

# Report: Is “Edo Sato Kagura” boring or not?

□□Hollywood movies are simply interesting. These movies are made with huge production costs, using talent from all over the world to focus solely on entertaining people. They can't be boring. However, human beings may think, “Well, they are interesting”, but there's not much left to enjoy. I want to see something more social” and so on. Of course, Hollywood movies can be empty, but the general image is one of great entertainment. Deeper movies can be seen in the Cannes Film Festival and the Venice Film Festival, for example. The film which gets the grand prix at these festivals has an image of the complete opposite of Hollywood. There are many films that make you think after seeing them. Nevertheless, the strength of their message can be a burden. In the worst case, it can make you sleepy. Movie fans go back and forth between the two.

□In Japan, there is “Edo sato kagura” which is in the genre of Kagura, a traditional performing art. It is almost exclusively performed in Tokyo and the surrounding areas. But it is not popular and is hardly known. It does not hold the elements of entertainment like “Iwami kagura”, and it does not have a local following like “Hayachine kagura.” These are held in obscurity at the corner of a shrine in the Shrine Festival . When I went to see a Edo sato kagura one day in Yokohama, there were only a few people . This situation is not usual but it is almost always held in such conditions. Many people aren't aware it is being performed. Sometimes even the staff of the shrine doesn't know! Although it gets a lot of influence from Noh, most Japanese people don't differentiate Edo sato kagura from Noh.... As I write this, I am becoming sad.



Iwami Kagura



Edo sato Kagura

Why isn't "Edo sato kagura" popular? Is it really boring? Isn't it worth seeing? I will try to verify this now. Now, I will give you a rudimentary knowledge about "Edo sato kagura". After that, I will teach you how to enjoy it.

## History



### Kanto region

Edo is the old name of Tokyo. The region that "Edo sato kagura" is held is around Tokyo. Tokyo is located almost the center of the main island called "Honshu (本州)". This region is called "Kanto (関東)", which consists of seven prefectures, Gunma, Tochigi, Ibaraki, Chiba, Saitama, Kanagawa and Tokyo. The Kanto region's kagura was originally introduced from the Izumo region (The Izumo region is the eastern area of Shimane prefecture). The Shinto priest at Sada shrine in the Izumo region learned "Noh" in Kyoto and he created the new art of kagura. This is the origin of "Izumo kagura". After the Introduction to the Kanto area, two styles developed. One consisted of isolated programs and rituals, another was performed as a historical play like theater. The historical play was performed by a professional group called "Shachu (師匠)". They perform Kagura in shrines after being invited. This is

the origin of “Edo sato kagura” today.

## **Where can we watch “Edo sato kagura” ?**

“Edo sato kagura” is performed by professional groups called “Shachu (舞団)” today as well, so we can watch each festival at shrines. Japan’s festivals are held most often in spring and autumn, followed by summer, and least in winter. In spring, the Japanese hope for a good harvest as they enter the rice planting season, and in autumn, they give thanks for the harvest. The meaning of each festival is to pray for the prevention of plagues in summer and for the revival of the sun in winter. Generally speaking, spring and autumn festivals are held in many places in Japan, but in eastern Japan, Kagura tends to be performed in spring, while in western Japan, it tends to be performed more in autumn or later.

## **A few more details**

There are four shachu as national intangible cultural assets in Edo-sato Kagura: Matsumoto (舞団), Ishiyama (舞団), Wakayama (舞団), and Mamiya (舞団) . In addition, there are several other famous groups, such as Hagiwara (舞団) group. Each of them has its own territory. For example, the Hagiwara group is invited by shrines in the Shinjuku area, while the Mamiya group is invited for festivals at shrines in the Shinagawa area. They go out there and perform a kagura or simply enliven it with a musical performance.

Edo sato Kagura is performed approximately three times a day. Each performance lasts from about 30 minutes to no more than one hour. In some cases, a related storyline is followed in the performance, and in other cases, completely unrelated programs are performed. Sometimes the time is posted on the stage, and sometimes there is no indication of the program. And I think this is the biggest problem: after one program, there is a two-hour gap between performances. There are various reasons for this, such as the return of the portable shrine that left the shrine, but many times I have seen people

who wanted to continue watching the show, but they got tired of waiting because it didn't start for a long time. I wonder what can be done about it.

Another thing that may keep audiences away from Kagura is the fact that there are some unique rules and regulations that are not communicated to the audience. For example, if the performer sits down and hides his face with a fan, it is a sign that the performer is asleep. This is rather easy to do, so you might be able to see it for the first time. However, some techniques take a bit longer. For example, there is a scene in which the servant is ordered by his master to fetch a bottle of wine and other things, and for some reason the servant dances his way out, which is a kind of "Hakobi (it means carrying)" rule and has no deep meaning. It's just a way of giving the supporting actors a chance to show off their skills or maybe it's just a little break in a serious scene. However, the characters seem to go so far out of their way that it's quite common for the audience to be confused.

## Play of "Bohi joshi"

The content can also be enjoyed on video→<https://youtu.be/SwjTADLdDVI> and <https://youtu.be/fVu2-9KTDX8>

So let's take a look at one specific stage from here. The program is "Bohijoshi (bohijoshi)". To put it simply, it is a play about handing over the country in Japanese mythology. The lord of the Ashiwaramizuho-no-kuni receives a messenger from Amaterasu of the Amatsu-kuni (state), asking him to hand over the country to the lord. In conclusion, three messengers come, and in the end, the Lord is defeated by force and gives up the country. (cf. Reference →***Japan mythology and history***) The first messenger is known as "Ameno-Bodhi". The title "Bohi" is derived from the name of this messenger. In the mythology, Bohi became a retainer after being pardoned by the lord of the

country, but in the Kagura, the story goes that the lord's son, Takeminakata, tried to kill Bohi by getting him drunk. Originally, in mythology, Takeminakata appears when he confronts the third messenger. He would fight the third messenger as a warrior against handing over his country. It is clear that the story of Kagura is not entirely true to the mythology.

□This is a rather common performance, and I will try to compare the four Kagura groups. This time, I would like to compare four Kagura companies: the Wakayama troupe, the Saito troupe, the Hisaizu Shrine group, and the Hagiwara troupe. (Hagiwara troupe only refers to the second half.) Except for Hagiwara Shachu, the mask is basically the same. They are probably based on the same mold

## **Takeminakata**

□The first thing that happens is that Takeminakata appears. They are all using Kyougen masks of the "Buaku" style.





Buaku 𠩺𠩺 mask





**Hisaizu shrine**



**Saito troupe**





**Wakayama** troupe



**Hagiwara** troupe

## Retainer (Modoki or Hyottoko)

□Next comes the servants, all of them are wearing masks with the comical role of "Hyottoko" (modoki). However, only the Saito troupe has two people appear. The others just appear, but this is the only one which the two of them first have comic exchanges.



servant of Hisaizu shrine





servant of Wakayama groupe



two servants appear in Saito groupe

□□

## Ameno-bohi

□Then comes the third character, Amenobohi, who also appears in the title. All of the troupes use a mask based on a Noh play called “Chujo”. However, only Hagiwara’s troupe uses a different type of mask.



[https://www2.ntj.jac.go.jp/dglib/contents/learn/edc9/kouzou/mask\\_customize/mask/noumen10\\_b.html](https://www2.ntj.jac.go.jp/dglib/contents/learn/edc9/kouzou/mask_customize/mask/noumen10_b.html)

**Chujo** □□





**Hisaizu shrine**



**Saito group**





**Wakayama** group



**Hagiwara** group

□ This mask was originally made for the role of a warlord who met a tragic end, and features a carving on the forehead that expresses melancholy. The use of this mask implies the tragic end of this person. In this way, Edo kagura often uses masks from Noh and Kyogen, which is one of the reasons why it is difficult to distinguish it from Noh.

\*One way to distinguish between Noh and Kagura is that Noh uses a musical instrument called a tsuzumi (hand drum) and includes a song called “utai (chanting)” as well as dialogues. In Kagura, except for a few cases, there are no dialogues. Basically, everything is performed in mute pantomime.

□

## Musical accompaniment



**Saito group**





## **Wakayama group**

□These three (four) people alone will proceed with the performance. They do all their acting in mime. The musical accompaniment conveys all the emotions and the mood of the scene. Most of them consist of two drummers and a flute player. There is no particular stage set, so it is difficult to understand without knowledge of the original mythology. Recently, some groups have begun to include a separate commentary.

## **Confronting**





A scene in which a character (in this case, Amenobohi) claps his hands and calls out to people



Wakayama group





□After the introduction of the characters, the story begins



with a visit from “Amenobohi. The story begins with a visit from “Amenobohi”, and Takeminakata’s retainer, Modoki, welcomes him. Modoki opens the door and does some other things. There is one more thing that is customary in Edo Kagura, the clapping of hands to signal that someone is calling. This is a scene that is often seen. The Takeminakata is just standing there, but only the Wakayama troupe’s Takeminakata is holding up his fan as if in some kind of alarm. Their faces are more expressive than the others, so their movements are also more expressive.









□And then they meet. The scene of the first meeting is filled with the feeling of tension, with both men bend their heads back slightly. Eventually, Takeminakata offers to sit next to him, and they finally sit down. Amenobohi then makes an offer to give up the kingdom. In addition, the stance of Amenobohi (and consequently, the Amatsu-kuni) make audience to feel their arrogance. Of course, there is no way Takeminakata will accept this offer. He interrupts the meeting, and Amenobohi leaves once.

## **Stratagem**







□The Takeminakata side ponders what to do about the proposal, which is not easy to accept. There is also a comical moment when Modoki as retainer falls asleep while thinking about it. If you look at it calmly, you may wonder why Takeminakata has continued to use such an unreliable-looking retainer, but he plays a very important role in the progress of the play. Originally, Kagura was performed as a form of entertainment for the common people. If it were only serious, it would not be appropriate for a festival. Takeminakata comes up with a ruse that is typical of him. He wanted to get him drunk and beat him to death with one fell swoop. The action here is easy to understand for both Takeminakata and Modoki.

I heard he loves drinking. So, just get him to drink more. And when he' s drunk...

While he' s drunk?

you just kill him with one fell swoop.

Heee!

Don't panic. It's not like you're going to be killed. You'll do it. Do you understand?

Hey, do I? Can I do it?







This is where the “carrying” scene comes in. It is a scene in

which the attendant simply brings in sake, but the dance is accompanied by musical accompaniment. It is a kind of entertainment scene and has no deep meaning.

## Banquet







□And finally, the banquet begins. Amenobohi, who had been

holding fast to the suggestion, accepts the cup, saying, "Just one cup." As soon as he drank all of it, Modoki pours him another cup. Bohee's face shows his embarrassment. "Don't hesitate," Takeminakata said.







□Even Bohi, who has a confused expression on his face, reveals

his innate love of alcohol as the drinking continues. This is a great example of good acting and masks that make you feel the expressions on the face. At the end of the performance in the Saito group's case, Bohi drinks out of a large bowl instead of a cup. In this kind of performance, you can feel the expression on the face even though it is a motionless mask. This is partly due to the quality of the masks and partly due to the skill of the performers. The key to enjoying Edo sato kagura is to be able to sense these small details.

## Dance performance







□Finally, the drunken Bohi is in a good mood and begins to

dance. Each group has a different performance of the drunkenness. In some troupes, Bohi stumbles when he stands up or when he starts to dance. In the other troupes he stumbles while he dances. Let's enjoy another virtuoso performance here. Bohi then sat down and held a fan in front of his face. This is a rule for staging a kagura performance where the performer is said to have fallen asleep.







Takeminakata pulled out his sword to see whether he has been

really asleep. Finally, he ordered his retainer to “go ahead and do it.” Bohi, as expected, sensed the presence and quickly took action. He is not just a drunkard.

## Battle

The content can also be enjoyed on video→<https://youtu.be/8WWPesEX0QY>























□ Takeminakata makes up his mind to accept that he has no

choice without fighting now that his opponent is awake. He is not going to hand over their country so easily. Bohi pulls out his sword, and Takeminakata says, "Well, then. you should defeat my retainer first". At this point, except for Saito troupe, Bohi gets ready by tucking up the sleeves of his kimono with a sash. The retainer makes a brave attempt to fight, but gets cold feet from the first. He is easily defeated, but it is admirable that he still makes a few attempts. But he's no match for Bohi. This is a comical scene to ease the tension and entertain the audience. The retainer runs back saying "I'm not a match for him". At last, the battle between the two is about to begin. The battle is different in each troupe. One side kneels down to receive the other's sword, and now the other side. In such a way, an extremely stylized battle unfolds. Noh does not have such scenes, but rather is closer to the Kabuki style. Kabuki also has a large influence on Kagura such as strike swaggering pose. Finally, Takeminakata defeats Bohi. This is the same performance in every troupe. When Bohi swings his sword down, Takeminakata, a moment later, knocks it down from above.

## **Ending**











After losing, Bohi gracefully admits defeat. The performing style of this scene varies depending on the performing troupe. One performer looks up at the heavens, while the other looks down at their sleeves and laments. This comes from a fineness of masks and performer's acting. It is not a showy performance, but it is a scene where you can enjoy the virtuosity of the performers. Quietly enjoying these small parts is the peculiar feature of Edo Sato Kagura.

□

□Sure, it's not fancy. This is not like a spectacle of Iwami Kagura that uses fire and so on. Nor is it as groovy as Hayachine Kagura. But it's not just a matter of spending a lot of money on a movie full of CG. There are many movies in which you can enjoy the virtuoso performance. If you have a chance, please take a look. A shrine festival makes you feel happy just by being there. It's not too late to find out if Edo sato Kagura is boring or not after seeing it with your own eyes.