

# How Commercialized Festivals Affect the Transmission of Traditional Religious Rituals: A Case Study of the Gion Matsuri in Kyoto

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## Abstract

The Gion Matsuri, a historic and culturally significant festival held annually in Kyoto, Japan, has undergone substantial commercialization in recent decades. This paper explores the impact of commercialization on the transmission of traditional religious rituals within the festival. Through a detailed case study approach, this research examines the historical evolution of the Gion Matsuri, the factors driving its commercialization, and the resultant changes in ritual practices. The study draws on data collected through participant observation, interviews with stakeholders, and analysis of secondary sources. The findings reveal a complex interplay between the economic benefits of commercialization and the preservation of cultural integrity. While commercialization has ensured the financial sustainability and global visibility of the festival, it has also introduced alterations that challenge the traditional and spiritual essence of its rituals. The paper discusses the perspectives of different stakeholders, including traditionalists, commercial entities, and tourists, and highlights the importance of balancing commercial interests with cultural preservation. The implications for cultural policy and festival management are considered, offering insights into best practices for maintaining the cultural authenticity of traditional festivals in a modern, globalized context.

**Keywords:** Gion Matsuri, commercialization, traditional rituals, cultural preservation, Kyoto, festival management, tourism, cultural heritage

## 1. Introduction

The Gion Matsuri, one of Japan's most famous and longest-running festivals, is celebrated annually in Kyoto throughout the month of July. Originating in the 9th century, this festival was initially conceived as a religious observance to appease the gods during times of plague and natural disaster. Over the centuries, the Gion Matsuri has evolved, incorporating various elements that reflect the changing social, cultural, and economic landscape of Japan. Today, it is not only a significant religious event but also a major tourist attraction, drawing millions of visitors from around the world.

Traditional religious rituals are an essential component of cultural heritage, serving as a conduit for the transmission of cultural values, beliefs, and practices across generations. These rituals, often deeply embedded in the historical and social fabric of a community, offer a sense of continuity and identity. In the context of the Gion Matsuri, the traditional religious rituals include the purification ceremonies, processions of mikoshi (portable shrines), and various other rites performed by Shinto priests and community members. These practices are not only religious observances but also expressions of communal solidarity and cultural pride.

In recent decades, the rise of commercialized festivals has become a global phenomenon. Festivals that were once primarily religious or community-focused events have increasingly adopted commercial elements to attract larger audiences and generate economic benefits. This trend is driven by various factors, including the growth of the tourism industry, media coverage, and the involvement of corporate sponsors. While commercialization can

bring financial gains and increased visibility to cultural festivals, it also raises concerns about the potential erosion of traditional values and practices.

The Gion Matsuri is a quintessential example of a festival that has undergone significant commercialization. The influx of tourists, the proliferation of souvenir shops, and the presence of corporate sponsorships have transformed parts of the festival into a commercial spectacle. This commercialization has sparked a debate among scholars, community members, and cultural practitioners about the impact on the transmission of traditional religious rituals. Some argue that commercialization helps to keep the festival alive and relevant in contemporary society, while others believe it undermines the authenticity and spiritual significance of the rituals.

This paper aims to explore the complex interplay between commercialization and the transmission of traditional religious rituals in the context of the Gion Matsuri. The primary research question guiding this study is: How does the commercialization of the Gion Matsuri affect the transmission of its traditional religious rituals? To address this question, the paper will examine the historical evolution of the festival, analyze the changes brought about by commercialization, and assess the perspectives of various stakeholders, including traditionalists, commercial entities, and the general public.

By investigating the case of the Gion Matsuri, this paper seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on the impact of commercialization on cultural festivals worldwide. The findings will provide insights into the ways in which traditional religious rituals can be preserved, adapted, or transformed in the face of commercial pressures. Ultimately, the paper aims to inform cultural policy and festival management practices that balance economic interests with the preservation of cultural heritage.

## 2. Literature Review

Traditional religious rituals are integral components of cultural heritage, embodying the collective values, beliefs, and historical narratives of a community. These rituals often serve as a means of connecting the present with the past, facilitating the transmission of cultural knowledge across generations. According to Turner (1969), rituals are performative acts that encapsulate symbolic meanings, reinforcing social cohesion and cultural continuity. In the context of the Gion Matsuri, traditional rituals such as the purification ceremonies and mikoshi processions are not merely religious acts but also expressions of communal identity and solidarity.

The commercialization of cultural festivals is a multifaceted phenomenon that has garnered significant scholarly attention. Historically, festivals were primarily religious or community-focused events, deeply rooted in local traditions and practices. However, with the advent of globalization and the rise of the tourism industry, many festivals have incorporated commercial elements to attract broader audiences and generate economic benefits. Cohen (1988) argues that commercialization can be seen as a double-edged sword, offering both opportunities and challenges for cultural preservation. On one hand, it can provide the financial resources needed to sustain cultural practices; on the other hand, it risks diluting the authenticity and spiritual significance of these traditions.

Modern trends in the commercialization of festivals are characterized by increased corporate sponsorship, media coverage, and the commodification of cultural symbols. For example, in the case of the Rio Carnival, Goldblatt (2005) notes that the influx of sponsorship and international media attention has transformed the event into a global spectacle, often overshadowing its cultural and historical roots. Similarly, the commercialization of the Chinese Lantern Festival has led to the proliferation of commercial activities that sometimes eclipse traditional practices (Henderson, 2000). These examples highlight a common pattern where the pursuit of economic gain can alter the nature and perception of cultural festivals. It illustrates the varying impacts of commercialization on traditional festivals. The Oktoberfest in Munich, originally a local celebration of Bavarian culture, has evolved into a global event attracting millions of tourists each year. As Stokburger-Sauer (2011) points out, the increased commercialization has led to changes in the festival's format and activities, raising concerns about the loss of traditional elements. In contrast, the Pushkar Camel Fair in India has managed to retain much of its traditional charm despite commercialization, largely due to concerted efforts by organizers to balance economic interests with cultural preservation (Dogra, 2012). These case studies provide valuable insights into how different festivals navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by commercialization.

The theoretical framework for understanding the impact of commercialization on ritual transmission draws on concepts from cultural studies and anthropology. Bourdieu's (1984) theory of cultural capital suggests that rituals serve as a form of cultural currency, embodying the social and symbolic capital of a community. Commercialization can alter the distribution and valuation of this capital, affecting how rituals are perceived and practiced. Additionally, Appadurai's (1996) notion of "mediascapes" highlights the role of media in shaping cultural narratives and influencing public perceptions of festivals. The media's portrayal of commercialized festivals can both promote cultural awareness and contribute to the commodification of traditions.

In the context of the Gion Matsuri, the literature suggests a complex interplay between commercialization and

ritual transmission. Scholars such as McKelvey (1997) argue that the festival's commercial elements have helped sustain its popularity and financial viability, ensuring the continuation of traditional practices. However, others like Kim (2005) caution that excessive commercialization may erode the festival's spiritual essence and alter the meanings attached to its rituals. This dual perspective underscores the need for a balanced approach that acknowledges both the benefits and drawbacks of commercialization.

In summary, the literature on traditional religious rituals and the commercialization of cultural festivals provides a comprehensive foundation for analyzing the case of the Gion Matsuri. By examining historical trends, modern practices, and theoretical perspectives, this review highlights the multifaceted nature of commercialization and its implications for cultural preservation. The insights gained from this review will inform the subsequent analysis of the Gion Matsuri, offering a nuanced understanding of how commercialization affects the transmission of traditional religious rituals.

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 Case Study Approach*

A case study approach is particularly suitable for this research as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the Gion Matsuri within its real-life context. According to Yin (2014), case studies are an effective method for investigating complex social phenomena, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined. The Gion Matsuri, with its rich historical background and evolving nature due to commercialization, presents a unique case for studying the interplay between tradition and modernity. This approach enables the researcher to capture the nuances and dynamics of the festival, providing a detailed account of how commercialization influences traditional religious rituals.

#### *3.2 Data Collection Methods*

To gather comprehensive data, this study employs a multi-method approach, integrating participant observation, interviews, and the analysis of secondary sources.

##### **Participant Observation**

Participant observation is a key method in this study, allowing the researcher to immerse themselves in the festival environment and gain firsthand experience of the rituals and commercial activities. This method provides valuable insights into the lived experiences of participants, the spatial and temporal organization of the festival, and the interactions between different stakeholders. During the observation period, detailed field notes are taken to document the sequence of events, the nature of rituals, and the commercial elements present. For example, observing the procession of mikoshi (portable shrines) and the accompanying ceremonies provides a direct understanding of how these rituals are performed and experienced. Similarly, noting the presence of commercial stalls, branded merchandise, and corporate-sponsored events helps to contextualize the impact of commercialization. This immersive approach helps to capture the authentic atmosphere of the Gion Matsuri and understand the subtle ways in which commercialization might alter traditional practices.

##### **Interviews with Festival Organizers, Participants, and Local Residents**

Semi-structured interviews are conducted with a diverse range of stakeholders, including festival organizers, participants, and local residents. This method allows for the collection of rich, qualitative data that provides multiple perspectives on the impact of commercialization. Interviews with festival organizers focus on the planning and execution of the festival, the role of sponsors, and the strategies employed to balance tradition with commercial interests. Questions may include inquiries about the decision-making process for accepting sponsors, the types of commercial activities introduced, and any conflicts or compromises that arise. Participants, including performers and spectators, provide insights into their experiences and perceptions of the festival's changes over time. They might discuss how the festival has evolved, the importance of traditional rituals to them personally, and their views on the commercial aspects. Local residents, who are often the custodians of tradition, offer a critical view of the festival's commercialization and its effects on cultural heritage. They can share their observations on changes in ritual practices, community involvement, and the overall atmosphere of the festival. The interviews are audio-recorded and transcribed for detailed analysis, ensuring that the collected data accurately reflects the views and experiences of the respondents.

##### **Analysis of Secondary Sources**

In addition to primary data collection, secondary sources such as historical documents, festival programs, media reports, and scholarly articles are analyzed to provide a comprehensive background and context for the study. These sources offer historical insights into the Gion Matsuri, documenting its origins, evolution, and the incorporation of commercial elements. Historical documents might reveal how the festival was conducted in earlier times, highlighting key rituals and community involvement. Festival programs and media reports provide information on the current state of the festival, highlighting changes in rituals, sponsorship, and public

perception. These materials can reveal trends in the commercialization of the festival, such as the increasing presence of corporate logos or the shift in media coverage from religious aspects to entertainment. The analysis of secondary sources complements the primary data and helps to triangulate the findings, ensuring a robust and well-rounded understanding of the festival's dynamics.

### *3.3 Data Analysis Techniques*

The collected data are subjected to rigorous analysis using thematic and comparative techniques to uncover patterns, themes, and insights.

#### *Thematic Analysis*

Thematic analysis is employed to identify and interpret patterns within the qualitative data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis involves a systematic process of coding data, identifying themes, and constructing narratives that explain the phenomena under study. The interview transcripts and field notes from participant observation are coded to identify recurring themes related to the impact of commercialization on traditional rituals. Themes such as the alteration of rituals, the influence of sponsors, and the perceptions of different stakeholders are explored in depth. For instance, codes might include “changes in ritual timing,” “commercial influence on participant attire,” or “community resistance to commercialization.” Once the data is coded, these codes are grouped into broader themes that capture the essence of the participants' experiences and perceptions. This method allows for a detailed and nuanced understanding of the data, highlighting the complexities and contradictions inherent in the commercialization of the Gion Matsuri.

#### *Comparative Analysis with Other Festivals*

To contextualize the findings and draw broader conclusions, a comparative analysis is conducted with other festivals that have experienced commercialization. By comparing the Gion Matsuri with festivals such as the Rio Carnival, Oktoberfest, and the Pushkar Camel Fair, the study identifies common patterns and unique aspects of commercialization across different cultural contexts. This comparative approach helps to situate the Gion Matsuri within a global framework, providing insights into how commercialization affects traditional rituals in diverse settings. For example, the Rio Carnival's transformation through corporate sponsorship and media coverage can be compared to similar trends in the Gion Matsuri. Similarly, the efforts of the Pushkar Camel Fair to maintain traditional elements despite commercialization can offer lessons for the Gion Matsuri. The comparison also highlights best practices and potential strategies for balancing commercial interests with cultural preservation. By examining these festivals, the study can identify factors that contribute to the successful integration of commercial and traditional elements, as well as pitfalls to avoid.

## **4. The Gion Matsuri: Historical and Cultural Context**

The Gion Matsuri, held annually in Kyoto, is one of Japan's most renowned and historically rich festivals. Its origins can be traced back to the 9th century, making it a pivotal part of Kyoto's cultural and religious heritage. Understanding the historical and cultural context of the Gion Matsuri requires an exploration of its history, the traditional religious rituals it encompasses, and its evolution over time.

### *4.1 History and Origins of the Gion Matsuri*

The Gion Matsuri originated in 869 CE during a time of plague and natural disaster in Kyoto. The people, seeking to appease the gods and end the suffering, organized a grand purification ceremony. They placed 66 halberds—representing the 66 provinces of Japan—at the Shinsen-en Garden and prayed for divine intervention. This event marked the beginning of what would become the Gion Matsuri. Over time, the festival was formally linked to the Yasaka Shrine, dedicated to the deity Susanoo-no-Mikoto, believed to protect against disease and calamity.

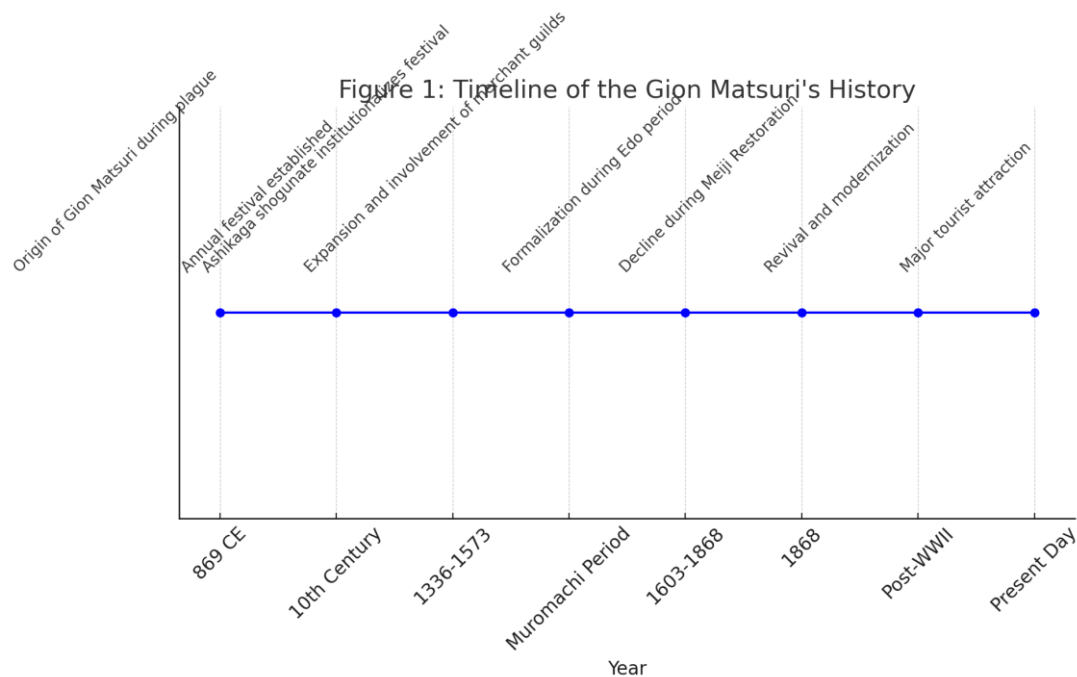


Figure 1. Timeline of the Gion Matsuri's History

The festival's early years were deeply rooted in religious purification rituals aimed at cleansing the city and its inhabitants. By the 10th century, the Gion Matsuri had become an annual event, signifying its growing importance in Kyoto's cultural and religious calendar. The Ashikaga shogunate (1336–1573) further institutionalized the festival, integrating it into the broader socio-political framework of the time.

#### 4.2 Traditional Religious Rituals Associated with the Festival

Central to the Gion Matsuri are several traditional religious rituals that have been preserved over centuries. One of the most significant rituals is the “Yamaboko Junko,” the grand procession of floats (yamaboko) that takes place on July 17 and July 24. These floats are lavishly decorated and carry effigies of deities, representing different districts of Kyoto. The construction and decoration of these floats are considered sacred tasks, involving intricate craftsmanship passed down through generations.

The “Mikoshi Togyo” is another pivotal ritual, where portable shrines (mikoshi) are carried through the streets, symbolically transferring the deity from Yasaka Shrine to a temporary resting place. This ritual, rooted in Shinto practices, is believed to bring the deity closer to the people, offering protection and blessings.

Additionally, the festival includes purification rites such as “Nagoshino-harae,” where participants pass through a large ring of reeds to cleanse themselves of impurities and misfortunes. This ritual underscores the festival's original purpose of purification and renewal.

#### 4.3 Evolution of the Festival Over Time

The Gion Matsuri has undergone significant changes throughout its history, reflecting the socio-political and economic shifts in Kyoto and Japan at large. During the Muromachi period (1336–1573), the festival grew in scale and splendor, with the involvement of various merchant guilds and artisan communities who sponsored floats and processions. This period saw the incorporation of theatrical performances and other entertainment forms, broadening the festival's appeal.

The Edo period (1603–1868) marked a further transformation, as the festival became more structured and formalized. The Tokugawa shogunate's policies promoted the preservation of cultural traditions, ensuring the continuation of the Gion Matsuri. However, the Meiji Restoration (1868) brought about significant changes as Japan rapidly modernized. The festival experienced a decline in participation and funding due to the socio-economic upheavals of the time.

In the 20th century, particularly post-World War II, the Gion Matsuri witnessed a revival. The festival adapted to modern times while striving to preserve its traditional elements. The introduction of tourism and media coverage played a crucial role in this revival, attracting visitors from across Japan and the world. The festival's organizers have made concerted efforts to balance commercialization with the preservation of traditional rituals.

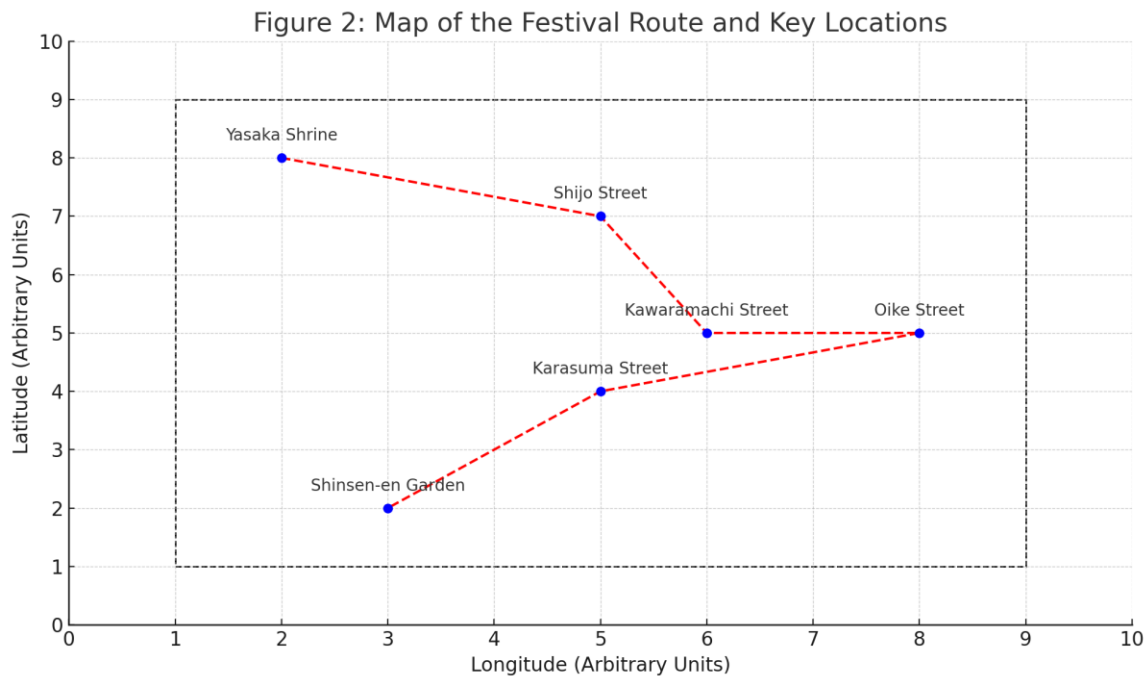


Figure 2. Map of the Festival Route and Key Locations

Today, the Gion Matsuri is a vibrant celebration that draws millions of visitors. It is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of Kyoto's cultural heritage. The festival's evolution reflects a dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity, where age-old rituals coexist with contemporary elements. The ongoing efforts to document and preserve the festival's history ensure that future generations can continue to experience and appreciate its rich cultural and religious significance.

In summary, the Gion Matsuri is not merely a festival but a living cultural institution that embodies the historical and spiritual essence of Kyoto. Its origins, rituals, and evolution provide a window into the city's past and present, illustrating how traditional practices can endure and adapt in the face of changing times. This historical and cultural context sets the stage for understanding the impact of commercialization on the transmission of the festival's traditional religious rituals.

## 5. Commercialization of the Gion Matsuri

The Gion Matsuri, one of Japan's most celebrated festivals, has undergone significant commercialization, particularly in the last century. This transformation has been driven by a variety of factors, including economic incentives, tourism, and media influence. The commercialization has led to notable changes in the festival's structure and organization and the role of sponsors and commercial entities.

### 5.1 Factors Driving Commercialization

Economic incentives are among the primary drivers of the commercialization of the Gion Matsuri. The festival attracts millions of visitors annually, generating substantial revenue for local businesses and the city of Kyoto. Hotels, restaurants, and retail establishments benefit significantly from the influx of tourists, prompting greater investment in the festival's promotion and infrastructure. This economic boost extends to artisans and craftsmen who create the elaborate floats and decorations, as well as to vendors who sell food and souvenirs. The financial benefits derived from the festival create a strong motivation for its commercialization, ensuring its continued growth and success (Dwyer, Forsyth, & Spurr, 2004).

Tourism has played a pivotal role in the commercialization of the Gion Matsuri. The global rise in cultural tourism has positioned the festival as a major attraction for both domestic and international tourists. Efforts to market the festival globally have included partnerships with travel agencies, promotional campaigns in various media, and the creation of travel packages that highlight the Gion Matsuri as a must-see event (Smith, 2009). This emphasis on attracting tourists has inevitably led to the incorporation of more commercial elements to cater to a broader audience. For instance, tour packages often include guided tours, exclusive viewing areas, and special merchandise, enhancing the commercial appeal of the festival.

Media influence is another significant factor in the commercialization of the festival. Extensive media coverage, including television broadcasts, social media, and online platforms, has increased the festival's visibility and

appeal. Media outlets often focus on the most visually spectacular aspects of the festival, such as the grand floats and parades, sometimes overshadowing the traditional religious rituals. The media's portrayal of the festival as a vibrant and entertaining event helps attract a wider audience, including those who may not have a deep interest in the cultural or religious aspects (Couldry, 2000). Social media platforms, in particular, have amplified the festival's reach, with posts and videos going viral and attracting global attention.

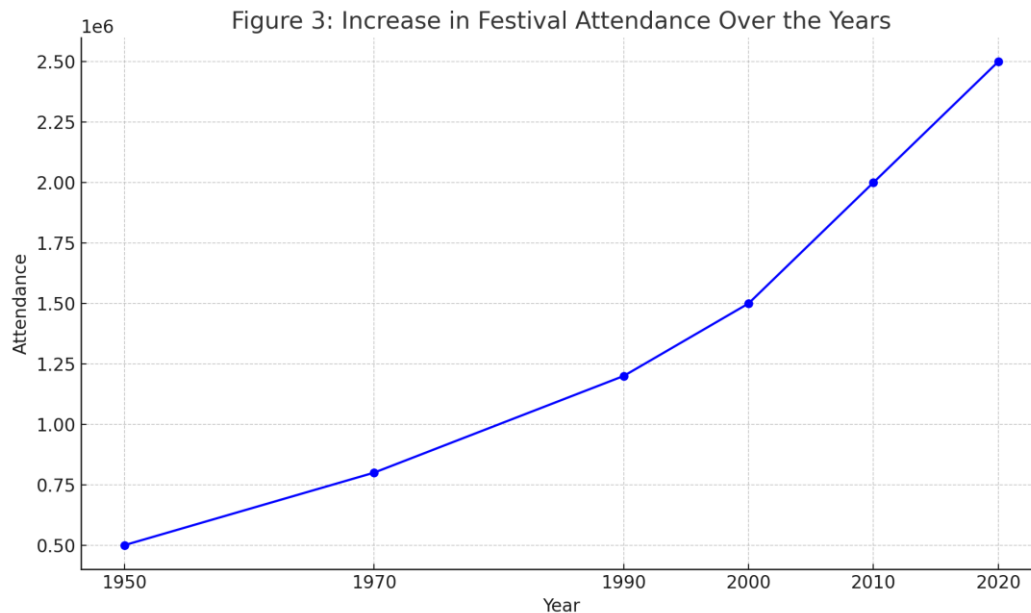


Figure 3. Increase in Festival Attendance Over the Years

Figure 3 shows the steady rise in attendance at the Gion Matsuri from 1950 to 2020. This graph highlights the impact of commercialization and effective marketing strategies on the festival's growing popularity. In 1950, the festival attracted approximately 500,000 visitors, a number that grew to 2,500,000 by 2020. This increase in attendance underscores the festival's success in adapting to modern trends and leveraging commercial opportunities.

### 5.2 Changes in Festival Structure and Organization

The commercialization of the Gion Matsuri has led to notable changes in its structure and organization. Traditionally, the festival was a community-centered event, with local neighborhoods taking responsibility for different aspects of the celebrations. Today, professional event organizers and marketing firms play a significant role in planning and executing the festival. This shift has introduced more systematic and professional management practices, ensuring the festival runs smoothly and efficiently. The involvement of professionals has also led to the implementation of modern event management techniques, such as crowd control measures, security protocols, and logistical planning, enhancing the overall experience for visitors (Getz, 2008).

One of the significant changes is the expansion of the festival program to include more entertainment and commercial activities. In addition to the traditional processions and religious ceremonies, the festival now features concerts, fireworks displays, and various cultural performances designed to attract and entertain a diverse audience. These additions enhance the festival's appeal but also shift the focus from purely religious observance to a broader celebration of culture and entertainment. The inclusion of modern entertainment forms, such as pop concerts and theatrical performances, caters to a younger audience and helps maintain the festival's relevance in contemporary society (Richards & Wilson, 2004).

The presence of corporate sponsorships has also altered the festival's landscape. Major corporations sponsor various aspects of the festival, providing financial support in exchange for brand visibility. This sponsorship is evident in the banners, advertisements, and branded merchandise that are ubiquitous during the festival. For example, large companies sponsor specific floats or events, and their logos are prominently displayed on festival materials. While these sponsorships provide necessary funding, they also introduce commercial interests that can influence the festival's content and presentation. The visibility of corporate branding during the festival has raised concerns about the potential commercialization of cultural heritage (Hede, 2008).

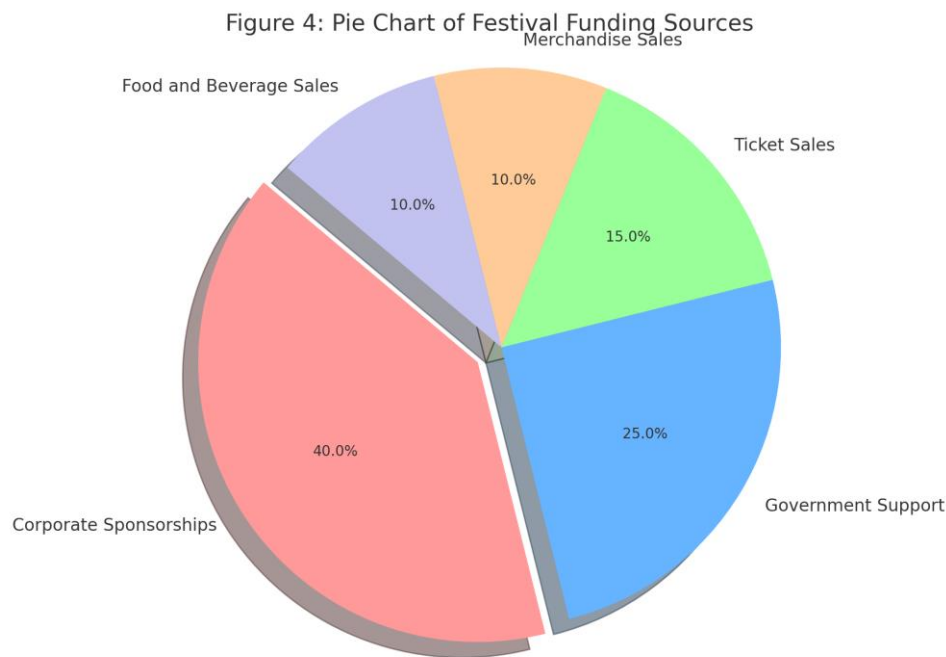


Figure 4. Pie Chart of Festival Funding Sources

Figure 4 shows the distribution of the festival's funding sources. Corporate sponsorships account for 40% of the total funding, highlighting the significant role that commercial entities play in supporting the festival. Government support contributes 25%, reflecting the public sector's interest in preserving cultural heritage and promoting tourism. Ticket sales make up 15%, indicating that attendance fees are also an important revenue stream. Merchandise sales and food and beverage sales each contribute 10%, demonstrating the diverse sources of income that sustain the festival.

### 5.3 Role of Sponsors and Commercial Entities

Sponsors and commercial entities play a crucial role in the commercialization of the Gion Matsuri. Their financial contributions are vital for covering the costs of organizing such a large-scale event. Sponsorship deals often include extensive branding opportunities, such as placing logos on festival materials, floats, and promotional items. For example, a beverage company might sponsor a float, resulting in the float featuring the company's branding prominently. This relationship benefits both parties—the sponsors gain significant exposure, and the festival secures the necessary funds to operate.

In addition to direct sponsorships, various commercial entities set up booths and stalls along the festival route, selling food, drinks, and souvenirs. These vendors contribute to the festival's lively atmosphere but also represent a shift towards a more commercial environment. The types of goods sold have also diversified, with traditional festival foods and crafts now sharing space with modern, branded products. This blend of traditional and commercial offerings reflects the dual nature of the modern Gion Matsuri (Timothy & Boyd, 2003).

Corporate influence is not limited to visible branding. In some cases, sponsors may have a say in the festival's planning and programming decisions. This influence can manifest in the inclusion of events that align with the sponsors' branding strategies or the prioritization of activities that have higher commercial appeal. While this involvement helps ensure the festival's financial viability, it also raises concerns about the potential compromise of cultural and religious authenticity. For example, sponsors may prefer high-visibility events that attract media attention, potentially overshadowing traditional rituals (Quinn, 2006).

In conclusion, the commercialization of the Gion Matsuri is driven by economic incentives, tourism, and media influence, leading to significant changes in the festival's structure and organization. The involvement of sponsors and commercial entities provides necessary financial support but also introduces commercial interests that shape the festival's content and presentation. Balancing these commercial elements with the preservation of traditional religious rituals is a complex challenge, requiring careful management to maintain the festival's cultural integrity while ensuring its sustainability and appeal in a modern, globalized context.

## 6. Impact of Commercialization on Traditional Rituals

The commercialization of the Gion Matsuri has had a profound impact on its traditional rituals. This section

explores the changes in ritual practices, the perspectives of different stakeholders, and the impact on cultural transmission and intergenerational continuity. The discussion is supported by figures illustrating these changes.

### 6.1 *Changes in Ritual Practices*

The commercialization of the Gion Matsuri has led to both continuity and change in its ritual practices. While some rituals have been preserved, others have been altered to accommodate the festival's commercial aspects.

#### Continuity vs. Change

Certain core rituals of the Gion Matsuri have remained unchanged, maintaining their traditional significance. For example, the purification ceremonies and the mikoshi (portable shrine) processions continue to be central to the festival's religious observance. These rituals are performed with the same reverence and adherence to tradition as in the past, ensuring that the festival's spiritual essence is preserved (Smith, 2006).

However, commercialization has introduced changes to other aspects of the festival. The timing of some rituals has been adjusted to fit into a schedule that maximizes tourist attendance. For instance, certain ceremonies that were traditionally held in the early morning or late evening have been rescheduled to more convenient times for tourists. This shift caters to visitor preferences but sometimes detracts from the rituals' original intent and ambiance (Getz, 2010).

#### Alterations in Ritual Timing, Participants, and Activities

The involvement of a broader range of participants, including tourists, has also altered the nature of some rituals. Previously, many rituals were exclusive to local community members and were seen as a way to reinforce communal bonds. Today, these rituals often include tourists and external participants, transforming them into public spectacles. While this inclusivity promotes cultural exchange, it can also dilute the sense of community and traditional ownership of the rituals (Henderson, 2011).

Additionally, the activities surrounding the rituals have expanded to include more commercial elements. For example, the traditional yatai (food stalls) have been joined by commercial vendors selling branded merchandise, creating a marketplace atmosphere. This blend of commercial and traditional elements reflects the dual nature of the modern Gion Matsuri but also raises concerns about the commercialization of sacred practices (Richards & Palmer, 2010).

Table 1. Comparison Table of Ritual Practices Before and After Commercialization

Aspect	Before Commercialization	After Commercialization
Ritual Timing	Early morning or late evening	Adjusted to convenient times for tourists
Participant Composition	Primarily local community members	Includes tourists and external participants
Activities	Focus on religious and communal aspects	Blend of traditional and commercial activities
Atmosphere	Sacred and communal	Vibrant and marketplace-like

### 6.2 *Perspectives of Different Stakeholders*

The impact of commercialization on traditional rituals is viewed differently by various stakeholders, including traditionalists, commercial entities, and the general public and tourists.

#### Traditionalists

Traditionalists, including local community members and cultural preservationists, often view commercialization with skepticism. They argue that the influx of commercial activities undermines the spiritual and cultural integrity of the rituals. Traditionalists emphasize the importance of maintaining the rituals' authenticity and express concerns that commercial interests may overshadow the festival's religious significance (Quinn, 2009).

#### Commercial Entities

Commercial entities, on the other hand, see commercialization as a means to sustain and grow the festival. They argue that the financial support provided by sponsors and the revenue generated from increased tourism are essential for the festival's continuity. From their perspective, commercial elements enhance the festival's appeal and ensure its economic viability, allowing traditional practices to thrive in a modern context (Barker, 2004).

#### General Public and Tourists

The general public and tourists tend to have mixed views. Many appreciate the festival's vibrant atmosphere and the opportunity to participate in a culturally rich event. However, there are also concerns about the commercialization overshadowing the traditional aspects. Tourists often express a desire to experience authentic cultural practices, and excessive commercialization can detract from this experience (Smith, 2009).

### *6.3 Impact on Cultural Transmission and Intergenerational Continuity*

The impact of commercialization on the transmission of traditional rituals to future generations is complex. On one hand, commercialization has helped to keep the Gion Matsuri alive and relevant in contemporary society. The financial resources and increased visibility provided by commercial activities have ensured that the festival continues to attract large audiences and maintain its place in the cultural calendar (Timothy & Boyd, 2003).

On the other hand, the dilution of traditional practices and the incorporation of commercial elements pose challenges to cultural transmission. Younger generations may find it difficult to distinguish between the festival's traditional and commercial components, potentially leading to a loss of cultural knowledge and appreciation. Ensuring that the core rituals and their meanings are effectively communicated to younger participants is essential for maintaining the festival's cultural integrity (Cohen, 2008).

## **7. Discussion**

The commercialization of the Gion Matsuri has led to significant changes in the traditional rituals associated with the festival. While commercialization has provided financial support and increased visibility, ensuring the festival's continuity, it has also introduced challenges that threaten the cultural and spiritual integrity of the rituals. The core rituals, such as the purification ceremonies and mikoshi processions, have largely been preserved, maintaining their traditional significance (Smith, 2006). However, the timing, participation, and surrounding activities of these rituals have been altered to accommodate the commercial aspects of the festival.

Balancing commercialization with the preservation of traditions is a complex challenge. On one hand, commercialization helps ensure the festival's financial viability and broad appeal, attracting tourists and providing economic benefits to the local community (Timothy & Boyd, 2003). On the other hand, it can lead to the commodification of cultural practices, where the emphasis shifts from the cultural and religious significance of the rituals to their entertainment value (Quinn, 2009).

Maintaining this balance requires careful management and strategic planning. Festival organizers need to ensure that commercial activities do not overshadow the traditional rituals. This can be achieved by scheduling commercial events at different times from the core rituals, providing educational programs to inform visitors about the cultural and religious significance of the rituals, and involving local communities in the planning and execution of the festival (Getz, 2010).

The findings from the Gion Matsuri have important implications for cultural policy and festival management. Policymakers need to recognize the value of traditional festivals as cultural heritage and ensure that commercialization does not compromise their integrity. This can be achieved through regulations that limit the extent of commercial activities, provide funding for cultural preservation, and promote cultural education (Henderson, 2011).

For festival managers, the challenge lies in creating a festival experience that appeals to a broad audience while preserving the traditional elements. This requires a comprehensive understanding of the festival's cultural and religious significance and the ability to design programs that respect and celebrate these aspects. Effective communication and collaboration with local communities are essential to achieving this balance (Smith, 2009).

## **8. Conclusion**

The study of the Gion Matsuri reveals that commercialization has both positive and negative impacts on traditional rituals. While it has ensured the festival's financial sustainability and increased its visibility, it has also introduced changes that threaten the cultural and spiritual essence of the rituals. The challenge lies in balancing these commercial interests with the need to preserve the traditional elements of the festival (Cohen, 2008).

This study contributes to the academic literature on cultural festivals by providing a detailed case study of the Gion Matsuri. It highlights the complex interplay between commercialization and cultural preservation, offering insights into the ways in which traditional festivals can adapt to modern economic realities without losing their cultural significance (Timothy & Boyd, 2003).

For festival organizers, the findings underscore the importance of strategic planning and community involvement in balancing commercial activities with traditional rituals. Policymakers can use these insights to develop regulations and policies that support cultural preservation while allowing for the economic benefits of commercialization (Quinn, 2009).

Future research should explore the long-term effects of commercialization on traditional festivals, examining how these changes impact cultural transmission over multiple generations. Comparative studies of different festivals can also provide valuable insights into best practices for balancing commercialization and cultural preservation. Additionally, research on the perspectives of different stakeholders, including local communities, tourists, and commercial entities, can deepen our understanding of the complex dynamics at play (Richards & Wilson, 2004).

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