGe no Kitaro* by Shigeru Mizuki (1922–2015). To use this famous *yokai* character as a local resource, a volunteer organization of residents established a stone statue of *Konakijiji*.

*Yokai* folklore was conducted through literature surveys and interviews, which led to the discovery of more than 100 stories. In 2009, a book titled *The Legends of Yokai Village* was published. The contents of this book are based on the research by Shoichi Shimooka, who is from this region. It includes *yokai* folklore based not only on literature surveys such as local history but also on interviews with nearly 40 local residents. This is a major difference from *The Legends of Tono*, in which Yanagita, as an outsider, is based on stories he heard from Sasaki, who was from Tono.

In the preface to *The Legends of Yokai Village*, Shimooka states that the *yokai* in this region are “essential for coexisting with the harsh nature and created out of a parental instinct to protect life.”<sup>34</sup> Some of these legends contain messages intended to warn about dangerous places linked to the landscape. Therefore, in this context, *yokai* culture functions not merely as a fictional story but as a form of local knowledge.

In 2010, part of the “Stone Museum” in a roadside station was renovated, and the “*Yokai* House,” which introduces local *yokai* folklore, was opened. Notably, the establishment of this new exhibition facility was largely driven by the local residents.



10

In fact, the figures of *yokai* displayed in the museum were created by the residents.

Currently, no staff members have been designated as “curators” at this museum; instead, local residents have taken on the roles of conducting research and organizing exhibitions. Rather, in the case of *yokai* folklore, it cannot be stored as “tangible material” in museums, and the residents themselves can be positioned as cultural resources.

Ochiai focuses on the role of “roadside stations” as places for disseminating information about local culture and advocates for the concept of a “roadside station museum.” She points out that “roadside stations” are often equipped with shops or restaurants that offer local specialties and regional dishes,

and by incorporating the function of conveying information about the area’s history and culture, they can become well-rounded local museums.<sup>35</sup>

In this context, when positioning “roadside station Oboke” as a “roadside station museum,” several characteristics can be identified. In the first place, “roadside station Oboke” was built as a “Stone Museum” and was registered as a “roadside station” as an afterthought in 2008. In 2010, the first floor of the “Stone Museum” was renovated as the “Yokai House.” Therefore, with roadside stations being admission-free facilities, the museum part requires an admission fee. Although the museum facility requires an admission fee, it is registered as an admission-free roadside station that provides unique game meat dishes.

**Fig. 10:**  
Oboke View,  
Yoshino River.

## The imaginary road of legends and folklore

In 2008, the *Law on the Promotion of Visits and Stays by Tourists through the Development of Tourism Areas* was enacted, leading to advancements in the development of “tourism areas” across various regions. Under the law, a “tourism area” is defined as “an area consisting of tourist destinations where stay promotion districts exist and which are closely related in terms of nature, history, culture, etc., and which aims to enhance the attractiveness of the tourist destinations through cooperation between these destinations.”<sup>36</sup>

The two cities and two towns in the western part of Tokushima Prefecture, including Miyoshi City, were designated as the “Nishi Awa/Mt. Tsurugi and Yoshino River Tourism Area” in 2008, when the system was launched. The Tourism Area Development Plan aims to “create

attractive regions for future generations” by connecting the area’s rich resources, generating attractions beyond individual ones, and working on creating a highly competitive tourism region that stands out globally. The brand concept “A thousand years, a hidden hamlet” has been established for this purpose.<sup>37</sup> Based on this concept, JR Shikoku began operating a sightseeing train, named *Shikoku 1000 Years Story*, between Tadotsu Station and Oboke Station in 2017.

The commencement of regular sightseeing train operations sparked a project to develop a walkway connecting train stations with roadside stations. This project aims to ensure that pedestrians can follow a safe route and enhance circulation within the area by installing signboards, as the pathway is narrow and the traffic volume along the route is high.



**Fig. 11:**  
Guideboard of  
Doromeki-buchi.

**Fig. 12:**  
Wooden statue of  
Enko.

As part of the Nishi Awa Concept Road, an information pamphlet on walking along the road of *yokai* folklore has been published. There are two routes set up there: a walking course and a trekking course. These routes start at *Oboke* Roadside Station. The walking course is a round-trip route between the roadside station and the Stone Statue of *Konakijiji* for approximately 90 min. The trekking course takes about three hours, walking along a steep mountain path, passing through the viewing spot of *Kompira* Shrine on the mountainside, and descending the *Yokai* Road.<sup>38</sup> In the past, there were tours where people walked a trekking course guided by local residents. We were not only given information about *yokai* folklore but also learned about plants that can be found in the mountains, how to walk on rugged mountain paths, local dialects, etc.



**Fig. 13:**  
Costume of *Enko*.

However, these guides are no longer available because of the aging of local guides. This pamphlet introduces storytellers from *Yokai* Village, including residents who have memories of playing with monstrous beings during their childhood. The *yokai* culture in this region has been passed down orally and therefore exists only in people's memories. It is difficult to visually recognize their existence; however, we can expand our imagination by placing ourselves in an environment in which they are said to have appeared. Furthermore, to stimulate our imagination, guide boards and statues of *yokai* have been installed along the *Yokai* Road.

For example, a *yokai* called "*Enko*" is said to have appeared in this area. This is a monstrous being that appears in rivers, similar to the "*Kappa*" mentioned in the Tono, and is said to pull people into a pool when they approach. The place where this has actually appeared is a pool called "*Doromeki-buchi*" located upstream of Fujikawa Valley. As it was not easy for visitors to reach the site, a guideboard and wooden statue were installed in different locations. The board included a photo of the "*Doromeki-buchi*" site (Fig. 11). The statue was created by local residents and blended with the surrounding greenery (Fig. 12). Additionally, a costume of *Enko*, which follows the image of a green *Kappa*, has also been made by residents (Fig. 13). The appearance of the wooden statues and costumes is not necessarily uniform, and each reflects the handmade individuality of its creator.

## Invisible landscape as invisible museum

In 2023, Fujikawa Valley was registered as a monument related to scenic sites. This is a mountain stream located in the mountainous area between the former Kamimyo Village and the former Nishi-u Village, flowing into the Yoshino River, which creates the scenic view of *Oboke*. This stream has folklore about *yokai* associated with dangerous places, such as *Akago-buchi*, *Kuwan-buchi*, *Doromeki-buchi*, and *Kumotori-buchi*. These reflect a reverence for nature and local knowledge for avoiding dangerous locations, and their value as cultural property has been recognized. The Miyoshi City Newsletter mentioned that the residents' steady efforts to preserve the landscape, listen to and record the legends, and use them as topics for revitalizing the region have been highly praised.<sup>39</sup>

*Yokai*, which have been passed down orally, possess the characteristics of intangible folk cultural properties, but there have been no cases of designating *yokai* themselves as cultural properties. One reason is that *yokai* are both intangible and invisible beings, making it impossible to objectively grasp their existence. In this regard, the registration of places where legends have been spoken of as "scenic spots" is significant from the perspective of expanding the concept of cultural property.

The root cause of this is the human practice of naming places. However, these are not necessarily recorded on maps and are often remembered only through oral traditions. Therefore, when designated as a cultural property, contemporaneous records were maintained to indicate where



each pool corresponds. For example, the image below is a top view of the Kuwan-Buchi pool, which is said to be inhabited by a giant snake that disguised itself as a young lord and seduced women; however, no one would likely recognize this place simply by looking. Even today, it is difficult to approach this place, and we can fully understand why people used to tell children, "Do not look at Kuwan-buchi when passing this path."<sup>40</sup> Just enough to let us know that this place has a specific name is a small sticker attached to the guardrail on the side of the road. Perhaps we can find an extremely marginal form of museum that preserves the historical significance of the location's name (Figs. 14–15).

Furthermore, "monuments" as cultural properties include ruins, such as ancient tombs, castle ruins, and former residences, as well as scenic spots like gardens, gorges, and coastal areas, along with natural monuments such as animals, plants,

**Fig. 14:** A small sign for Kuwan-buchi posted on the guardrail.



14

and geological minerals. In Miyoshi City, as mentioned above, *Oboke* and *Koboke* have already been designated as national natural monuments and scenic spots, and in addition, the Fujikawa valley has also become a registered monument related to a scenic spot.

The “monuments” listed here are all tied to a place and cannot be moved by themselves. Kent C. Ryden points out that “since places are fusions of experience, landscape, and location, they are necessarily bound up with time and memory as well.”<sup>41</sup> Memories associated with a place can be updated by accumulating people’s experiences and activities. In Yamashiro Town, many of the places where yokai legends have been narrated are dangerous places that cannot be easily approached. Therefore, the relatively easy old road was renovated as the Yokai Road, and a pool along the way was given a new name, “Akago-Buchi” (Figs. 16–17). Nearby is a statue of the “Baby of Akago-Buchi” created by local resi-

dents (Fig. 18).

In this way, local residents exhibited several yokai statues along the Fujikawa Valley to make the invisible legends visible. What is noteworthy here is that these statues were created by local residents. In the case of *Konakijiji*, the starting point that brought attention to yokai in this region, the original legend was told locally; however, the visualized character was drawn by Shigeru Mizuki. In this context, even locally, the image of *Konakijiji* is a reimport of the artwork created outside the region. On the contrary, in the case of local yokai that are not yet widely known, the visual image has not yet been solidified; thus, the flexible ideas of the local residents are reflected.

One example of such unique and distinctive yokai folklore is *Yamajichi*, which was passed down in the Mizunashi community. Along the Fujikawa Valley, there are wooden statues of *Yamajichi* and a guide-board (Fig. 19).

Fig. 15:  
Kuwan-buchi.



16



17 - 18



**Fig. 16:**  
Entrance to the  
Ancient Trail.

**Fig. 17:**  
Akago-buchi.

**Fig. 18:**  
A Statue of the  
Baby of Aka-  
go-buchi.



**Fig. 19:**  
Wooden statue  
of Yamajichi.

The village where this legend remains is located midway up the mountain, about a 20-minute walk from the place where the guideboard stands. Regarding *Yamajichi*, a bilingual sign in Japanese and English is also installed at the entrance to Fujikawa Valley and states the following:

*Climbing up from the statue of Yamajichi along the Fujikawadani River, one comes to the village of Mizunashi. Tales speak of a giant that came here and attacked the villagers. This yokai was chased away by a mountain priest, who later lost his life. To this day the villagers that were killed, the mountain priest, and Yamajichi himself are still worshipped there.*

The mountain priest who defeated *Yamajichi* was enshrined at *Hijirigo* Shrine (Fig. 20), and nearby, a mound was also built to commemorate the *Yamajichi*.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, continuing along the mountain path from the village, there is also a rock cave where *Yamajichi* is said to have been hidden, but today it is difficult to reach it due to landslides. This situation evokes the image of large cliffs that are said to be the origin of the name *Oboke*. As with the previous *Kuwan-buchi*, the closer we approach the site of folklore, the greater the danger, allowing one to experience the mindset of the people who have passed down *yokai* legends as knowledge for survival.

Kent C. Ryden analyzed the reading and consolidation of regional folklore into four layers and categories.

First, local lore, especially material folklore, reveals the depth and intricacy of local knowledge about the nature, physical properties, and limitations of the geographical milieu. Second, regional folklore encapsulates and transmits the intimate and otherwise unrecorded history of a place. Third, local lore provides a strong sense of personal and group identity. Finally, and most difficult to describe, regional folklore reflects the emotions that local residents attach to their place and the components of their place, emotions stemming from knowledge of place-based history and identity, and which inevitably influence their perception of their physical surroundings.<sup>43</sup>

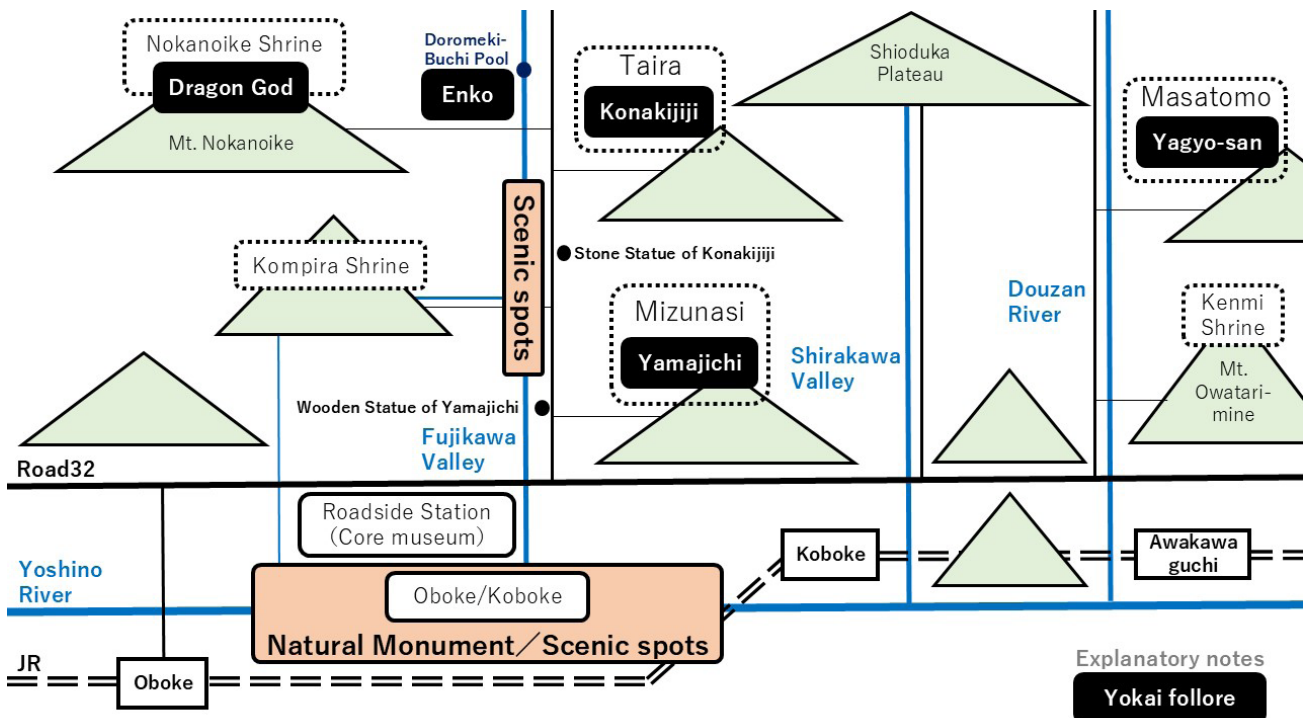
This illustrates the stages that progress from observable elements, such as the natural environment, to invisible elements, such as people's memories and emotions. If we apply this to the case of Miyoshi City, the handcrafted *yokai* figures made by local residents and displayed at the roadside stations can be seen as tangible folk cultural properties, serving as an introduction for visitors to the *Yokai Village*. Next, by exiting the building and walking along the well-maintained *Yokai Road*, visitors can experience the environment that has been described and imagine the relationship between the geographical milieu and legends. However, they are not necessarily sites of the traditions themselves; to actually visit them, visitors must walk along unpaved mountain paths and re-experience the emotions of the people of that time. In that sense, we can say that, here, the environment itself has become an invisible museum. Fig. 21 illustrates an invisible museum model of Miyoshi City.

**Fig. 20:**  
*Hijirigo Shrine.*

**Fig. 21:**  
An invisible museum model of Miyoshi City.



20



21

## Conclusion

Through case studies in two different regions, this study derived two types of practice models for preserving and utilizing intangible cultural resources.

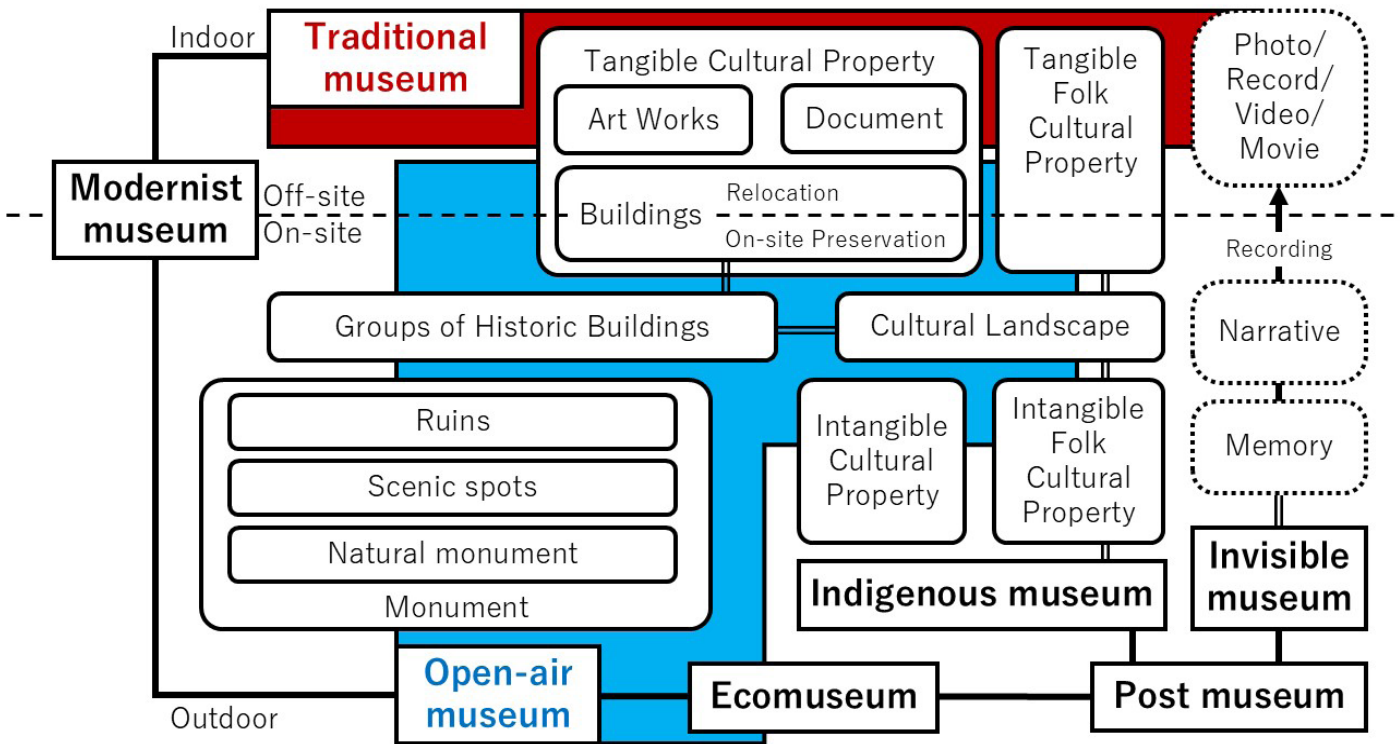
First, as seen in the case of Tono City, it is a network-type museum model that connects various facilities centered around government-led museums. In the case of Tono, the museum and related facilities were built as part of local development under the leadership of the local government, clearly demonstrating the role of a network-type museum. Consequently, the entire area has become like a theme park based on *the Legends of Tono*, making it easy for tourists to get around.

In Tono, the Tono Municipal Museum functions as the core museum, while open-air museums such as Densho-en and Tono Furusato villages function as satellite museums. These facilities collect and exhibit tangible cultural properties and relocate buildings to present information to visitors in an easy-to-understand format, thus fulfilling the role of a modernist museum. Additionally, there are many on-site cultural properties throughout Tono City that are related to *The Legends of Tono*. Many of these cannot be stored in museums and must be preserved on-site. The Tono Heritage Certification System has now established a method of collaboration between the government and residents. Emphasis is placed not only on the objective value as defined by *the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties* but also on the meaning and subjective value to the residents. Therefore, residents' narratives and memories surrounding

heritage are given importance, and these activities themselves have the characteristics of intangible heritage. The network-type museum model presented here is a practice that is connected to the ecomuseum in some way.

Second, as seen in the case of Miyoshi City, this is an intangible museum model that deconstructs the functions of the museum and incorporates them into the community. While Tono has many cultural facilities, Miyoshi City does not have a public museum network. This is largely owing to the geographical characteristics of Tono, which is surrounded by mountains and makes it easy to construct buildings in flat basin areas; however, the steep terrain means there is almost no flat land.

In this context, the exhibition facility attached to the roadside station *Oboke* functions as a core museum. Furthermore, the *yokai* objects on display were created by local residents with little involvement from the government. However, the actual sites related to the *yokai* legends are not easily accessible to visitors. Paradoxically, this dangerous environment is characterized by the presence of an invisible *yokai*. Museological practices can be found in the process of valuing *yokai*, which previously existed only in the narratives and memories of local residents, as cultural resources. In this sense, we may be able to discover the model of an intangible museum as a form of post-museum.



**Fig. 22: Acknowledgements**

Museum classification map.

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**Endnotes:**

- 1 Hooper-Greenhill 2000, p. 152.
- 2 Hooper-Greenhill 2000, p. 152.
- 3 Alivizatou 2006, p. 49
- 4 Alivizatou 2006, pp. 54–55
- 5 Wróblewska 2019, p. 2409.
- 6 Bodo 2012, pp. 181–191.
- 7 Naguib 2013, p. 2179,
- 8 Wróblewska 2019, p. 2409.
- 9 Blake 2018, p. 20.
- 10 Blake 2018, p. 19.
- 11 The second chapter of *The Legends of Tono* contains the following folktale. “A long time ago there was a female *kami* (god) who came to this plain with her three daughters, and they put up for the night at the location of Izu Gongen Shrine, in present-day Rainai village. Before going to sleep the mother *kami* told her daughters that she would give the best mountain to the one who had the finest dream. Deep into the night when a lotus flower floated down from heaven and came to rest on the bosom of the eldest sister, the youngest sister, who would wake up now and then, secretly took the flower and placed it on her bosom. Thus, the youngest sister got the best mountain, Mt. Hayachine. Her sisters got Mt. Rokkoushi and Mt. Ishigami.” The English translation of *The Legends of Tono* used in this article was based on the following edition: Yanagita [1910] 2008, p. 12.
- 12 Yanagita [1910] 2008, p. 7.
- 13 Tono City General Affairs Division 1964, p. 90.
- 14 Tono City Commerce and Industry Statistics Division 1970, p. 42.
- 15 Ochiai 2009, p. 134.
- 16 For example, in the case of Kanegasaki Town, Iwate Prefecture, where the author has continued action research, it was selected as an important Preservation District for traditional building groups in 2001. There, the divisions of samurai residences from the Edo period, the shapes of the streets, hedges, and estate forests remain, and the place itself holds value as a cultural property. This area also has a museum called the Kanegasaki Fortress History Museum, but it primarily functions as a visitor facility serving as an information center, and the actual materials are located outside the museum.
- 17 Tansei Institute 1993, p. 4.
- 18 Rivière 1985, p. 182.
- 19 Asahi Town Reader Planning and Editorial Committee 2010, p. 65
- 20 Tansei Institute 1993, pp. 95–97.
- 21 Kreps 2009, p. 195
- 22 Kreps 2009, p. 195.
- 23 Yanagita [1910] 2008, p. 19.
- 24 Kreps 2007, p. 233.
- 25 Tono City Illustrated News Planning Committee 1979, p. 36.
- 26 Tono City Tourism Association 1988, pp. 42-43.
- 27 Tono City, Japan Tourism Association 1989.
- 28 Tono City Tourism Association 1988, pp. 51–52.

- 29 Tono City 1994, p. 24.
- 30 The English text here is basically based on Ronald A. Morse's translation, but corrections are indicated due to typographical errors.
- 31 In addition to this "Kappa-buchi," "Taro-buchi Pool," said to be inhabited by a kappa named Taro, is also designated as Tono Heritage No.91.
- 32 Tono Culture Research Center 2016, p. 4.
- 33 Tono City Cultural Policy Department 2012, p. 132.
- 34 Shimooka 2009, Preface.
- 35 Ochiai 2009, p. 237.
- 36 Second article in the Law on the Promotion of Visits and Stays by Tourists through the Development of Tourism Area
- 37 Referred to the PDF of Nishi Awa/Mt. Tsurugi and Yoshino River Tourism Area Maintenance Plan: <https://www.mlit.go.jp/kankocho/content/001901239.pdf>. See in particular p. 3.
- 38 Referred to the Pamphlet of *The Road of a Legend and Folklore* by the General Incorporated Association Sora no Sato.
- 39 Yamashirokko Editorial Committee 2023, p. 1.
- 40 Shimooka 2009, p. 7.
- 41 Ryden 1993, p. 39.
- 42 Shimooka 2009, p. 3.
- 43 Ryden 1993, pp. 62–66.

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