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“Dance of the Herons” (*sagimai*) of Tsuwano: A well-preserved medieval performing art

Luise Kahlow

The Agency of Cultural Affairs first classified the Tsuwano *sagimai* as an Intangible Folk Cultural Property in 1973, and then as an *Important* Intangible Folk Cultural Property in 1994. This recognition has strongly encouraged its preservation. Although performed for the Emperor in 2014, it has nevertheless gained little attention in the academic world. This article hence undertakes an introductory survey of issues relating to the performance practice and preservation of the *sagimai*. It represents a new, comprehensive approach, based on former research, examination of visual historic materials, and my own fieldwork. Information obtained during interviews in July 2012 with the dancer Nagata Jōji and three members of the preservation committee (*honzonkai* 保存会), Yoshinaga Yasuo (head), Inomura Mitsuo (former dancer) and Kurisu Yukimasa (head of secretariat and parishioners) provides insights into the preservation practice and cultural meaning of the dance today.

“Dance of the Herons” (*sagimai*) of Tsuwano:



Figure 1 *Sagimai* in Tsuwano 27.7.2014.

Sagimai in Tsuwano

Tsuwano is a small city in southwest Shimane prefecture that was formerly home to the Yoshimi samurai clan and feudal lords such as the Kamei. The *sagimai* is performed as part of Tsuwano's annual Gion festival. July 20 is the date of the *togyo* 渡御: the *shintai* 神体 (sacred object) is transferred in a portable shrine (*mikoshi* 神輿) from its place of enshrinement to its temporary lodgings for the duration of the festival (*otabisho* お旅所). The *kangyo* 還御, or journey back to the shrine, is undertaken on July 27, the last day of the festival. On these two days, two men in white heron costumes, with heron heads and plumage, dance in circles around each other at certain places in the city. They are accompanied by flutes, drums, gongs and singers. Walking around the dancers, two rod wielders (*bōfuri* 棒振り) with fuzzy red wigs wave their



Figure 2 The parade with portable shrine 27.7.2016.

rods to keep bad spirits away. Behind the herons two drum dancers (*kakko mai*) perform their dance. The whole group is protected by ceremonial guards (*keigo-gata* 警固方). Apart from these performers, there is also a parade with a portable shrine (*mikoshi junkō* 神輿巡行), a lion dance (*shishi mai* 獅子舞), a Shinto deity with a *tengu*-mask, men carrying halberds, and other elements.

Most academic research on the *sagimai* was conducted and published in the last century. It is now apparent that this research includes some misinterpretations, and that it overlooked a number of important issues, thus making comprehensive revision necessary. The following is a short survey of important local researchers who adopted a primarily folkloristic or ethnological approach.

As a member of the family of shrine keepers at the Tsuwano Yasaka

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Shrine, Kuwabara Hidetake (1898–1945) was hence likely to have had access to old handwritten sources, some of which have gone missing in the succeeding years. His 1930 article gives us an interesting insight into pre-war interpretations of the *sagimai* perhaps forgotten in post-war Tsuwano. This article is one of several published in the journal *Shimane hyōron* on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the founding of Tokyo’s Meiji Shrine in November 1930, when the *sagimai* was among the performing arts staged at the shrine. This performance attracted the famous ethnologist Orikuchi Shinobu (1887–1953), who records his impressions and thoughts on the *sagimai*—some rather unique, if hard to verify—in his “Notes on the history of Japanese performing arts” (1957).

From the 1960s, several approaches were made to the topic by local historians. Okimoto Tsunekichi¹ (1902–91) was probably the best-informed; he collected and copied much valuable material also used by later researchers. His work (1962) provides a sound basic reference, especially with regard to the *tōya* (head 頭屋 or shift 当屋) system and its history.

Following the lead of these pioneers, Ishizuka Takatoshi² (1919–2014), Katō Takahisa³ (1934–), and Yatomi Izu⁴ (1929–) published introductory articles on the *sagimai*. Ishizuka’s work (1962) is notable for its detailed description of the dance movements, including a dance step diagram. Although a good introduction to the topic, his work suffers from some misquotation and misinterpretation of historical sources.

Katō’s article (1968) covers history, with quotations and interpretation of old records, a detailed description of the elements of the performance, with an explanation of the costumes, dance formation and how the dance

is done today (with a sketch of the layout of the performers). Furthermore, he examines the heron as a living bird, even citing an ornithologist in what is quite a unique approach. Though not an expert on the *sagimai*, he nevertheless wrote a well-researched article on the topic.

Probably most widely known is Yatomi, who has contributed most to introducing the *sagimai* to the public. Anyone who visits Tsuwano will find his small book (1973) on sale throughout the city. He relies on the research mentioned above, including a description of the *tōya* system and an elaborated version of the dance diagram. He describes the costumes, introduces old sources mentioned in former research, and provides a transcription of the music of the *sagimai*. This formed the base for the revised transcription that I made using material collected during my fieldwork. Although Yatomi's work is widely available, it shows some methodical weaknesses and needs to be revised in some aspects.

In recent years, much research has been conducted on the history of the Gion festival. While there is no room for details here, mention should be made of two figures who study the historical sources of the Gion festival and associated performing arts, including, if tangentially, the *sagimai*: the ethnologist Yamaji Kōzō⁵ and the medieval historian Kawauchi Masayoshi.

Another connection between the Gion festival and the *sagimai* can be seen in the text of the *kyōgen* piece “The tea seller” (“Senjimon” 煎物), which has been studied by the well-known *kyōgen* researcher Inada Hideo (2007). The text of a song practiced in the piece for the float of the Gion festival in Kyoto shows surprising similarities to that of Tsuwano's *sagimai*, and will hence be examined in detail below.

“Dance of the Herons” (*sagimai*) of Tsuwano:

Information concerning the visual historic materials introduced in this article relies centrally on the work of the art historians Izumi Mari and Matthew P. McKelway. Two important works are examined. The first is “Festivals of the Twelve Months” (“Tsukinami sairei-zu (mohon)” 月次祭礼図 (模本), Tokyo National Museum), attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu (1434 – 1525), an artist of the Tosa school. *Tsukinami-e* depict activities associated with the months of the year. The “Festivals of the Twelve Months” is a copy of a lost pair of six-paneled screens that depict monthly activities in Kyoto. One of the pair shows the oldest depiction of the *sagimai* dance as part of the Gion festival.

The second work is a fan on the screen “Flowing Fans of Famous Sights in the Capital” (“Keiraku tsukinami fūzoku-zu senmen nagashi” 京洛月次風俗図扇面流, Kōenji, Kyoto) by Kanō Motonobu (1476 – 1559). This is a single screen with twenty-four fans showing famous places and monthly activities in Kyoto. The activities can be identified with a specific month. Screens of this type were highly valued (McKelway 2006, 242). A fan for the first month gives a detailed depiction of a performance at a New Year’s bonfire (*sagichō* 左義長)⁶, which closely resembles what we see in Tsuwano today. Izumi points out that the screen depicts Kyoto as it was in the 16th century, noting that the images were drawn after the Ōnin War (1467–77), probably by the middle of 1500s (Izumi 2006, 31).

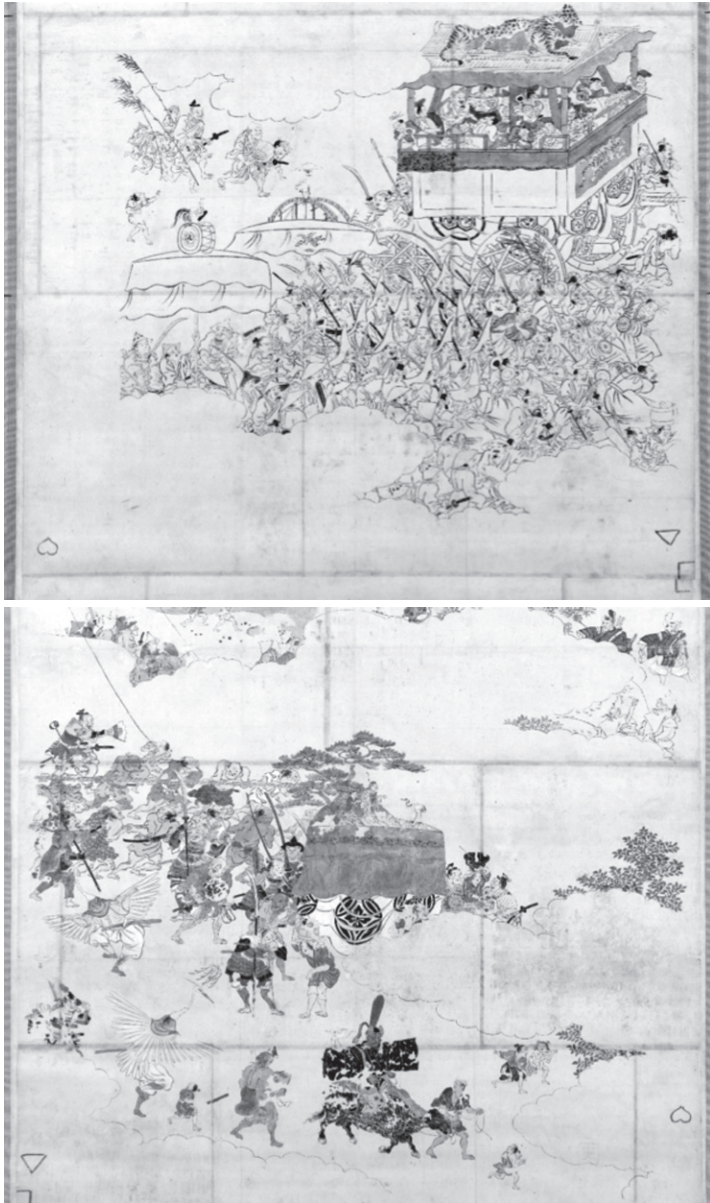


Figure 3 “Festivals of the Twelve Months”. A float with a *hayashi* and a *kasaboko*. Courtesy of TNM.

“Dance of the Herons” (*sagimai*) of Tsuwano:

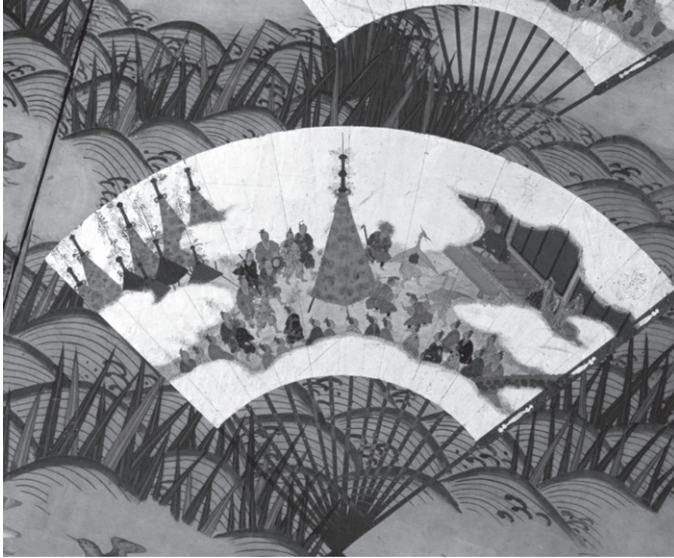


Figure 4 New Year's bonfire (*sagichō*) on the screen “Flowing Fans in the Capital” (Kōenji Kyoto).

Historical background

The *sagimai* dance originates in the Kyoto Gion festival, and was transmitted via Yamaguchi in southwest Honshu to neighboring Tsuwano. The Gion festival dates back to the early Heian period, or 9th century, when it was celebrated to placate evil spirits that were believed to bring pestilence to the people. It was originally financed by and carried out on the will of the court and aristocracy, who feared the revenge of disgraced persons who had met unnatural ends.

Nowadays, the Gion festival takes place annually from July 1 to 31 in the area around the Yasaka Shrine in Kyoto. Although many different rites are held during July, the highlights are parades on July 17 and 24, when elaborate floats are pulled by festival participants through the city district.

Most of the 33 floats are decorated with tapestries and life-size figures of historical personages.

The very first transmission of the Gion Shrine and its festival is said to have taken place under the rule of Ōuchi Hiroyo (?–1380), who controlled the western half of the Chūgoku region with its headquarters in Yamaguchi. Whether the *sagimai* was introduced at this time, however, is not clear (Yatomi 1973, 16).

The *sagimai* of the medieval Gion festival was performed by outcasts⁷ under the patronage of the weaver guild (*ōtoneri za* 大舎人座). The *ōtoneri* were a group of lower ranked bureaucrats⁸, who also formed a guild for manufacturing twilled fabrics. Participating in the Gion festival was a means of maintaining their status (Wakita 1980, 651–652). The *sagimai* was thus performed on behalf of the *ōtoneri* by the outcasts under a big heron (or magpie) umbrella called *kasasagi-boko* 笠鷺鉾／鶺鴒鉾 (Yamaji 2009, 108; Tai 2010, 5). The same performers can also be seen on the folding screen “Flowing Fans of Famous Sights in the Capital” performing a dance at the New Year’s *sagichō* (Yamaji 1988, 130; Izumi 2006, 34).

While the earliest reliable source mentioning the Yamaguchi *sagimai* dates from 1583⁹, it is possible that it might have already been introduced long before, by Ōuchi Norihiro in 1459, when he is known to have introduced the Gion festival (Yatomi 1973, 15). It was probably introduced to Tsuwano in 1542 under the rule of Yoshimi Masayori (1513–88). The story goes that his mother was especially eager to have the *sagimai* performed. As a protection from pestilence, Yoshimi adopted the dance from Yamaguchi when he married the daughter of Ōuchi Yoshioki (Kuwabara 1930, 46 et al.). Meanwhile, the *sagimai* of the Gion festival in

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Kyoto apparently vanished with the Ōnin War (Kawauchi 2012, 271–72).

After the Ōuchi clan was overthrown, the Yoshimi became vassals of the Mōri clan during the Warring States period (1467–1568). In 1600, Yoshimi Hiroyuki was defeated at the side of Mōri at the Battle of Sekigahara, and was forced to leave Tsuwano castle by Tokugawa Ieyasu. He fled to Hagi where he died shortly after. In 1601, Ieyasu designated Sakazaki Naomori the new ruler of Tsuwano. Due to the confusion of the war years, the *sagimai* was probably lost at this point, and there is no sign that Sakazaki revived it. Before long Sakazaki instigated a rebellious plot¹⁰ and was thus forced to commit suicide (Kuwabara 1930, 48–49 et al.).

The Kamei family ruled over Tsuwano from 1617 to 1871. The culturally informed Kamei Koremasa (1617–81) is said to have given two men¹¹ the task of reintroducing the *sagimai* from Kyoto to Tsuwano. The *tōya* system was established in the middle of the 17th century, with the result that the *sagimai* has been transmitted down to the present (Kuwabara 1930, 49–51 et al.).

The *sagimai* today

Several preparatory events are celebrated in advance of the dance performance. The festival as a whole is carried out under the supervision and patronage of the *tōya*.

June 30: Preparations at the shrine office. During a ceremony called *wakuguri-sai* 輪くぐり祭 at the shrine, people pass through a ring made of the roots of *Imperata cylindrica* (*kaya* 茅).

July 15: Decorating the big zelkova tree with a braided straw rope (*shimenawa* 注連縄). Consultations on the ceremony.

July 16 to 19: Dance training.

July 19: An altar (*saidan* 祭壇) is installed at the *tōya* house (nowadays the community center), on which the *sagimai* costumes are placed. Umbrellas (actually “umbrella halberds” or “parasols,” *kasaboko* 笠鉾) are erected in front of the community center. In the evening, a man beating a drum walks through the city to inform its residents about the festival (*furedaiko* 触れ太鼓). The text of his message, *tōya e gojare, furedaiko o tatakashō* 頭屋へご座れ、触れ太鼓をたたかしょう, indicates that it was originally a call for participants to gather at the *tōya*'s house.

July 20: The *togyo*, or transfer of the deity from the shrine to the *otabisho*. The *tōya* and his guards go to the *otabisho*, where the dancers are waiting. Two requests for them to dance are refused; the third time, the dancers walk half way to the community center, where they are met, and agree to dance. At 2 pm, everyone involved in the performance gathers at the community center, where they take seats in a stipulated order. The heron dancers, formerly of low strata of the social order¹², are seated at the head (*kamiza* 上座), in front of the altar where the costumes and offerings are being sanctified. The *tōya* sits at the opposite end of the table and reads out his greetings. After that, salted mackerel (*sashisaba* 刺し鯖) and rice wine (*omiki* お神酒) are served. The *tōya* of the year asks the dancers to perform.

Meanwhile, elementary school girls perform a cute modern version of the heron dance (*kosagi odori* 小鷺踊り), dancing through the city. This dance was created in 1958 for the participation of children.

At 3 pm the first performance of the dance is begun in front of the community center. They go on to perform two versions of the dance, long

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and short, at different places in the city.

Community Center 15:00 – Yasaka Shrine 15:15 (Here they join the portable shrine parade; the parade walks directly to the *otabisho* without stopping. The parade thus arrives at the *otabisho* earlier than the *sagimai* dance group.) – Karakuen park 15:40 – Elementary school 15:50 – Sara-no-ki shop 16:05 – Furuhashi brewery 16:15 – Takatsuya Itō Hakuseki-dō pharmacy 16:25 – Post office 16:35 – Yoshinaga rice shop 16:40 – *Otabisho* 16:45 – Community Center 17:10.

The portable shrine is carried in the parade from the shrine to the *otabisho*, where it is lodged during the festival until July 27. The dance group and the parade take different routes to the *otabisho*.

July 26: Ceremony for the next *tōya* (*maikomi-tōya* 舞込み頭屋). The parishioners (*ujiko* 氏子), representatives of the parishioners (*sōdai* 総代) and the priest of Yasaka Shrine gather at the *otabisho* to hand the role of the present *tōya* to the one of the following year.

July 27: The return (*kangyo*). Again starting from the community center, the *sagimai* dancers proceed to the *otabisho*.

Community Center 15:00 – Sara-no-ki shop 15:05 – Furuhashi brewery 15:15 – Takatsuya Itō Hakuseki-dō pharmacy 15:25 – Post office 15:35 – Yoshinaga rice shop 15:40 – *Otabisho* 15:45 (Here they join the portable shrine parade and go back to Yasaka Shrine together.) – Yasaka Shrine 16:10 (After their performance, the present *tōya* hands his hat over to the *maikomi-tōya*) – Community Center 17:20.



Figure 5 Above: Community center, below: *Kosagi odori* 27.7.2012.

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The heron dancers wear a white costume with red trousers. They bear white plumage made of long strips of cypress wood (*hinoki* 檜), which are struck together to produce a clapping sound. It weighs approximately 11 kg. Their heads support a heron head with a long neck, decorated with white paper to represent feathers. The female heron’s mouth is closed while the male’s is open. The movements of the two dancers are almost the same, except for the final pose, where the male puts its wing on the female. As noted above, two versions of the dance are performed, according to the rank of the venue. Three men from Tsuwano take turns as dancers; one debuted as recently as 2012. The demanding nature of the role means that they retire at sixty, thereafter functioning as instructors of the next generation.

While the dancers perform their dance, they are accompanied by instrumental music and song. The text of the song gives us a hint as to the meaning of the performance (dashes indicate vowels elongated in the song line).

| | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>Hashi no ue ni ori-ta-</i> | On the bridge |
| <i>To-ri wa nan do-ri</i> | What birds have landed? |
| <i>Ka-wasasa-gi- no-</i> | The herons (magpies) |
| <i>Ka-wasasa-gi- no-</i> | The herons (magpies) |
| <i>*Ya- ka-wasasagi</i> | Yah, the herons (magpies) |
| <i>Sa-gi ga ha-shi u[o] wa-taita</i> | The herons have built a bridge |
| <i>Sa-gi ga ha-shi u[o] wa-taita</i> | The herons have built a bridge |
| <i>Shigure no a-me ni nure</i> | In the drizzling rain they got wet |
| <i>To-ri to-ri* (repeat) (ya-)</i> | The birds, the birds! |

The term *kawasasagi* is problematical; if, as Katō argues (1968, 57; 59), the “*wa*” is simply a prolongation of the “*a*” of the previous syllable, it then takes the form *kasasagi*. This can be interpreted in three ways:

- magpie (*kasasagi* 鶺鴒);
- heron (*sagi* 鷺) with an umbrella or (sedge) hat (*kasa* 傘/笠) (Baird 2001, 113);
- heron with a lot of nape plumes (entry “*kasasagi*,” Shinpen Daigenkai 1982, 406), a type of bird known as the little egret.

Yamaji (2009, 109) points out that this text echoes a passage relating to Kyoto’s medieval Gion festival, to be found in the *Kanmon nikki* 看聞日記:¹³

Kasasagi ame no naka mairi, nurenure mai, sono kyō ari 笠鷺雨中
参、ぬれぬれ舞、有其興。

The *kasasagi* gathered in the rain and got wet while dancing, which was interesting.

Yamaji is of the opinion that the song sung at that time was probably the one preserved in Tsuwano. The fact that the dance was performed in the rain on this occasion is probably why Prince Sadafusa added this entry to his diary (Yamaji 1988, 128–29; Yamaji 2009, 109).

There are several different kinds of herons, but the one that comes closest to that depicted in the *sagimai* is the little egret (*Egretta garzetta*). It is widespread in Japan, frequenting marshes and wet rice fields. It has a white plumage and an elongated sinuous neck, long black legs, and a dark stabbing bill. During the breeding season, adults develop two long slender

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nape plumes and a beautiful gauzy plumage around the breast and back, which may have given rise to the name *kasasagi*, ‘heron with a hat.’ The skin between the eyes becomes a bright red or blue color (BirdLife International 2016; Wildscreen Arkive 2013). The costume, as introduced above, imitates the nape plume, and perhaps also the red of the neck, which can be found in the color of the trousers. Misumi states that the pose taken by the heron dancers at the end of their dance recalls the courtship dance of the real heron (Misumi 1995, 176). Not only Misumi shares this impression; the heron dancer Nagata Jōji interprets the dance as a prayer for an abundance of children (interview, July 22, 2012).

According to Orikuchi, the heron brings harm to the fields, so the people felt a need to placate it, making it in turn a symbol of good fortune (Orikuchi 1957, 367). In fact, it feeds primarily on small fish, also consuming bivalves, crustaceans, and other invertebrates, but not young rice plants (Wildscreen Arkive 2013). While eliminating these pests, however, it may harm small rice plants as it wades through the fields (Isshiki 1981, 59–60). This makes the heron an ambiguous creature. Perhaps this is why, despite its beauty and association with longevity, the motif of the heron rarely appears in Japanese art. It may also be due to its Japanese name, *sagi*, being a homophone for “fraud” or “false pretenses” (Baird 2001, 112).

In contrast, the magpie is a symbol of good fortune in China and Korea (Hooper 2008; Kuroda 2010). Interestingly, the bird is not indigenous to Japan. Although it can now be seen in parts of Kyushu, this is the result of its introduction to Japan in Edo times. It seems that it was introduced from Korea to Kyushu, especially to Fukuoka and Saga, by

feudal lords of the early 17th century (Eguchi and Kubo 1992, 32). Knowledge of the bird, however, goes back centuries, since it plays an important symbolic role in the mythology of the Tanabata festival (Baird 2001, 113), which was introduced from China in ancient times.

Tanabata is the story of two lovers, Hikoboshi (the Cowherd Star, Altair) and Orihime (the Weaver Star, Vega), who are usually separated from each other by the Milky Way. They can only meet once a year, on the seventh day of the seventh month (lunar calendar), but only if it does not rain. If it rains, magpies come and spread their wings to build a bridge on which they can meet. The story of the Weaver Star merged with native legends in Japan, and the people imagined her as a celestial maiden who wove cloth for the gods (Tanabata-tsu-me, abbr. Tanabata). The keywords “rain,” “magpie(/heron),” “bridge” and “wet,” as well as the courtship dance itself, come together in the Tanabata legend and *sagimai* dance (and its song text). I believe that, in sponsoring the *sagimai*, the weaver guild (*ōtoneri za*) invoked the goddess of weaving in prayer for a good market for their products.

Another link to the song text is found in the *kyōgen* piece “The tea seller” (“Senjimonō”). The play is included in the oldest record of *kyōgen* plots, the Tenshō-bon (1578), named after the Tenshō year-period (1573–92). While the oldest recorded performance dates to 1603, it was evidently written in medieval times, probably under the influence of other pieces (Inada 2007, 13; 16).

A float committee of the Gion festival gathers to rehearse the music for their float, also discussing how to build the magpie float (Inada 2007, 14–15). A medicinal tea seller arrives and tries to sell his tea, disrupting

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the rehearsal. He agrees to adjust his pitch to the song of the float committee, praising his different kinds of tea. After a while the head of the committee dons a waist drum (*kakko* 羯鼓) and starts practicing his float dance. The tea seller ties one of the plates he uses to roast his tea to his waist and imitates him. In the end, he falls and breaks it, but acts happy to have gained more plates (Kenny 1999, 231).

Inada cites the song practiced by the neighboring people for the music on the float as it is performed today in the Izumi and Ōkura schools:

Shigure no ame ni nureji tote, sagi ga hashi o wataita, kasasagi no hashi o wataitari ya sō yo no 時雨の雨に濡れじとて、鷺が橋を渡いた、鶺鴒の橋を渡いたりやさうよの (Inada 2007, 13).

So as not to get wet in the drizzling rain, the herons built a bridge, it seems that [they] built a magpies' bridge. (Cf. “A sudden shower and I take shelter by crossing the Heron Bridge, by crossing the Magpie Bridge, Heigh ho!” [Kenny 1999, 231])

This song text is similar to that sung at Tsuwano, with the keywords “rain”, “wet”, “heron”, “magpie”, and “bridge.” Moreover, the setting of the play at the Gion festival and the musical accompaniment (*hayashi* 囃子) with a *kakko mai*¹⁴ link it strongly to what we see at the *sagimai* dance performance in Tsuwano today. Although historical details remain obscure, it is clear that a heron/magpie song was sufficiently well-known in the late 16th century to feature in a *kyōgen* play on Kyoto's Gion festival.

The elements

The *kakko mai* (also *kanko mai*) is known in a common form as a lion dance using an hourglass- or barrel-shaped drum, or *kakko shishi mai* 羯鼓獅子舞. Dances of this type are usually associated with prayers for rain (Lancashire 2013, 42) or a good harvest, and can be seen all around Japan.

In the case of the *sagimai*, the *kakko mai* is of a different type: two dancers with drums fixed to their hips perform their dance behind the heron dancers, while the *kakko* refers to the small barrel-drum they are carrying. The drum has two heads and diagonal tuning cords. It is only beaten symbolically.

The dancers wear a brocade vest, and beneath it a *kosode* 小袖, a short sleeved *kimono* with feathers printed on it. The trousers are a kind of colorful *hakama* 袴 with oval patterns. Their shoes are straw sandals (*zōri* 草履) with white socks (*tabi* 足袋), and on their heads they wear formal headgear called *kazaori-eboshi* 風折烏帽子, which was originally worn by court nobles.

Like the *bōfuri*, the *kakko mai* of Tsuwano can be found in the medieval Gion festival. Miyamoto Keizō states that the *kakko mai* (or *yatsubachi* 八撥) was a dance born in the Muromachi period. The drum usually appears as a set with a strung clapper, made of multiple pieces of wood strung onto a cord (*sasara* 簾 or *bin-zasara* 編木). It appears as an ensemble instrument of the *hayashi* accompaniment, and also as a solo instrument used for the *kakko mai* (Miyamoto 2012, 5–6).

On the folding screen “Festivals of the Twelve Months”¹⁵ we can see a *kakko mai* both on the float and on the ground. The drummers appear to be beating the drum with sticks; the depiction is very dynamic. Those on the

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ground wear a red wig and red *kosode*. Tai argues that the *kakko mai* of medieval times was more dynamic than the one we see today (Tai 2010, 43), and the depiction on the folding screen certainly supports this assertion.

Another depiction of a *kakko mai* can be found on the screen “Flowing Fans of Famous Sights in the Capital,” where it appears along with the *sagimai*, the *bōfuri* and the *hayashi* in a performance on the occasion of a *sagichō* in the garden of a noble’s residence (Izumi 2006, 34). This closely resembles what we see in Tsuwano today. The costumes of the *kakko mai* dancers have patterns in red, blue, and orange, and they wear a hat. Even though the costume differs in some details, it is much closer to the present one than those on the screen “Festivals of the Twelve Months.” Moreover, seen from the point of view of the audience, they dance closely behind the *sagimai* dancers, unlike on the screen “Festivals of the Twelve Months,” where the *kakko mai* dancers are on the float or in the crowd far behind the *sagimai* dancers. We might also note that there are only two dancers at the *sagichō*, but at least three on the “Festivals of the Twelve Months.”

Today we see a single child performing a *kakko mai* on the first float of the Gion festival, the Naginata-boko.¹⁶ In contrast, the *kakko mai* of Tsuwano is performed by adults on the ground. They follow almost the same rhythm as the heron dancers; they pull up their legs just when the heron performers do. When the heron dancers open up their plumage, the *kakko mai* performers either stand on their tiptoes, bow their upper body forward and move the sticks symbolically, or do little jumps.

Walking around the dancers, two rod wielders (*bōfuri*) with fuzzy red wigs wave their rods to keep bad spirits away. The term derives from the

stick (*bō* 棒) they wave (*furu* 振る; noun form *furi* 振り). They wear blue trousers, long red sleeves, and a short patterned coat. They carry a stick 150 cm in length and 4 cm in diameter in their hands. Blue and red paper strips are wrapped around the stick. People in Tsumano believe that someone who touches the stick or is stroked by it will fall ill or bring bad luck to his or her house (Kuwabara 1930, 53).



Figure 6 *Kakko mai* in Tsumano 27.7.2014.

“Dance of the Herons” (*sagimai*) of Tsuwano:

Many depictions of *bōfuri* with the *kakko mai* can be found on folding screens from the 16th and 17th century on. Surprisingly, there is no such depiction on the “Festivals of the Twelve Months.” In contrast we can find one *bōfuri* on the fan of the screen “Flowing Fans of Famous Sights in the Capital.” His costume is green and red; he has fuzzy red hair and carries the stick in his hand. Yagi Tōru thinks the medieval *bōfuri* formed a professional group similar to those formed by the *sagimai* and the *kakko mai* performers.¹⁷ As in the case of the *kakko mai*, the slight difference in appearance from what we see in Tsuwano today does not appear to be of particular significance.

Of the 33 floats of the contemporary Gion festival, there are only two *kasaboko*: the *ayagasa*hoko (or *ayagasaboko* 綾笠鉾), recognized by the characteristic cock on top of it, and the *shijō-kasaboko* 四条笠鉾. Both are



Figure 7 *Bōfuri* at Tsuwano 27.7.2014.

accompanied by *bōfuri*; the *bōfuri* of the *ayagashoko* display an acrobatic use of the stick, while the *shijō-kasaboko* is accompanied by children who perform an elegant dance with it. The former *kasaboko* was lost and revived numerous times in history; the performance we see today was reintroduced in 1979 and is preserved by the preservation committee “Miburokusai.” This group preserves other dances as well, and during the Gion festival takes the designation “Ayagashoko Hayashi-kata Hozonkai” for the *bōfuri* performance.¹⁸

In Tsuwano the *bōfuri* are adult males who walk in circles around the *sagimai* dancers, doing relatively simple movements in comparison with those of the Gion festival. As mentioned above, the effect of the whole closely resembles the depiction of the *bōfuri*, *sagimai*, and *kakko mai* found on the “Flowing Fans of Famous Sights in the Capital.” I believe it very likely that these were brought to Tsuwano as a set.

The group as a whole is protected by *keigo-gata*. They wear a stiff, sleeveless jacket, blue in color, and a long pleated skirt made from hemp or raw silk (*kamishimo* 袴) with the family crest of the Kamei. Beneath that they wear a white *kosode*. They wear flat, round sedge hats, and carry a bamboo stick in their hands.

Originally 13 halberds were carried by people at the festival, 12 of which were small and one big. Nowadays, the halberds are set up in front of the community center. Unfortunately, not all of the 13 halberds are preserved today. The small halberds are about 2.1 m tall and made of bamboo. They are covered with a dark cloth on which the Kamei family crest is printed. On the top there are small herons and a young pine made of wood. The big halberd is a little longer, about 2.7 m. At the top are a

“Dance of the Herons” (*sagimai*) of Tsuwano:

dark cloth with the Kamei family crest and a gold phoenix. Kuwabara states that the function of the halberds is to ward off impurity; the small halberds represent each month and the big halberd represents the whole year. It is believed to bring harm to the people if the big halberd is too heavy to be carried around (Kuwabara 1930, 52 et al.). The people of Tsuwano show concern about the fact that it would be better to carry the halberds around, but since there are not enough participants in the festival they have to be left standing where they are set up. Originally, halberds or umbrellas were an important element in the parade, a practice that derives from the medieval Gion festival.

The most important person is the *tōya*, the one who carries out the festival. Under the rule of the Yoshimi, this was a hereditary role taken by the head of the Hori family, Hori Kurobē (Kuwabara 1930, 51). The people in the city were expected to assist. The *tōya* system evolved after the brief interruption of the early 16th century. In time, the role of the *tōya* came to rotate among influential families. The function of the *tōya* was connected to the house, not to individual persons, so anyone who lived in the *tōya* residence, where the associated ceremonies were held, was obliged to carry out the festival and take responsibility for the event (Okimoto 1989, 446–47).



Figure 8 Halberds (*kasaboko*) with heron and phoenix 27.7.2016.

From the middle of Edo period, there were 12 houses in the town center (*honmachi* 本町) that carried out the obligation in rotation. The rest of the people living there were called *kumiko* 組子, and were affiliated with one of the 12 houses. Their task was to help the *tōya* with the festival. This relationship, similar to that of landlord and tenant, became untenable in 1872, when the feudal government was abolished. The *tōya* system itself collapsed in Taishō period (1912–26). After that, influential persons in the center of Tsumano took over the role of the *tōya* (Kuwabara 1930, 51–52 et al.).

This system was too heavy a burden for working people, and it was changed so that representatives of the parishioners of the Yasaka Shrine drew lots to determine the *tōya*. Today, the role of the *tōya* is rotated among 15 parishioners. To lighten the burden of the *tōya*, associated

“Dance of the Herons” (*sagimai*) of Tsuwano:

ceremonies are no longer held at private residences, but at the community center. Usually only men are appointed to the role.

The costume of the *tōya* takes the form of the formal attire of samurai, consisting of a brown kamishimo with a family crest of the Kamei over a white *kosode*. They wear a hat and a sword, and carry a stick as well.

The female priest Kuwabara Fumiko of the Yasaka Shrine carried out the ceremonies until last year (2015), and her duties have now been taken over by her grandson. Over the centuries, the Kuwabara shrine family has taken this role. The priest communicates with the gods and leads the whole ceremony, not only on the days of the *sagimai* performances but also during preparations.

With the *tōya* system, the Intangible Folk Property Law and the preservation committee, the *sagimai* is protected at multiple levels.

Conclusion and future prospects

The *sagimai* is a traditional performing art originating in medieval Kyoto, where it was lost after 1500, but is still well-preserved even today in Tsuwano. The performance of the *sagimai* was part of the Gion festival in Kyoto, and even today we can see a parade with a portable shrine in Tsuwano, even though the *sagimai* has developed into the main event.

My survey of former research has touched upon its strengths as well as points requiring revision. Examining the oldest surviving depictions of the *sagimai* in Kyoto (“Festivals of the Twelve Months” and “Flowing Fans of Famous Sights in the Capital”), we saw similarities with and differences from the performance in Tsuwano today. The existence of elements such as the *kakko mai* and the *bōfuri* in the Tsuwano *sagimai* suggests strongly

that it was introduced as a set in medieval times.

The song text displays a certain ambiguity with regard to the magpie/heron issue, leaving room for a range of interpretations. This flexibility makes it easier for each generation to find its own interpretation of the *sagimai* and thus a way to infuse meaning into it in order to pass it on to the next generation.

Effective transmission of the *sagimai* has been facilitated first by the *tōya* system, and second, more recently, by the existence of its *honzonkai* (preservation committee) and protection by law as an Intangible Folk Cultural Property, which regulates changes in its current state. In contrast, the creation of the new *kosagi odori* has fostered awareness of the city's cultural heritage among the younger generation.

There have, of course, been many changes. The meaning of the performance has shifted from protection from pestilence or prayers for good business to wishes for an abundance of children nowadays. There are no social strata as there used to be in the past, and there is no restriction on the descent of the participants in the performance. The scale of the festival has shrunk over time and now the heron halberds are only set in place and no longer carried. Still, as Nagata explains, there are many good reasons to join the *sagimai* troop, and it clearly builds ties within the community. Although the city faces problems common to other parts of rural Japan, such as decreasing numbers of children and the increasing isolation of the elderly, the festival functions to bring Tsuwano's community together. Even so, continuing preservation of the dance may require gaining the cooperation of people who have been excluded from its transmission until now, such as women and people from outside Tsuwano.

Footnotes

- ¹ Okimoto also collaborated in the biggest compilation on the history of Tsuwano (4 parts, 1976–2005). He won the Yanagita Kunio Prize in 1967.
- ² Ishizuka was born in Izumo, Shimane prefecture. As a student he heard a lecture of Yanagita Kunio and decided to undertake folklore research on his homeland.
- ³ Katō, born in Okayama, is a Shinto priest at Ikuta Shrine in Kobe, as well as a Shinto scholar and professor emeritus at Kobe Women’s University. He gained his doctorate in 1986 from Kokugakuin University with a thesis on Shinto in Tsuwano.
- ⁴ Yatomi was born in Masuda, the neighboring city of Tsuwano. Concerned about education in Tsuwano, he started writing about the history of Tsuwano as well as the famous 15th-century painter Sesshū.
- ⁵ Studying at Waseda University, Yamaji became a student of the ethnologist Honda Yasuji, famous for categorizing Japanese festivals. Under his supervision, Yamaji wrote his first article on the *sagimai* at a very young age, completing a work that is even today one of the best-researched and reliable sources on the *sagimai* (Honda; Yamaji 1974). Yamaji still visits Tsuwano occasionally and continues his research today.
- ⁶ *Sagichō* is New Year’s event that featured ritual bonfires and dancers wearing crane or heron costumes. It was originally restricted to the imperial house, court aristocracy, or the shogunate, and held on the 15th and 18th days of the first month (McKelway 2006, 32; 140). It can still be seen, even in remote places all around Japan.
- ⁷ We find a number of different terms, such as *eta* 穢多, *shōmoji* 声聞師 (a discriminatory term with slight variants in orthography and pronunciation), and *kitahata/kitabatake sanjo* 北畠散所. Izumi explains that the *sagimai* was associated with the *shōmoji* living in an area in Kyoto with the latter name (Izumi 2006, 34).
- ⁸ The *ōtoneri* were imperial attendants and thus stayed at the court overnight, and handled routine chores at festivals. To avoid the Ōnin War they fled to Nara and Sakai, Osaka, but came back to Kyoto after its conclusion. They settled in the Nishijin district in Kyoto, which is famous for fabrics (Toyoda 1977, 133; 140; Berry 1997, 331).
- ⁹ “Gion-e mainen junkin ninzu no koto” 祇園会毎年順勤人数之事 gives an overview of performers involved in the *sagimai* (Ishizuka 1962, 294; Yamaguchi-ken 2012, 845–47 et al.)
- ¹⁰ The Senhime incident. Naomori planned to capture Senhime (daughter of Tokugawa Hidetaka) in order to marry her, but failed.
- ¹¹ Two dates for this transmission can be found in the sources, namely 1643 and 1668. Detailed historical analysis must wait for another article.

- ¹² Yamaji told me that the custom of dancers belonging to lower strata of the social order may have remained common until well into the twentieth century (personal communication, July 27 2016).
- ¹³ *Kanmon nikki*, the diary of Prince Sadafusa (Fushiminomiya Sadafusa Shinnō), covers the period from 1416 to 1448 in 54 volumes. See entry for Eikyō 10 (1438) 6th month 14th day, on the Gion festival.
- ¹⁴ This kind of *kakko mai* can also be seen in the *kyōgen* piece “Pots and Drums” (“Nabe yatsubachi” 鍋八撥). It is more relaxed than the *nō* version of *kakko mai*. “Pots and Drums” also features a *bōfuri* (Inada 2007, 22).
- ¹⁵ There are many more depictions of the *kakko mai*. A proper analysis will be the topic of another paper.
- ¹⁶ What used to be real children on all of the floats have largely been replaced by puppets (Tai 2010, 19).
- ¹⁷ Webpage of “Ayagashoko Hayashi-kata Hozonkai”, text by Yagi Tōru.
- ¹⁸ Webpage of “Ayagashoko Hayashi-kata Hozonkai”.

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“Dance of the Herons” (*sagimai*) of Tsuwano:

“Dance of the Herons” (*sagimai*) of Tsuwano:

-A well-preserved medieval performing art-

The “Dance of the Herons” (*sagimai* 鷺舞) is a dance with instrumental and vocal accompaniment, performed by two dancers in full-body heron costumes at a summer festival on July 20 and 27 in Tsuwano, an old castle town in western Honshu that attracts many tourists with its beautifully preserved Edo townscape. The dancers, who represent a male and female heron, are joined by other performance elements deriving from the medieval Gion festival, such as the drum dance *kakko mai* 羯鼓舞. The Gion festival, the annual festival of Kyoto’s Yasaka Shrine, is one of Japan’s biggest summer festivals, famous for its elaborate floats and festival music. In this article, the present form of the *sagimai* is situated in its relationship to its history. Analysis is based on the results of previous research as well as the author’s fieldwork, including interviews with the performers.

Keywords:

“Dance of the Herons” (*sagimai*), Gion festival, *kasasagi-boko*, *kakko mai*, *furyū hyōshimono*, *bōfuri*, *tōya*

津和野の鷺舞——中世芸能とその伝承

津和野という城下町は、島根県の南西部に位置する。鷺舞とは、津和野祇園祭りの神事として毎年7月20日と27日に行なわれる。男性二人が白鷺の冠り物と、作り物の白い羽を身につけて、囃子と歌にあわせて優雅に津和野の各所を舞い回る。囃子には笛・鼓・鉦・太鼓が用いられる。その他に、頭に赤熊しやぐまを冠り、手に飾り棒ぼうふをもった二人の棒振りが鷺の周りを回る。また、鷺の後ろに羯鼓舞かつこまいを演じる人が二人いる。これらの舞い手を見守るのは警固方けいこかたという。

本論文では、津和野の鷺舞の芸能とその伝承について考察する。どこから生まれて来たか、そしてどのように変遷してきたかなどを明らかにする。先行研究を踏まえつつ現地調査でわかったことを紹介した上で、改めて鷺舞にアプローチを試みる。