

Report: Would you mind spending a calm day at a place away from urban noise ?

~Part 4 Yuki Suwa shrine Daidai-Kagura~

□Finally the special feature article, “Let’s go to the city to watch local Kagura during beautiful cherry blossoms season”, this is the last of the series. Two guides who took you to various kagura till now will take and guide you this time too. Hey, two guys, are you ready? OK, let’s start!

*If you want to know who they are, read the article, part 1.



Date; 3rd April

Location; Kamiyamakawa 160, Yuki city, Ibaraki prefecture

Access; about 7 kilometers from Yuki □□ station. To get to Yuki from Tokyo, you take Ueno-Tokyo line(JR line, bound for Utsunomiya. It takes 1.5 hours), and change at Oyama, for Mito line (JR). It takes 15 minutes.



Ibaraki prefecture



from Tokyo to Yuki



image is for illustration purpose

Oh,no! 7 kilometers is a long way to walk. I can't walk.

Don't worry. In this station, there is a corner to rent a bicycle. You pay ¥500 and ¥1,000 for deposit, you can rent a bicycle for a day. When you return it, the ¥1,000 deposit will be refunded to you. (as of 2020)

Bicycle? Certainly, it's a good deal (cheaper). But I didn't expect you to suggest riding a bicycle.

Is there something wrong for a deity to get on a bicycle? It takes about 20 minutes by bicycle.

OK,OK. Anyway let's just go.

Introduction



Isn't this shrine cozy and modest? Cherry blossoms seem to bless the festival. The kagura-den is dressed up today. Oh, several booths by local people sell some food and drinks. Shaved ice, Yakitori (Japanese kebabs), steamed potatoes and Amazake (a sweet fermented rice drink). What time does kagura start?

You are really greedy. I wonder if it is too early to sell shaved ice. Well, the Shinto ritual starts at noon, so kagura will start in 45 minutes.



1. "Dance of Gogyo"





Kagura's first program has begun. The program board says "Dance of Gogyo"... What does "Gogyo" mean?

This name comes from the two principles of ancient Chinese. One is the philosophy of “Yin and Yang”, another is the thought of “Gogyo”. “Yin and Yang” is negative and positive. The ancient people thought that the universe had derived from Yin and Yang. Apart from that, they also thought that the universe consisted of five elements, that is, wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. Finally, they reached the conclusion that these thoughts made it possible to explain everything. These philosophies were introduced to Japan in the 6th century, and had had a great influence. Do you understand?

I guess I understand the outline. So, black and white dancers appear in this program, don't they?

Yes. Although this story may seem difficult, this thought has affected the lifestyle of Japanese until today. For example, when Japanese decide on the date of weddings, they set a date based on this theory.

I thought better of you. You are a genuine deity guide.

Aha!

2. "Sarutahiko"





That's dance of Sarutahiko. I was waiting for him. It's about time!

Moves of this dancer's Sarutahiko have the same feature in Kanto area. It's a very magical action to expel evil spirits from the stage.

3. "An archer"





He is handsome.

He is a deity of an archer. He shoots an arrow to drive away evil spirits.



Look at the papers in front of the stage. Many names are on the papers. What do they mean?

They are the names of sponsors. They offer sweets, liquor, money and so on.

Many sweets! I can have high hopes for “mochinage (the throwing-many-things ceremony to celebrate).

I knew you would say that.

4. “The old man holding a sword”



He is not an old man. His old face shows thoughtfulness and consideration. His name is “Omoikane”. Do you remember this name?

Yes. He is the most intelligent deity. When “Amaterasu” had hidden behind the Iwato, he was the key deity to devise the plan to bring her out. Is that right?

Good! →*see “Reference”/Japanese mythology, “Iwato biraki”, please

5 & 6. “Inari (man and woman)”



These foxes are good looking and their clothes are classy.

They are the messengers of the deity for planting rice. They are not just foxes.



That fox is going to throw something here...Oh, no. He threw it in a different direction. He is pretty clever!





Aren't they male and female according to the title?

Maybe..This program, as you would think, took 15 minutes, nevertheless, others just took 10 minutes.

7. "Rice harvesting"





8. "Ebisu"



The audience has gathered before I knew it. That's Ebisu. He

is popular. At once, he is going to fish something.



Oh, sake! It looks heavy.





Oh, did you look at that? That's money!

That is gift money.



You only mention him getting things, but actually he does a lot of giving too. He is a deity who “gives fortune”.

He finally has fished a red snapper. Look at his triumphant expression. But why is a red snapper auspicious in Japan?

It's a simple reason. When people want to express congratulation or happiness, they say “medetai” in Japanese. “Tai” means red snapper. It's a pun or word play. In addition, this fish's color is red and looks good. Red is considered to protect us from evil.

How simple-minded Japanese are.

You, too. Don't forget that you are figments of their imagination.

9. “dance of Uzume”





“Ameno Uzume” is coming. When it comes to “Uzme”...

“Iwato biraki” or “Tenson-korin”. →*please see
“Reference”/Japan mythology

Yes. Now she comes out on the stage, Iwato-biraki is to come.

10. “Tajikarao~Amano Iwato-biraki”





Here comes Tajikarao. This is the scene of “Iwato-biraki”. He took off the Sakaki (species of ever green) branches at the corner. This represents “Iwato”.

So does that mirror represent “Amaterasu”?

Yes. The direction of kagura like this can often be seen all over Japan. Amaterasu is a deity of the sun. A mirror is a symbol of the sun in Shintoism.

11. Ending~“Ohyamatsumi”



He has three eyes! Is he a yokai creature?

No, he is a deity named “Ohyamatsumi”. He often comes out towards the end of Kagura in the Kanto area. When it comes to Ohyamatsumi, it is the end in no time. The ending of kagura in Kanto area is....



How many things there are! People throw things which were carried in relay by humans a while ago. Those things are not only sweets but also cup noodles and some foods. It's great.

Many gifts which were piled up as a mountain are vanishing one by one. Are human beings greedy or generous? I'm not sure which is right.

That's human!

Anyway, we went around many kaguras in Kanto area. What do you think of them?

I am getting to know the form of kagura in this area a little. They have a certain form but each has different features. I want to go to many different kagura. Didn't you introduce a kagura of Ohmiya Sumiyoshi shrine you belong to?

Yes. There are many kaguras that I haven't introduced yet in this area.

I want to watch the others as many as I can.

Sounds good! But, to be honest, you just want to get many sweets, don't you?

You get it!

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

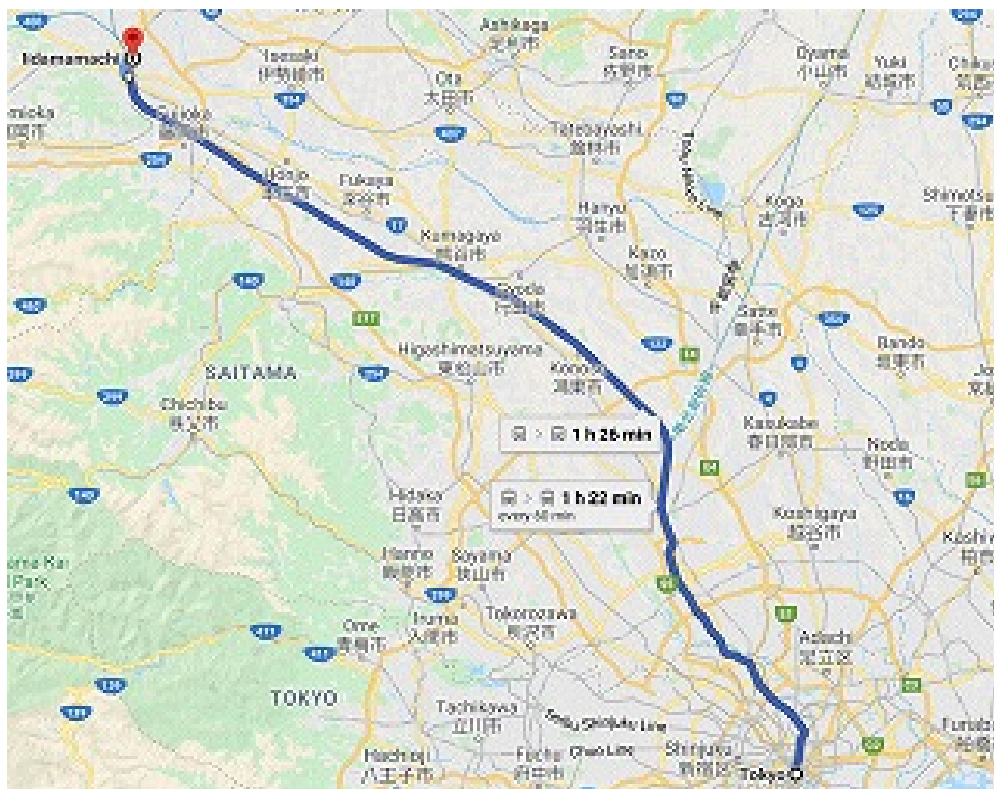
Access; □It takes 20 minutes from Naebashi station (JR) on foot

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 begining 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 staring. 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 coursing 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.

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 駅 station (JR line), To get to Fujioka from Tokyo, you take Ueno-Tokyo line (JR line, bound for Takasaki), and change at Kurakano 駅 for Hachiko line 駅. 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 amis falling of paper of pale pink prtals.



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 mythorogy)

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 太玉命". 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 voming.

You are so greedy !

But, it os 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

Report: 1/35 of the most important of the folk performing art Haji Ichiryu Saibara Kagura □□□□□□□□

Date□□□1st January, 14th February, 10th April, 10th October, and day of "Tori" in December, every year

Location□ Washinomiya shrine Washinomiya, Kuki city, Saitama prefecture

How to get there□ It takes 10 minutes from Washinomiya station (Tobu Isezaki line)

□□This kagura is consisted of 12 programs.

□□This kagura is one of 35 an important Intangible Folk Cultural Heritage by Japanese national government.



Introduction

□This kagura is called “**the source of Kanto kagura**” (Kanto is located in center of Honshu which is main island of Japan, and is the generic name of seven prefectures). In addition, this is one of **the country designation important intangible cultural asset** which there is 35.

□“Sada shinno” originally started in Shimane prefecture. A Shinto priest of Sada shrine learned Noh in Kyoto about the beginning of 17th Century, and made a new kagura (so called Sada Shinno) based on the Noh style. This kagura is known for a distinctive element. That’s the dancer is holding thing (bell, sacred staff with cut paper (heisoku 舞歌), or a sakaki leaf and so on). This style of kagura started to be called “Izumo style ” and spread out in the whole country before long. This shrine is where Izumo style was accepted first. So it is called “the source of Kanto kagura”.

□But the first document of the kagura in this shrine was recorded in about the middle of 13th century. We don’t know

whether this kagura is the same kagura of today.



Washinomiya station



□I went to Washinomiya shrine on 1st January, 2015.

□**Kuki city** is located in Saitama prefecture, population of about 150,000. It is not very big town. It takes about 1 hour from Tokyo by Ueno-Tokyo line (JR), changing at Kuki to Tobu line, next station being Washinomiya station.

□**Washinomiya shrine** is about a 10 minute-walk from Washinomiya station. We cross a red bridge on the way to the shrine. It like a connection between the sacred place and the regular world.





□The shrine became a holy ground of animation films in these days. so we can see many persons who wear costumes of animation characters. We can find a middle-aged man who puts on a blond wig wearing sailor uniform (high school girls style) and skirt among them. You guess that it is quite a surreal scene. Even if it is not so, this shrine is the core of faith in this area. The number of people that gathered exceeded 400,000 in there days. The shrine is quiet in usual times, but only for three days, it becomes really crowded.

First half

□On those days, people make a long lines to pray, I passed by them and ran to the hall (kagura-den) where kagura was being performed.



□the kagura was going to start about 10 or 10:30. When I arrived at about 11:00. The kagura had already started. The kagura-den is front of the Hon-den (main hall). So many people were there, but nobody was looking at the kagura. The audience seemed to be no more than 20 persons.

□On the stage, there were one masked man and two girls. The mask showed an old man smiling gently. He dance slowly holding a bell and sacred staff with cut paper (heisoku □□). This kagura's feature was in a ceremonial manner with hardly any dramatic representation.







□I guessed from the title that this program represented at the famous scene of Japanese mythology, “*Amano iwato biraki*” (see to “Reference/Japan mythology”). In “*Amano iwato biraki*” all deities are pleased when “Amaterasu” (she is a deity of sun) comes out from where she was hidden in a big door of rock. But, it is difficult to understand such a state only by seeing it. It is significant to appease the Earth in every direction by the swinging the bell. This program took about **30 minutes**.



□Next program is “Hakagura”. This program is where two girls dance swinging a bell. When this program is played, people sitting on the stage play music “Saibara”. “Saibara” is a popular music in Heian period (9~10 C). When we listen to these music, we don’t feel such elements. The oldest music is called “Gagaku”. I feel this music like “Gagaku” faster in tempo. I don’t know if these music remain completely at the time, but I am filled with deep emotion. I think it worth listening to once at least because you would feel the life of ancient Japanese.



Izanagi



Izanami



□Next program is based on Japanese mythology, too. This mythology says in the beginning of time, two deities, named “**Izanagi**” and “**Izanami**” gave birth this country. So, a mobile bridge is set on a stage and two players dance across the bridge. The male deity dances powerfully, the female deity dances with grace. While changing their positions they dance around a stage. This program ended at about half past 12. Then there was an intermission.

Intermission





□There were many food stalls in the shrine precinct. After I ate lunch, I found a place where people were being fire using metal barrel. This area was surrounded by a double fence, and some people were direct cuttlefish. I thought it was a good system. Only people who bought, direct dried cuttlefish could enter in front of the fire. I saw quite a lot of people buying cuttlefish.

Second half

□Meanwhile the kagura started again at **2 o'clock**.

□First program, two little girls were dancing hoiding a bell. It was short.



□Next program was based on mythology,too. When the grandson of “Amaterasu (a deity of sun)”, “Ninigi” goes down from his country “Amatsu kuni” to this earth, two deities got married with the meditation of “Ninigi”. One is a chaperon of Ninigi, named “**Ameno Uzume**”, and is a deity who had waited Ninigi’s group and led this country to safety, named “**Sarutahiko**”.





Sarutahiko



Ameno Uzume

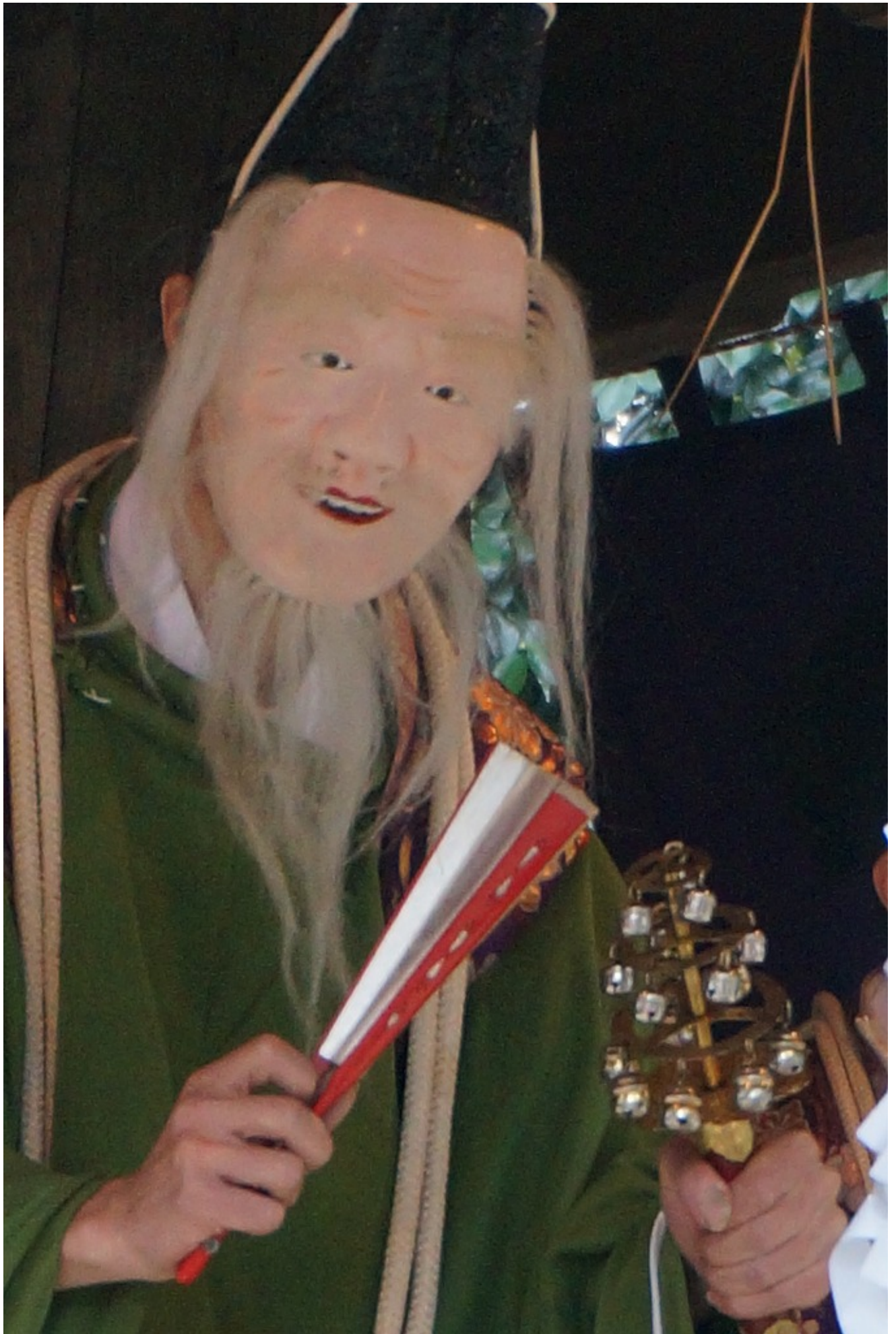


□So, two dancers enter the stage. One wore a red face mask with long -high nose, and another wore a female mask. The dancer with the red mask is “Sarutahiko”, and the other is “Ameno Uzume”. Sarutahiko held a pike, and Ameno Uzume held a big staff which red piece of paper. Two dancers faced each other across the bridge, changing their position like the program of “Izanagi and Izanami”. This kagura basically consists of such dancing.

□It ended at **2:20**.









□After short break, next program started. Three dancers each wore a mask of “okina” (old man) with long mustache and beard. They each held fans, and danced slowly making a circle. It is said that it is to express a prayer for a peace of the world.

□After **30 minutes**, the whole program for today ended.

□If you are interested in old style kagura, I recommended to watch this “Saibara kagura”. You can definitely see a noble and elegant dance program.

□□□□***For more information***

□This kagura is held at “Washinomiya shrine (branch shrine)”, 15th April. It is at “Hachiho, Washinomiya town”.