

Master's Thesis Abstract

Student ID Number: 21GH301

Name:

The Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Major Program / Policy Science Course

Nobuyuki IMAI

Title:

Research on Hirosaki Neputa Festival with a Focus on its Current Situation and Problems from the Perspective of Regional Industrial Promotion Policy

Hirosaki Neputa Festival, which has its origin in a traditional event *Nemurinagasi* of feudal era in Hirosaki, has been playing its complex roles, such as religious and social ones in the long history of its development until modern times. Currently, it has the most important role as one of the main tourism resources closely related to the economic policy of Hirosaki *qua* local government for the promoting of local industry. This research has its specific focus on the current situation of this annual festival and its fundamental problems to be solved by us with a view to handing it down to our next generation as one of the most valuable regional cultural heritages.

It is 1950s that Hirosaki Neputa began to be evaluated by local people as one of the most promising tourism resources. From then on, it has been developed most successfully as one of the most representative local festivals of Aomori Prefecture. Currently, it is annually held in the midsummer from 1 to 7 August every year, by the official administration of Hirosaki Neputa Festival Committee, together with lots of groups participating in the *joint* procession of the festival. These groups can be classified into three categories, i.e. (a) a neighborhood association-based groups, (b) an enterprise or public organization-based groups, and (c) other groups, different from each other in respect of their historical backgrounds as well as social and economic situations.

This research draws attention to fundamental problems, which Hirosaki Neputa Festival will necessarily be facing in the near future as a result of the decreasing population of Hirosaki City and Aomori Prefecture in all. These problems are 1) what measures one should take to maintain the number of the groups participant in the *joint* procession of the festival, coping with the situation in which the population of Hirosaki is expected to decrease to 127,702 in 2045, 2) what measures one should take to nurture Neputa painters belonging to the younger generations of twenties and thirties, and 3) how one should keep balance between traditional and innovative elements of Hirosaki Neputa Festival.

This research also makes some suggestions in order to hand down Hirosaki Neputa Festival to our next generation by solving these problems. 1) One should take measures to maintain the number of the groups participant in the *joint* procession of the festival (1) by promoting collaborative cooperation among them, (2) by creating new groups which will be participants in it, and (3) by building a system of collaboration and cooperation under the leadership of Hirosaki City with its neighboring cities, towns and villages for holding one Neputa Festival jointly in the future. 2) One should take measures, which would be effective for promoting more financial independence for Neputa painters as well as for improving their social status. And finally and most realistically, 3) one should take measures to make a fundamental shift of this festival from the current observation-type event to a participatory type event in order to maintain the number of participants in it and its scale in the future. To make it possible, it is necessary for Hirosaki *qua* local government to strengthen a partnership for cooperation with more of the domestic and overseas municipalities.