



Shinto Ritual Practice in Miyagi Prefecture after the Great East Japan Earthquake The Case of the Ogatsu Hōin Kagura

This ethnographic study examines the impact of the Great East Japan earthquake on kagura practice, more specifically the Ogatsu Hōin Kagura in Miyagi Prefecture, and shifting notions of the functions and meaning of ritual performance. Referring to Satsuki Kawano’s notion of “emplacement,” I argue that the disaster has expanded the range of meanings in multiple ways. By demonstrating that practitioners play an essential role in redefining the nature of kagura performances in the wake of the earthquake and that the adaptation of the performance to changing circumstances helps to maintain its relevance, I argue that Hashimoto Hiroyuki’s concept of “the authenticity of practitioners,” which seeks to understand folk performing arts as evolving rather than “authentic” cultural phenomena, continues to be highly pertinent.

KEYWORDS: disaster ethnography—kagura—post-disaster ritual adaptation—community—subjective agency

“If your parents have different faces all of a sudden, you would feel uneasy, wouldn’t you?” Chiba-san, the chief Shinto priest (*gūji* 宮司) in his early forties who is the head of the Ogatsu Hōin Kagura, explained the situation the group finds itself in after the masks and other equipment were lost in the disaster and troupe members had no option but to use new masks.

THIS ARTICLE aims to trace the impact of the Great East Japan earthquake in March 2011 (or 3.11) on kagura practice in Miyagi Prefecture, one of the three worst affected prefectures in Tohoku, northeast Japan, by examining the case of the Ogatsu Hōin Kagura 雄勝法印神楽. Kagura denotes “the music, dance and theater performed in the contexts of shrines as an entertainment for the deities (*kami*) and people gathered. Specifically it incorporates music and dance which purifies space for the coming of the *kami*, music and dance which summon *kami*, and music, dance and theater which entertain *kami*” (LANCASHIRE 2011, 23). While shrines may better be understood as Shinto shrines, previous research has suggested to avoid the term Shinto in the kagura context because of the problematic nature of Shinto (BREEN and TEUWEN 2000; LANCASHIRE 2006).

Kagura encompasses a wide range of dances of female shamans (*miko* 巫女) generally associated with Shinto shrines to lion dances (*shishimai* 獅子舞) and dramatic representations of myths and historical events (LANCASHIRE 2006, 16). Kagura constitutes one of the five broad categories in the classification system devised by Honda Yasuji to describe the abundant number of folk entertainments referred to as folk performing arts (*minzoku geinō* 民俗芸能) today (LANCASHIRE 2010, 55–57; LEE 2000, 98; HASHIMOTO 2006, 32–33).

The etiologial myth of the Shinto dance is a key episode of Japanese mythology: when Amaterasu Ōmikami, the sun goddess, hid herself in a rock cave and darkness covered the world, the dancing of another goddess was the only means to lure out the sun goddess from her hiding place and restore the daylight. This mythic event is considered as a prototype of the kagura tradition and despite the distance of Ogatsu from the west of Japan, where the sun goddess episode is said to have taken place, the Ogatsu Hōin Kagura shares the cave hiding story (LANCASHIRE 2011, 135). Compared to the classical Japanese stage genres of *noh*, *kabuki*, and *bunraku*, kagura has received relatively little attention by researchers in the Anglo-Saxon world. While the detailed study of predominantly material



FIGURE I. Temporary stage for festival kagura (all photos taken by author).

aspects of folk performance traditions such as kagura in northeast Japan has been a core concern of Japanese ethnology since the early twentieth century—Honda Yasuji being perhaps the most representative Japanese scholar—less research has explored the contemporary challenges faced by those who actively maintain these traditions in the communities where they persist (THOMPSON 2008, 362). This sense of frustration at folklorists’ predominant concern with archival sources was also aired by some kagura practitioners in Ogatsu who bitterly complained about the lack of interest in troupe members’ everyday challenges in what practitioners perceive as “marginal research.”

This study seeks to address this lacuna by focusing on the immateriality of the kagura as an example of folk performing arts. It depicts and analyzes how individuals involved in the practice and transmission of the kagura in Ogatsu cope with the challenge of passing on the tradition under the dramatic circumstances of their post-disaster environment. This article is concerned with giving a perspective on kagura as Japan’s “grassroots culture” (ABE 2012) by emphasizing the perceptions and views of local (and increasingly, nonlocal) practitioners. I also explore the expansion of folk performing arts such as kagura from activities strongly embedded in local livelihood and culture to something that exceeds community life as a result of the demographic and socioeconomic decline exacerbated by the disaster.

“THE ESSENCE OF THE KAGURA HAS NOT CHANGED BUT...”

In order to illustrate the changes kagura practitioners have faced since March 2011, I start out with observations by several members of the local kagura “preservation society” (*hozonkai* 保存会), which was established in 1951:

Of course ... [our group has been affected by the disaster] ... our chairman died in the tsunami ... those of us who have been left behind need to pass on the

thoughts of our chairman ... we must not forget his thoughts and carry on ... personally I think that he is watching us from the sky, so we really have to try our best, I have to work on my irresponsible character (laughs).... (group member, fifty-nine years old)

We do not have a place to practice now ... we do not have regular practice ... there is practice at the school ... and before performances we rent some places to practice. (vice chairman, seventy-one years old)

The kagura itself does not change, as far as our feelings are concerned. I hope to do my best so that we can perform in our hometown ... because this is traditional culture. I want to preserve carefully what has been passed on to us ... for we also have received support from across Japan so that this does not cease as a result of the disaster. We have the responsibility [to carry on]. (group member, forty-two years old)

The first statement underlines TRAPHAGAN's persuasive argument that "to be dead in Japan is not to be removed from the world of the living" (2008, 395) and shows that deceased relatives, friends, and colleagues continue to remain salient in the thoughts and even shape the acts of the living. TRAPHAGAN has emphasized the function of religious activities as an expression of interconnectedness with people and has argued before that ancestor veneration rituals serve to keep the ancestors socially involved in the living world (2004, 79–80). I contend that the case of the Ogatsu kagura illustrates the reciprocal relationship between the living and the dead in the sense that practice and performances of the ritual dances helps the living members come to terms with the loss of friends and family who died in the Great East Japan earthquake and resulting tsunami. On the one hand, troupe members keep alive the memories of the deceased in multiple ways—for example they imitate their movements and habitus as a means of paying respect to their ancestors and enacting a sense of obligation; on the other hand, references to the deceased make the living feel contextualized and reassured in transition periods such as post-disaster times. SUZUKI argues that the sense of protection awarded by ancestors to the living is on the decrease in contemporary Japan (1998, 185), but the above statement and participant observation suggests that such a conceptualization of the ancestors as protectors continues to be prevalent.

This ethnographic article is based on several stretches of fieldwork in Ogatsu, Ishinomaki, the location of the Ogatsu Hōin Kagura, which I have carried out since February 2012. Interviews took place at *hozonkai* members' homes and workplaces, at community centers and cafes, as well as backstage after performances. I have attended performances of the group both in various sites in Ogatsu as well as in Tokyo and Kamakura. Furthermore, I have also visited a practice held by the present chairman of the preservation group for high school pupils in the Kahoku School, where local pupils have been relocated after 3.11. I have carried out both individual and group interviews for my ethnographic study. Compared to fieldwork I have conducted with other kagura groups of "lower" designation status in Niigata and Shimane Prefecture, it took me longer than expected to get

access to troupe members and obtain “deep” data from this group, which may be connected to its designation status as “important national intangible cultural property” (*kunishitei jūyō mukei bunkazai* 国指定重要無形文化財). According to a preservation group member,

As far as the continuation of the Ogatsu kagura from now on is concerned, well I think it is going to be difficult. There are no jobs, most people leave after graduating from school.... I don't think that we can solve these issues by ourselves.

For six hundred years, the Ogatsu Hōin Kagura has been handed down from one generation to the next and was designated as a nationally important intangible folk cultural property in December 1996. The Ogatsu Hōin Kagura is said to have its origins in the Dewa Sanzan and Haguro area in adjacent Yamagata Prefecture. It belongs to the *yamabushi* 山伏 (mountain ascetics) type of kagura, which was spread by Buddhist monks who were loosely affiliated to the main Buddhist sects of Tendai and Shingon (LANCASHIRE 2010, 63). The *yamabushi* cultivate their spiritual powers in remote mountains. The religious system of mountain asceticism focuses on ritual practice and is known as Shugendō. Its proclaimed purposes are to achieve enlightenment, to gain magical powers through ascetic practices in the mountains and to use those powers for the benefit of the people (AVERBUCH 1995a, 17).

The oldest known reference to the Ogatsu Hōin Kagura dates to 1739 in a document entitled *Okagura no daiji* (LANCASHIRE 2011, 135). According to the report issued by the OGATSU KYŌIKU IINKAI (2000, preface), in the Monou Oshika region the Honzan style and Haguro style were found, but the Honzan style was predominant in farming villages whereas the Haguro style was passed on in the towns of Ogatsu and Kahoku along the coast. When the edict separating Shinto and Buddhism was issued in 1868, it proved difficult to pass on the tradition just among monks and the practice seems to have been opened to the general public. It is highly probable that some ruptures occurred in the transmission process. For example, the official separation of Buddhism from Shinto (*shinbutsu bunri* 神仏分離) in the Meiji period resulted in the reworking of the kagura and a greater emphasis on the Japanese classics (LANCASHIRE 2011, 135; OGATSU KYŌIKU IINKAI 2000). There is archival evidence that after the Meiji restoration, the Ogatsu kagura was exposed to secularization and the Meiji government issued directives to put a halt to that tendency (OGATSU KYŌIKU IINKAI 2000, 4). Other examples of kagura being transformed from a distinctly sacred to a secular form of entertainment in the course of time underline this tendency for change (for example, NAKASHIMA 2013, 212). However, the report by the OGATSU KYŌIKU IINKAI claims continuity (2000, preface) despite mention of secularization being made in the same report.

Due to its location right at an indented ria coast, the height of the tsunami in Ogatsu was fifteen meters and the impact was much larger than in other places facing the sea: 90 percent of the 1,600 households were washed away or destroyed entirely. The Isono Shrine where the kagura had been passed on for centuries and part of the kagura utensils were also swept away. The group has managed to

resume its activities relatively quickly due to massive support by institutions such as UNESCO and companies such as Mitsubishi. The fund set up to support the Ogatsu Hōin Kagura has so far received a record sum of 6,038,793 JPY (as of 5 October 2014; see <http://www.geocities.jp/hoinkagura/>). Four masks, costumes, and other equipment have been donated. For example, the National Federation of UNESCO Associations in Japan financed kagura masks (*kaguramen* 神楽面), costumes (*chihaya* 千早), curtains (*kaguramaku* 神楽幕), musical equipment, and costumes for the Children's Kagura Club at Ogatsu Elementary School (see NFAJ 2012). Right after the disaster, according to a thirty-six-year-old practitioner, members were busy ensuring their individual and family's safety and survival. However, as soon as April 2011, members agreed on carrying on the tradition, also for the sake of encouraging the local community after the disaster (*genkizuke* 元気づけ) and in response to numerous locals who called on troupe members to continue the venerable tradition. Given the extent of the disaster, members had discussed whether it was appropriate to perform the dance at all. However, when the twenty-two troupe members of the preservation group met to exchange their views about the future of their local performance art, they uniformly agreed on the necessity of making a contribution to local recovery by carrying on the tradition and to provide their fellow residents with emotional support (*kokoro no yoridokoro* 心の拠り所).¹ In late May, they collected all the masks and costumes that had survived the disaster and encouraged their fellow residents by staging the kagura. Since then, the preservation group has performed in many places outside of Ogatsu, including the Tokyo National Theater and Kamakura. Despite the above-mentioned archival evidence that the Ogatsu kagura has been exposed to secularization throughout its history, some members have expressed their doubts about a secularization and commercialization of the tradition, arguing that the essence of the Ogatsu kagura is entirely religious in nature and should not be adapted to other purposes. According to the vice chairman of the preservation group, "Since the kagura is something divine ... it is not really appropriate as a showpiece of tourism ... the kagura itself belongs to the kami ... so it is not something that can be performed anywhere ... this time the disaster occurred, so we now do it to appeal to people but [...]."

Another group member shares the view that this traditional dance "is basically not something that should be displayed to people" (interview on 23 July 2013). Another practitioner refers to the necessity of ensuring its continuity given the six-hundred-year-old history of the tradition. He remarks that going somewhere to perform the dance and adapting to the needs of others in doing so is not something envisaged originally. He argues that the atmosphere of the festival in which the *kagura* takes place is important, but that he also considers it as a means of self-cultivation and a means of communicating with the region (interview on 8 May 2012). The broad range of meanings contained in engaging in the dance as well as the intricate relation between clinging on to past practices and the move towards change is evident from these observations.

As for membership, officially, the group is open to anyone registered as a resident of Ogatsu. However, conversations with group members have shown



FIGURE 2. Volunteers and locals during “event” kagura.

that most individuals engaging in the association have family connections with the tradition that reach back generations. This system of membership that borders on the hereditary may account for the reluctance to accept change among some practitioners. The resistance to change, insistence on the integrity and privacy of folk performing arts, and protectiveness of local traditions seems common and has been described in previous research (HASHIMOTO 2003; THOMPSON 2014). However, other troupe members hold that in the extraordinary circumstances after the disaster, they need to make some concessions to a larger public as they have received generous nationwide support. One troupe member thoughtfully observes,

There are some events that have hardly anything to do with kagura—we decline invitations to such events, events that do not have any religious function (*shinji* 神事). Personally I believe that kagura is principally not something to be displayed to people. We are making efforts to perform not only in a closed environment but also to ensure some degree of openness.

For example, an invitation to perform in the Ishinomaki Grand Hotel for the entertainment of local parliamentarians was declined on the grounds that such a performance is not compatible with *shinji*. A member points out that the group has already made considerable concessions but there are limits to the extent the group can open up performances. The above statement shows the ongoing process of negotiation in the group between the need for change and resistance to adaptation. Kodani has pointed out that after the disaster, the issue to whom the

Ogatsu Hōin Kagura belongs has featured among kagura practitioners given the increasing number of performances to nonlocal audiences (KODANI 2014, 76).

In this article, I discuss the actual impact that the disaster has had on kagura practices and shifting notions of the function and meaning of kagura. In doing so, I share the understanding of ritual as a creative process as previously defined by GEERTZ (1973, 412–54), TAMBIAH (1979), and BELL (1997). I would like to refer to Bell’s poignant description here: “Hence, ritual as a performative medium for social change emphasizes human creativity and physicality: ritual does not mold people; people fashion rituals that mold their world” (BELL 1997, 73). The ongoing interaction between the ritual and ritual participants as a reflection of their environment and as a means to shape their environment also applies to the case of the Ogatsu Hōin Kagura.

Referring to the notion of “emplacement” coined by Satsuki Kawano, I argue that the disaster has expanded the range of meaning of kagura performances beyond sacred rituals to communication between the living and dead, prayers for reconstruction, expressions of gratitude for help received after the disaster, signs of revitalizing the community, and integration of residents and volunteers from all over Japan. KAWANO defines emplacement as two processes: (1) collecting and guiding of objects and bodies according to culturally defined and socially generated environments; (2) in so doing, creating and maintaining culturally defined and socially generated environments as they collect objects and bodies in a culturally specific way (2005, 55).

I contend that emplacement or inscribing meaning into physical space takes place here in three ways: first, the dead are emplaced by the living—that is, kagura serves as an instrument to connect with previous generations. Second, those who have moved away and come back for a limited period to take part in temporary festivities are emplaced by those remaining in the village; in this way, kagura provides a forum for reconstructing a lost community. Third, nonlocals (mostly volunteers) are emplaced by residents through the framework of the kagura. Post-3.11 performances provide a forum for social interaction to a group of heterogeneous individuals from across Japan who would otherwise not come together.

POST 3.11 KAGURA: FROM FESTIVAL KAGURA TO “EVENT” KAGURA?

Festival kagura has been on the decrease ... so far, we have not had the custom of going to places and performing the kagura. But [after 3.11] there have been invitations from all over Japan and we try to accept them, but of course all of us have our own jobs [apart from the kagura].

Whereas some members deny that major changes have taken place since March 2011, the majority indicate that the kagura has undergone a transformation—like the observation above by a member of the Ogatsu Kagura Preservation Group. First of all, the fact that 90 percent of the physical environment has been destroyed obviously means that the local community has been dispersed. After

all, a large part of the residents, especially those with children who need to attend schools, have moved away. Thus, kagura performances have taken on the role of uniting people who have moved elsewhere, but come back to their hometown for a brief visit. An eighteen-year-old kagura practitioner who usually lives in Yokohama for professional reasons but comes back for performances described it as his “treasure.” He said that not a day goes by on which he does not think of it even if he lives somewhere else. When he is at home by himself, he thinks about the dances, sometimes watching performances on YouTube. He said his fascination with the dance started when he encountered the kagura club in lower high school at the age of fifteen. For him, performing the kagura for the kami is what is most important to him, even if the kagura takes place during festivities. A practitioner in his early sixties who works as a fisherman and has forty years of kagura experience said that since the disaster, he is more conscious of the audience gaze. He observed that kagura is not only about performing by himself only. He thinks that practitioners’ attitude has changed, pointing out that engaging in the dance is not merely about the joy of festivities or personal liking anymore but it is much deeper and the responsibility heavier now. He does not think that the essence of the dance has changed, but the attitudes of those engaging in it have.

A troupe member in his early forties stated that he considers practicing the dance as part of his life. He would like to dedicate more time to it but he needs to earn money. He said that he does not dislike his present job as a *yakisoba* cook which he took on after the disaster since he had to give up his original profession in fisheries; but he would like to have more time available to educate younger practitioners to pass on the tradition. Since the precincts of the shrine where the kagura used to take place have been washed away by the tsunami, the group has moved the performance sites to temporary stages constructed in front of private houses called *miyamori* or shrine precincts. For example, one of the performances I attended in spring 2012 took place on such a temporary stage in front of a private home in the municipality of Osu. This location of the stage provided a rather family-like atmosphere to the whole event, with local children standing at the bottom of the stage watching and residents even climbing on stage. There were interactions of various kinds occurring between the kagura practitioners and the audience. At another kagura performance in a tiny hamlet, many guests had brought their bento lunch boxes since the performance lasted for five hours or longer. Most people in the audience knew one another, exchanging amicable greetings, and the entire atmosphere was familial. When I was shivering after sitting outside for several hours, my neighbor kindly offered me a blanket. But this sense of familiarity and warmth also pervades the relations between kagura practitioners. One early spring morning, I sat next to one of the preservation group members who was in the midst of preparing a bamboo stick for a performance of the dance on the shrine compounds of a small hamlet in the mountains when another member arrived. Despite the sense of festive playfulness, *joie de vivre*, and entertainment during performances, a strong sense of dedication to the kami deities was also palpable (see FIGURE 3). This coexistence of secular and sacred



FIGURE 3. Warding off evil from the local audience.

elements is in accordance with previous research (AVERBUCH 1995b, 243), which has cogently described “Japanese religiousness as a syncretistic blend of, mainly, Shinto, Buddhist, and folk religious traditions and rituals that tend to intermingle with (and are sometimes difficult to distinguish from) secular activities in their daily lives” (ROEMER 2010, 492; BLACKER 1999).

ANCESTOR VENERATION, MEMORIAL SERVICES,
PRAYERS FOR RECOVERY, CULTIVATION OF THE SELF

As indicated by the above citation of one member that the deceased chairman is watching them from the sky, kagura practitioners clearly feel a sense of obligation towards their ancestors and those who have died in the disaster. But even before the disaster, practicing the traditional ritual dance was perceived as being contextualized in the wider framework of past and present in the sense that practicing members perform in awe and in imitation of ancestors as a sense of respect for something that has been passed on as a result of the efforts of ancestors. Members see themselves as part of a long-term relation with ancestors and future generations (interview with member, 23 July 2013). This is why more senior practitioners command respect since they are seen as “repositories of embodied knowledge and skill” (MOORE and CAMPBELL 2009, 229). Troupe members who have joined relatively recently humbly make fun of themselves as “absolute beginners,” although they have practiced for more than ten years and have grown up with the

kagura from early childhood since their fathers or grandfathers were involved in the tradition. But since the disaster, clearly kagura has been ascribed the meaning of mourning, paying one's respects to those who perished or, simply, rejuvenation. A similar expansion of functions has occurred with other traditional performing arts as well. According to HASHIMOTO (2012b), a tiger dance (*toramai* 虎舞) musician lost his mother and sixteen-year-old daughter in the 3.11 tsunami. He remained overcome with grief but as he knew that his daughter had loved it when he played the flute, he began to play again several months later, shedding tears as he played. Originally the *toramai* flute was not played for the deceased, but in the context of the recovery efforts after 3.11, it took on aspects of a memorial service. Hence the kagura could be perceived as a means of emplacing individuals (and individuals emplacing themselves) in a long-term sequence of generations. This sense of emplacement is not limited to a sense of responsibility to carry on the tradition but also applies to normative ideas: one member narrated that his ideal of practicing the kagura is the way his grandfather performed, although he never had a chance to see him for himself, but only heard episodes from his sensei who had been instructed by his grandfather. In other words, oral transmission plays an outstanding role and ancestor worship constitutes a source of normativity for kagura practitioners. Put differently, the practice of kagura has both the dimension of a ritual dedicated to and directed to kami as well as a medium of interaction with ancestors carrying normative connotations.

Furthermore, troupe members also imply that engaging in the Shinto dance carries the dimension of a dynamic process of self-transformation through perseverance and cultivation of the self. Practitioners describe their engagement as a daily effort and kagura as a lifelong process of learning. Troupe members say that learning the dance in its entirety is not something that can be mastered in one or two years, but that it takes all your life. Such phrases suggest that practicing the dance can be categorized as “serious leisure” (STEBBINS 2007), such as the tea ceremony, traditional Japanese archery, Noh theater (MOORE 2013), and the like. For example, one member of the preservation group in his mid-thirties, who usually works in the municipal office in Ishinomaki, described in an interview how engaging in the kagura dance after the disaster had resulted in “reducing his ego.” Another member, who has practiced for more than ten years, mentions the need for a certain degree of self-management in order to be physically and mentally fit for practicing the Shinto dance. The vice chairman, who is in his early seventies, also narrates that he walks for one hour everyday to maintain his weight in order to ensure his physical fitness for the kagura dance. A member in his early forties describes his engagement with kagura as an extension of a hobby but something that is close to his purpose in life. He emphasizes the importance of the discipline of working on oneself as a kagura practitioner (*kagurashi* 神楽士) everyday, including the practice of certain movements in one's daily routine. For example, he keeps drumming rhythms while driving the car and mentions the importance of “image training”—that is, imagining himself playing different roles.

THE IMMATERIALITY OF MATERIAL LOSS

As mentioned above, a considerable part of research into folk performing arts such as kagura dances has been concerned predominantly with material aspects. I have also pointed out that intangible aspects such as the immediate practice and transmission of kagura at the grassroots level remains largely unexplored. Strikingly enough, one of the members indicated that the loss of kagura equipment due to the tsunami was difficult in the intangible rather than tangible sense:

Of course the fact that the costumes were gone was a shock, but not so much because of the loss of the material, but because all kinds of memories were contained in the material—immaterial in the material as it were (interview with member, 23 July 2013).

In other words, the masks, costumes, and other equipment were appreciated mostly for the memories connected to them rather than their physical, that is, material, value (although the shrine priest's statement at the beginning of this article also refers to the tangible loss). In the wake of 3.11, the group received an offer by a craftsman from Kanagawa Prefecture who had been so moved by a performance of the Ogatsu Hōin Kagura that he offered to reproduce the masks. Whereas the group has expressed its deep gratitude for this kindness, without which the group could not have resumed its activities so fast, members such as the shrine priest at the beginning of this article have also indicated that the atmosphere of the masks is entirely different, which testifies to the intangibility of material items.

Last but not least, the demographic decline in Ogatsu in the wake of the disaster both by death and relocation means that the hamlet has faced the problem of a lack of people to carry the portable shrines during festivals. This is why in the spring of 2012 the festival in Tachihama, Ogatsu, could only be carried out with the help of numerous nonlocal volunteers from across Japan. The sudden influx of newcomers to time-honored traditions that were strongly attached to the local community in the past has inevitably inscribed an entirely new sense of atmosphere and meaning to the kagura. Volunteers followed the exact instructions they received from the village elders. Some of them had been to Ogatsu repeatedly before the festival to volunteer and were asked for help by the locals. At the beginning of the ritual, there was an eery sense of tension in the air—an interplay between feelings of insecurity by the volunteers that they may not carry out all the instructions correctly and worries by the residents that the dignity of the kagura could be affected by nonlocal involvement. Carrying the *mikoshi* palanquin down the steep hill from the shrine to the coast was a delicate task (see FIGURE 4). Given that, some residents were naturally skeptical about nonlocals not familiar with the village traditions taking part in the festival. Although many of the volunteers had been to Ogatsu previously, it was the first time for them to help in a local festival. According to the vice chairman of the preservation group, volunteers were careful to keep a low profile during the entire event, confining their contribution



FIGURE 4. Nonlocal volunteers and locals carrying the palanquin.

to carrying the palanquin and following the instructions of villagers. Despite the skepticism and worry about nonlocal participation, there was a sense of dynamic exuberance during the procession from the shrine down to the coastline. After the procession arrived at the coastline, the kagura was staged by the bay and local delicacies from the ocean served to everyone, regardless of age or origin; by that time, the tension had dissolved into relief and exuberance. There was an overwhelming, if entirely novel sense of *matsuri* about this, which provided the kagura with a genuine meaning of a life-strengthening rite of rejuvenation. Volunteers mentioned the sense of reward and feeling of satisfaction they felt when locals expressed their gratitude towards them.

SUBJECTIVE AGENCY IN LIEU OF AUTHENTICITY

To sum up, the earthquake and tsunami have led to an expansion of kagura functions: not only has it enforced ties between deceased practitioners, residents and the living, but it also has assumed a meaning of reenforcing ties with residents, who have moved away and are coming back temporarily as well as integrating nonlocal volunteers who help to sustain the kagura. The emergence of a new culture of festival kagura as embodied by the Tachihama event paradoxically comprises a sense of elevation, secular pleasure, and social interaction all wrapped into one. While some preservation group members may object to what they perceive as an inappropriate secularization of the kagura, I contend that it is exactly this change which sustains the relevance of such performing arts. Here I draw on Hashimoto's argument of the "authenticity of practitioners" shaping the relevance of performing arts. Hashimoto argues that rigid adherence to past patterns limits the creativity of the performers, quoting one informant as saying that "[i]f we did [our ritual] the same as in the old days, it would gradually die out" (HASHIMOTO 1996, 186). In his analysis of the 1992 Festival Law which promotes the exploitation of folk performing arts as tourist attractions, Hashimoto suggests considering



FIGURE 5. Kagura as community event for all generations.

“folk performing arts not as authentic cultural phenomena existing as real entities, but rather as cultural phenomena that emerge through tourism—in other words as a kind of tourist culture. By paying attention to practitioners’ sensations, I intend to de-center the perspective that views folk performing arts as authentic cultural phenomena” (HASHIMOTO 2003, 228). Bell equally advocates the agency of practitioners by invoking the notion of ritual practice as self-interested appropriation, which affords its participants some flexibility in determining the terms of their engagement (BELL 1992). Despite some skepticism about secularization and worries about what impact changes may have on the sacred nature of the tradition, the majority of practitioners concede the necessity of adapting to new demands that have arisen since 3.11. Participant observation and interviews with kagura practitioners have displayed the broad range of motives of why individuals engage in the kagura and how they perceive the meaning of the tradition since the Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami. Fieldwork has shown kagura practitioners being torn between the need for change and a reluctance to accept what some view as “inappropriate” secularization. Nevertheless, I argue that the acceptance of nonlocal actors as participants in community festivities and other forms of pragmatism in the face of a rapidly aging population and depopulation enforced by the disaster indicate a graduate move towards adaptation even in conservative hamlets such as Ogatsu. The chairman of the preservation group states that the number of occasions for the group to perform at shrine compounds has decreased considerably. He contends that making compromises and performing “outside,” that is, beyond the community and environs and at occasions that are not strictly sacred, is necessary to ensure the continuity of the tradition (interview conducted 9 May 2012). Similarly, another experienced member hints at the process of negotiation when he mentions that group members are presently making efforts to find a compromise between the sacred nature of the kagura and more tourist appropriations. In this sense, on the basis of the findings obtained during fieldwork, I would argue that

the authenticity of the Ogatsu Hōin Kagura resides exactly in such novel forms that have been shaped by emerging circumstances as a result of demographic changes before and after the disaster, and these then help to sustain its continuity in contemporary society and are seen as relevant by its practitioners.

NOTE

1. FUKUSHIMA (2003) explored the function of kagura as a means of emotional support after the occurrence of the disaster, specifically the 1995 Kobe earthquake, and showed how it can provide a source of respect, life purpose, identity, sense of belonging, self-respect, and the opportunity to express feelings for individuals who had been traumatized by disasters. MASAOKA (2012) and HASHIMOTO (2012b) described how folk performing arts may serve as a means of providing continuity to local citizens whose relations with their surroundings have been ruptured.

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