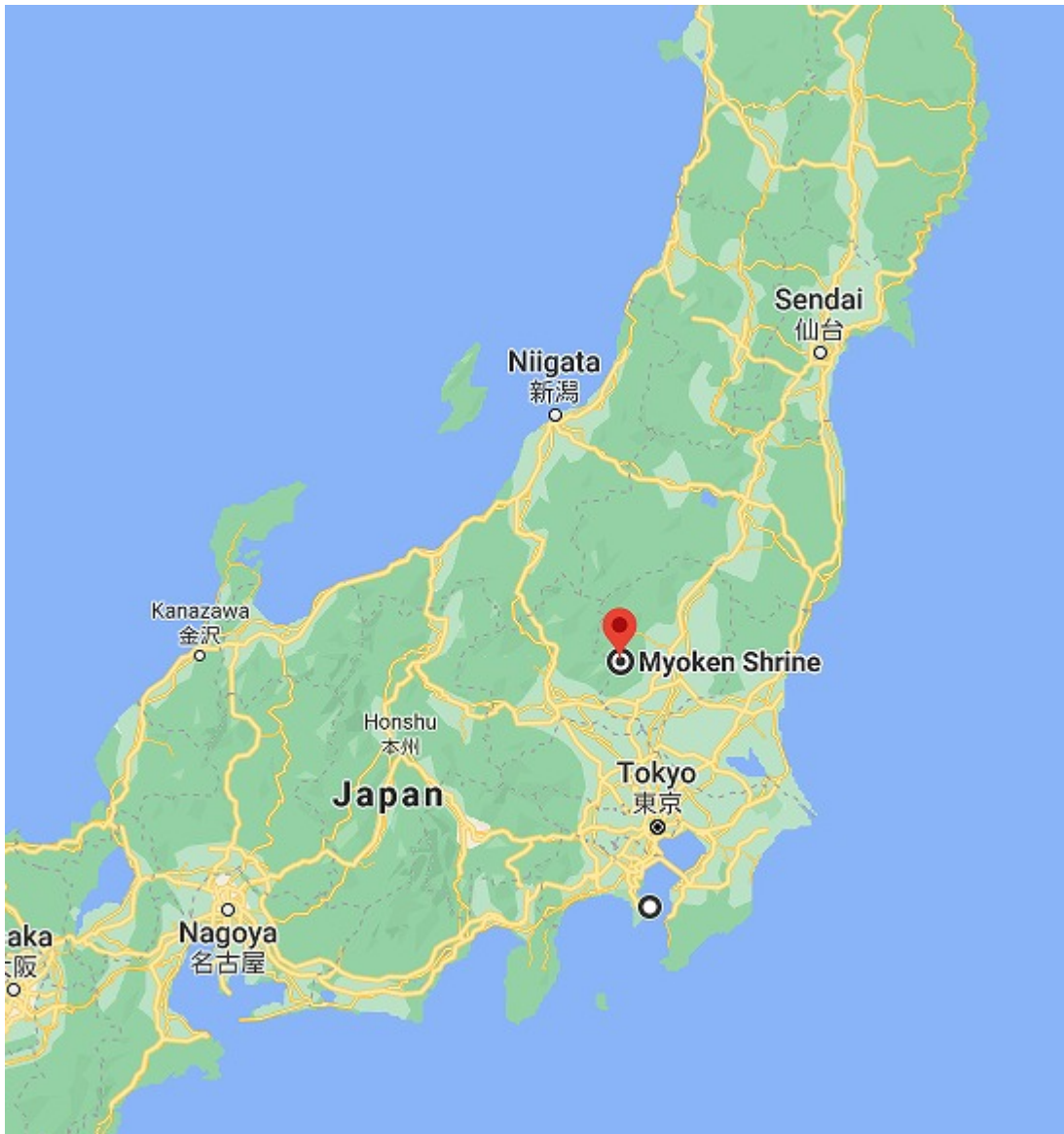
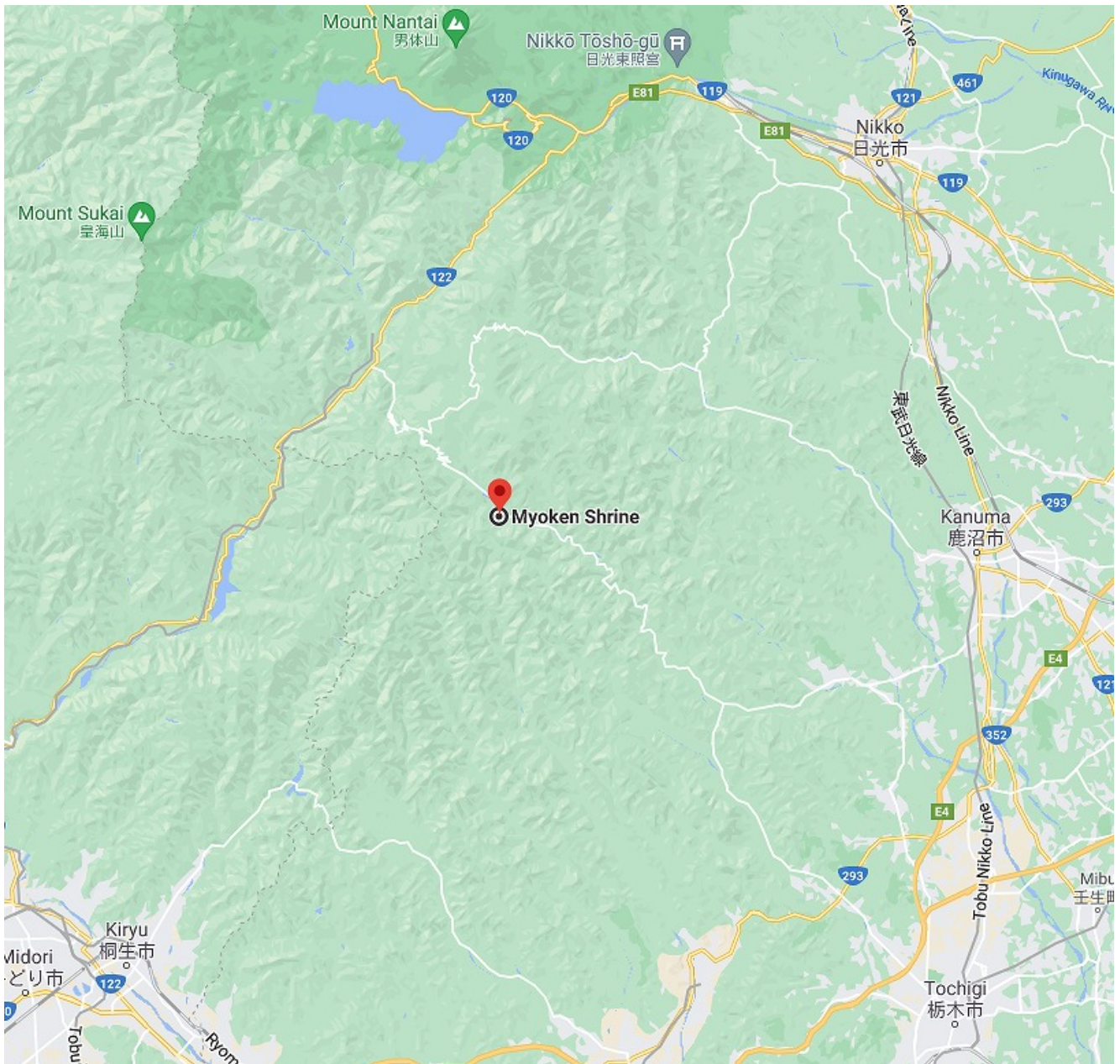


Forced rice eating ceremony in Hokkoji





Date: 3rd of January every year

Location: Kmikasuo 915 (Myoken shrine), Kanuma city, Tochigi prefecture

Access: From Tochigi IC of Tohoku Expressway, approx. 45 min. for Kasuo Pass/Ashio, or from Kanuma IC, approx. 50 min. for Kasuo Pass/Ashio

A strange Buddhist ceremony called

forced rice eating



<https://www.rinnoji.or.jp/event/389-2/>



Rinnoji-temple 日蓮寺

<https://www.rinnoji.or.jp/photo/?1081>

There is a strange ritual called “Gohan-shiki 御飯式 (the strong rice ceremony)”. It’s one of the Buddhist rituals. It is a ceremony where a large amount of food is prepared and forced to be eaten. There are many theories as to why it started. One theory says that it started when yamabushi (monks who practiced asceticism in the mountains) offered food to the main deity in the mountains and shared it with the people in the villages. Another theory is that it was an imitation of offerings to the gods and Buddha visiting the human world. In any case, it is not clear why people are forced to eat large amounts of food. Moreover, this ritual exists only in Tochigi prefecture, in the vicinity of Nikko. The most famous of them is conducted at the temple called Rinnoji 日蓮寺. Nikko is famous for its shrines and temples dedicated to Ieyasu 徳川家康, the founder of the Edo shogunate, the last samurai government. In the past, it was a very prestigious ceremony and only feudal

lords were invited. Therefore, even today, they still follow the dress code of that time.

The ceremony at Hokkoji □□□



<http://10.pro.tok2.com/~a11234842/kei109.html>



<http://10.pro.tok2.com/~a11234842/kei109.html>

The Ceremony in Hokkoji is held on January 3rd, which is descended from the ritual of Rinnoji Temple in Nikko.

Access is not good. There is a campground around the area. It is a place rich in nature, but it limits the ways of transportation. It takes about 10 minutes from the station by car. From the nearby interchange, it takes about an hour or less. There is also a bus route, but it is closed during the

New Year's. The area around the station is not a place where cabs are stationed. Therefore, the only way to get there is to take your own car, call a cab according to the train schedule, or bring a bicycle.

Outline of the ceremony



<http://10.pro.tok2.com/~a11234842/kei109.html>



https://blog.goo.ne.jp/community_2007/e/bbce70d2ae14562d79213149dd70725c

The ceremony starts at 9:00 a.m at Myoken shrine. After an hour of rituals, they go to to the community center in the neighborhood of the shrine, and the main part of the ceremony starts at around 10:00. Originally, it is the ritual to take over the festival duty. It attracts not only the people involved, but also the mayor and other people as guests. In front of all of them is a table with a mountain of rice on it. First, a mountain priest appears, followed by an ogre called "Gouriki 𪛗𪛗". "Gouriki" is wearing a straw sash all over his body and holding a two-pronged staff. Then they stand in front of each of them and say a platitude. "Eat and drink 33 cups of sake, 5 cups of hot water, and 75 cups of rice. This is the rule. Do not leave a single bowl uneaten. No one can drink and eat like this. But the participants say "yes" and bow down. The mountain priest takes a pinch of rice and puts it in the guest's mouth. Then he says, "Do you understand? Then congratulate in honor of Gouriki." Then he orders the "

Gouriki". The "powerful" will then offer a few words. If the person is in charge of the festival, he will tell them how to run the festival. If the person is the mayor, he will tell him to recover quickly from the disaster. To newlyweds, he would say, "The number of children is decreasing these days. Have a lot of children." Then he holds his head down with the two-pronged staff in his hand. They repeated this for each of the guests.



<https://tabi-mag.jp/hokkoji0103/>



<http://www.tochimaru-shop.com/kanko/detail.php?id=176>



<https://www.sankei.com/article/20180103-DFIF2RPNK5NVPFYA4DGQ3ZK7DQ/>



<https://www.pref.tochigi.lg.jp/culture/event/1174.html>

Ending

The roles of “Gouriki” and Yamabushi are played by ordinary local people. Although they play the roles, they speak out against the mayor and other influential people. They can't just say the same thing every time to liven things up. It seems that they have their own difficulties. They say they break out in a cold sweat every time. This ritual has come to be held in the same way as the Nikko event. However, it is a traditional event that has continued since the 14th century. I hope it will continue. There is Nikko, a world heritage site, nearby. Toshogu Shrine is worth a visit.



Odashirogahara 湖と桜

<https://travel.rakuten.co.jp/mytrip/ranking/spot-nikko>



Edo Mura (Edo village) 江戸村

https://www.jalan.net/kankou/spt_09383cc3540060189/



Toshogu shrine 日光

<https://www.gltjp.com/ja/directory/item/10071/>

**Report: Would you mind spending a calm day at a place away from urban noise?
□Part 2~Iidama shrine Daidai kagura~**

Date; □ 1st Sunday April, every year

Location; Hirose town 2-2-8, Maebashi city, Gunma prefecture

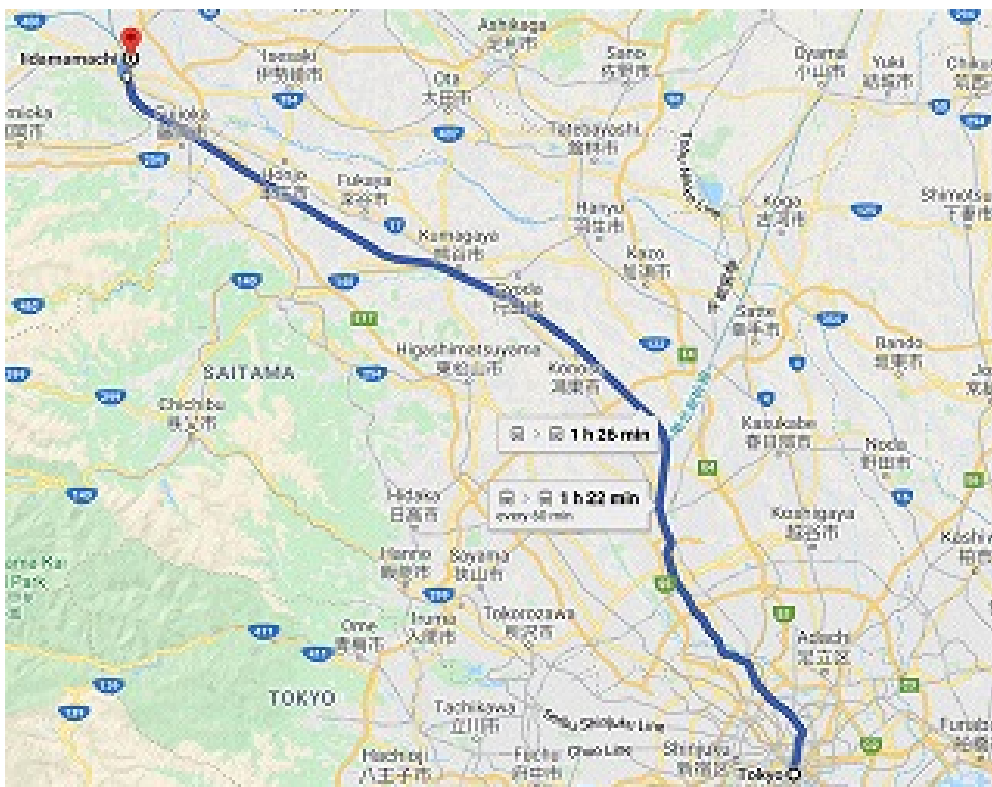
Access; □It takes 20 minutes from Naebashi station (JR) on foot

Mebashi is 1 and half hours from Tokyo



Gunma prefecture

Introduction



Iidama shrine from Tokyo

□This time, we will introduce “Iidama shrine Daidai kagura”.

□This Kagura event is held at the Iidama shrine every spring. “Daidai” is a word usually used in the event in the Kanto area and means “bigger and bigger”. Tears ago, kagura was sometimes held for people to get their wishes. The stronger the people’s wish was, the bigger the scale of the kagura became, because they paid a lot of money. So, the name of the kagura became “Dai kagura” from merely “kagura”. Dai means big. Finally, it is said to have come to be called “Daidai” kagura, according to some views.

□This period (from end of March to the beginning of April, about two weeks) is one of the best season in Japan. Many cherry blossoms bloom all at once and Japan is covered with the color of pale pink. So, if you go to this event, you would see beautiful scenery all over this area.



around the shrine



the Kagura-den

□This kagura is performed at lunchtime from about 11 am to 3 or 4 pm every year.

□*This article was written from the writer's experience visiting in 2017.



□This time once again two men (Modoki and Sarutahiko) seem to

be ready to guide you.

Here we are. This is Iidama shrine.

This shrine is in the middle of a residential district, isn't it?

Yes. Well, what time is it now?

It's about 11 am, just on time for starting. But the kagura event does not start yet, does it?

Such things happen. I would use this spare time effectively to introduce the features of this kagura. This is the kagura typical in Kanto area. The first half is very ritual and the second half becomes comical.

Do people like me get on the stage?

Yes,. Performing only a refined and sophisticated program would make the audience bored.

□20 minutes later.

The first program seems to be starting.

First half~ritual part

□At first, two deities come in. "Sarutahiko"





Are they Sarutahiko?

Yes, we often get on the stage at first because we are guides for all deities.*→Reference/Japan mythology, please

This is a rare program. Two men are playing.

Right. It's rare in Kanto area. But four men get on the stage in Okayama area.

Really? In addition, one mask has black beard and mustache and the other has white ones. And they have long eyebrows! They look like whiskers.

They are my colleagues. Don't quibble about deities' face. This is the refined program.

□Next program "**Four sieties**". Four men without mask are dancing slowly.



I guess that the moves of this dance are simple but skilled.

You come to understand kagura at last.

Thank you.

But stay focused and study even harder.

Oh, are you giving me a lecture again?

□Next “**Uzume or Okame**”. One dancer is holding Gohei (staff with plaited paper streamers in Shinto) and a bell comes on

stage. The feature of this dance is a slipping like movement.



Uzume looks like she's having fun.

The face of the mask has small eyes, long -slit and narrow eyes, and slender face with large jowls. This is for Okame.

It means funny face?

Although it may vary according to the time, this face is characterized by stylized beautiful woman figures.

Different times, different minds.

□Intermission from 12:20 pm to 1:00 pm.

□Next program, "Tajikarao". He has a staff like a shield.



Have you heard his name?

Of course. I am a humble member of kagura. When Amaterasu had hidden behind Amano-Iwato (a door by rock), he took it off.

Yes. He is the most powerful deity.





He has long eyebrows, too. And what is that? Long hair like a beard grows from under the eyes. It is an eyebrow or beard?

Shut up and look at his action. It seems to raise the wind!

Sure. It is getting a little cold from the wind.

He is cursing the wind by his power.

No way!

□Next program; “**Ameno Koyane**”. One person wearing white old man mask comes on the stage. He is holding a bell and a white fan.





Have you heard his name?

No.

He is a clever deity. At an affair of “Iwato-biraki”(Amaterasu behind the rock door. →Reference/Japan mythology), he took measures with Omoikane (a deity of the cleverest). And he is the founder of the Fujiwara clan. The Fujiwara clan has reigned this country for 1,000 years as the aide of emperor.

He looks gentle and elegant. He doesn't like he has political power. A man can't be judged by his appearance. Shoot! not man, yes deity.

□Second half~comedy part

□At 1:30 pm. “Tanemaki”. It means sowing seeds. A fox appeared following an woman holding rice plant.





Is she a deity of agriculture? I considered a deity of agriculture an old man. It is rare case.

Probably I guess she is a messenger of Inari.



□A fox is jumping crouching position. This is a popular image of a fox in kagura. A woman gave some rice plant and has left. Following, two men appear. They both wear a yellow cloth and one man wears a red towel on his head.

Hey, omg! Finally our colleague comes on the stage.

I'm sure that he might cause an incident,too.





□Unexpectedly, he is competent. After being taught how to plant from the fox, he started working easily and joyfully. When he is planting seeds just like dancing, another man comes in. He wears a yellow cloth and yellow towel on his head. He is bringing a big basket. After he puts the basket down, a man with red towel began to teach him how to plant the seeds.





Oh, I see. They are vaudeville actors. The man with the red towel is a straight man and the man with the yellow towel is the comical character.

Aren't they the same role?

Yes, but they are two of a kind.

So, teach me what they are talking.

Yes, it's easy.

□*Following the conversation is Modok's fictional transration.





Do as I do. At first you hold this tool, you break up the ground.

Why?

I don't know. After you break up, throw these beans as I do.

What these?

I don't know either.



□While they were doing this, one woman appears. She wears a cooking coat. She is called “Okame” or “Otafuku”. She begins to take care this and that.

These are seeds. If you throw on the ground, these will grow up into rice.



□Following Okame, an old man appears.

He is not just an old, he is a great deity, “Inari”.

Really? Thankful and fortune for humans like us.

□Nevertheless, the Inari did almost nothing. He just smoked a long pipe while looking over spring scenes.

Why does Inari do nothing?

He is a deity. A deity will be a such a being. Anyways, what are they doing?



Ah, they have tied their each hands though they wanted to tie straws. This is a typical comedy style.





Okame teaches them how to use the tool

Inari doesn't get fazed by anything. That's a deity.

He looks only lazy to me.

□After all, Inari and Okame left. Two of Modokis begin putting rice into a big straw bag.



Ouch! Stop. You are putting my head into bag together with rice.

I'm sorry. I got to absorb in doing this.

Really?



And now, keep doing it. I'll keep open the bag.

OK, I'll try.

Ouch!...

What are they doing?

This is Modoki. (laughing)

□Two Modokis managed to finish. Next, they have to bring it.



Well, sit down there. I'll help you carry the bag.





□Red finished tying. Yellow wants to stand but cannot. Red helps him to carry the rope.

□Then, fox comes out again.

It's too heavy. It wouldn't budge.



What are you doing? You are tying the rope to the pillar.

No wonder it's heavy.

Pull yourself together. Cheer up!

Aren't they hasty and careless?

That's Modoki.

□They are left finally with the fox. This program takes over 30 minutes.

□Next program "Daikoku's mallet".

□Daikoku is a deity of fortune. He always has a little mallet. The little mallet is a famous staff which people imagine as soon as people hear the name "Daikoku". Daikoku swings the mallet, then a lot of treasures appear immediately.



Daikoku as a deity of fortune



People have gathered again, haven't they?

Most people know when Ebisu or Daikoku appears, happy time is coming.



The Modoki with his head covered by a red towel comes out again. I don't think this program is going to end well.

Really?





Look at the stage. Daikoku gives modoki something.

He seems at a loss. Ah, he has given the staff to the audience.



□Daikoku gave a bell, mirror, and the mallet at last and he has left the stage.



Do as I do



It's an important roll.

Okame comes out and teaches how to use the mallet to modoki.



Hey, cheer up.



Okame is a hasty,too?

Daikoku swings the mallet to bring out some treasures but...What does his swinging the mallet make appear? I still doubt whether this program is going to end well.



□Modoki swung the mallet and a strange being has appeared. It wears an all-pink clothes and has a pink face.



What is that?

I don't know. I guess he or she is a monkey from the face.





□Anyway, modoki ties the monkey-like creature to a pillar. Modoki starts dancing in front of the monkey-like creature but it has vanished without noticing.



What happens? The monkey-like creature has come to the audience.

He is greeting the audience. Modoki is upset and brings the monkey-like creature back to the stage.



After all, what does red modoki try?

I guess he will try to teach dancing.

Modoki holds a rope, and the monkey-like creature is dancing. He is like a monkey trainer.



Suddenly the mochinage ceremony starts! □wasn't expecting that!



Look at that. Once again, a strange man with a red face has

come. Who is he?

I'm not sure. Maybe he looks like an ogre. There are too many strange happenings.

This is because Daikoku left all his work to Modoki. He is responsible for all the happenings.

Oh, are you angry?





□At last, Daikoku, Modoki, and the monkey-like creature drive away the ogre by throwing beans and all the cast have left.

What on earth has happened. Your guess was right.

Maybe they wanted to represent throwing away bad things and wishing for happiness. But I can't explain this program in more detail.

□**"Zougi and Taihou"** Two deities talk to each other, and wish for happiness.



□"Kagutuchi"



Do you know who this deity is?

I don't know.

He is a deity of fire. He can burn out everything.

Oh my God! That's scary.



□The last program. The blue face comes out holding a bell and a plate. He dances and throws many sweets or rice cakes and the program is over.

How about this kagura?

You are greedy till the end, deplorable!

□to be continued to Part 3

Report: Would you mind spending a calm day at a place away from urban noise ? ~4 kaguras in Kanto area in spring~ vol.1

□Today, I'll introduce 4 kaguras which is held in the most beautiful season of blossoming cherries within 2 hours from Tokyo.

introduce four kaguras (Japanese traditional folk performing art) in cherry blossoms blooming season

□If you ask some Japanese which season is the best to visit, most people will answer that it is for the blooming cherry blossoms.

□In this season, cherry blossoms begin to cover Japan starting from the south region and moving up north for two months. The blossoming status in each region is reported on TV or radio. Many people go out, dressed a new in spring clothes upon hearing such.

□The mountains, the rivers, the towns all views change from dark color to pale pink.



a shrine with cherry blossoms in Kamakura



cherry blossoms cover Tokyo

□Through out history, people have loved cherry blossoms. One famous poet composed the poem (waka □□) which reads “Hopefully, I will die under the blossoms in the spring time.” And another poet said;

“If it were not for/ cherry blossoms in the world/ How peaceful and calm/ The heart in spring could be.”

□confer

;

<http://dharmaechoes.blogspot.com/2010/04/heart-in-spring.html>

□The cherry trees has had strong influence on Japanese lifestyles. The cherry trees represent, so to speak, Japanese culture itself. In this season, if you see traditional kagura □□, you can grasp the whole Japanese culture in one day.

□The following 4 kaguras will be taken up here today. Every kagura is held in April.

□**Fuji sengen shrine Daidai Kagura** on the 1st Fujioka city, Gunma prefecture

□**Iidama shrine Daidai Kagura** on the 2nd Maebashi city, Gunma prefecture

□**Yamanashi oka shrine Daidai Kagura** on the 4th Fuefuki city, Yamanashi prefecture

□**Kamiyamakawa Daidai Kagura** on the 5th Yuki city, Ibaraki prefecture

□I guess that each kagura is worth watching. You can feel Japanese culture, besides you can get a lot of good luck fortune. This is not metaphor. Of course, you can get a mystical feeling in a shrine. Moreover, you can get many “good luck” items. This is why “mochimaki” is held while kagura’s at all these shrines. What is “mochimaki” ? Please read the following text if you wish know more about it.



Modoki (Hyottoko) and Sarutahiko

□These two people seem ready to guide you, this time. Then, could you two introduce yourselves, please ?

Sarutahiko is my name, from Ohmiya sumiyoshi kagura in Sakado city, Saitama prefecture. And let me tell you first of all , I am not human being, I am a deity, OK?

My name is Modoki, sometimes I am called Hyottoko. I am often called the comic or clown in festival.

□Well, let's go to watch kagura with them.

1. Fuji-sengen shrine Daidai kagura

Date; 1st, April

Location; Fujioka town 1152, Fujioka city, Gunma prefecture

Access; 10-minutes walk from Fujioka 〇〇 station (JR line), To get to Fujilka from Tokyo, you take Ueno-Tokyo line (JR line, bound for Takasaki), and change at Kurakano 〇〇〇 for Hachiko line 〇〇〇. It takes about 2 hours.



Gunma prefecture



from Tokyo to the shrine

□*This article is written based on the experience when the writer visited the place in 2016. The program procedures are basically the every year.



Fujioka station





How beautiful the cherry trees are!

There are few cherry blossoms trees in the precinct Shinto shrine..

Why?

People often plant evergreen trees because these are thought to live forever just like deities. But, in this shrine, the entrance area has many cherry blossoms, the beauty of which delights visitors.

So I guess the cherry trees were thought superior to faith?



the view from the Hon-den

First half



the Hon-den

□The precinct is wide. Main hall (Hon-den 本殿) is at the center. This building is on a hill which overlooks the view of whole precinct. This hill is old grave. This kagura-den 神楽殿 (hall for playing kagura) is right in front of the main hall. This building has two stories, the stage is on the second floor. You can watch from under the hall or from the main hall. which is a little away.

□The kagura starts at **11:30** am on schedule.

Quite a few people gathered more than I expected. Especially the number of children stood out.

I guess the reason is because they are in spring holiday.

Spring holiday? We, all deities, work without holiday.





□First program is “Omoikane”. The player white cloth dances

alone, holding a bell and staff of pleased paper stream.

What is the thing the player holds?

This is “Gohei (paper streamer)”, which Shinto priests often use at ceremonies. We can often see this from. They that the deity lodges in these things temporally.

And players take the same action at four corners. Why?

It means that it is significant to appease the earth. The feature of this kagura is very ritual and hardly any dramatic elements. So, players sometimes turn back to the audience because they play not the audience but for the deity.

I’m sorry to say there is no part for me in this scene.

□Second program is “**two Koyanes**”. Two players are on the stage. They were white and black mask of old men. They dance bisymmetrically with paper streamer and bells, too.







How are programs named?

The names of programs are named on each deity. For example, "Koyane" is named after the called "Ameno Koyane".

□Third program is "**three deities of Sumiyoshi**". Three players appear on the stage who each wear cloth of different colors, white and yellow. They dance symmetrically with great skill amidst falling of paper of pale pink petals.



Look at that. I think that you can feel fundamental elements

of Japanese culture. Cherry blossoms falling and watching kagura. It is hard to get such feeling from another event.

I see.

□Every program is short which lasts within 10~15 minutes.

□Toward the end of this program, people gather around the kagura-den.

More people have gathered. Do they love this program?

No. They are human as well as you.

□Many people appeared on the stage, and began to throw many things.



What is going to be?

This is “mochinage” ceremony. “Mochi” means originally Japanese rice cake. But, recently, “mochi” changed to various other things, like sweets. This is a congratulation present. Of course, all are free. Most of the audience gather to get

this present. Anybody can get this. There is no limit numbers. You can get many sweets by yourself.

That's good.

But what you must not forget is that these are presents of fortune for everybody. Not only for you? OK?

I see, I see.





□After the ceremony of mochinage, the program starts again.

□Next program is “**Miko mai**”. “Miko” is a shrine maiden consecrated to deity. Miko-mai is a type of dance performed by “miko”. The way to dance is different in every region. Here, four elementary school girls are performing. This is shorter than other programs which lasts within 5 minutes.

□“**Sarutahiko**”. One player wears red and long-high nose mask and holds a bell and long sword in his hands.



Oh, he is my colleague. We are proud guides for our fellows

deities. (Reference/Japanese mythology)

He looks more powerful and stronger than you.

Darm it. Your eyes are kortholes.





□ "Miko-dance" again.







□ **"Iwatobiraki"** → please refer to "Reference" → "Japanese mythology"

□ One player wears black clothes red "hakama" and holds gold folding fan. "Hakama" is Japanese skirt for formal wear. He is deity named "Tajikarao 伊弉諾". He plays the role of removing "Iwato". In this kagura, a blackboard represent it. He takes it off, exposing a little girl traditional wear of "miko". She represents "Amaterasu".



□After the first player leaves, “Miko-mai” plays again. And

two players wearing black and white clothes and mask of old man bisymmetrically. At last, the first player "Tajikarao" appears again.





□At last, mochinage ceremony is held again, and there is a lunch break. It is about 20 minutes.

Second half

Hey, get up. Kagura started again.

?? Oh, I seemed to have dozed off without realizing. Spring weather makes us sleepy.

Stop being so idle and get to work !



□ "A sword dance" One player has a mask of surprising and long

hair. He walks powerfully swinging a sword.

His action signifies cutting evil. We can usually see the action in kagura.

You know so well.

That's because I am a deity !



“Miko-dance” one player.

It's beautiful !

It looks like spring of cherry blossoms come together to make one female figure.

You sometimes are so poetic despite your appearance, aren't you?

Hey, don't judge people by appearance.



□"Ryujin (deity of dragon)"

□Mochinage again.





□"Hachiman" This is a deity of battle and war. He drive out

evil spirits to shoot a bow.



Sago-mai

After "Sagomai" and "miko-mai", 15 minutes intermission



Miko-mai

It is getting cool. I feel the cold wind.

Three more programs. Be patient.

Aren't you feel cold?

Noway, I am a deity.





□"Hakuhatsu (deity with white hair)"



I guess that this program is to wish for longevity. He has long white hair and wears mask of old man.



□"Ebisu"

I like this program.

Why?

He is fishing. And this program is often the sign of mochinage coming.

You are so greedy !

But, it is one of the most popular programs from old times. Hey, mochi is falling down again.

□Ebisu finally caught a sea bream as expected and got off.
□Finally, people were throwing sweets splendidly and all programs ended. It was 5 pm.



Ending



This kagura went on schedule. I think it is rare.

Yes, I hardly see something like this.

I am pleased to get many sweets. Let's visit here again.

□to be continue to vol. 2