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## The Transmission of the Heron Dance in Yamaguchi and Tsuwano

Andrea Luise Kahlow

Japan has a highly diverse range of traditional performing arts. These include, for example, the classical theatrical performing arts, such as *noh*, *kyogen*, *kabuki*, and the puppet theatre, which have been designated as part of Japan's Intangible Cultural Heritage, as well as folk performing arts, such as the heron dance. The theatrical arts are passed down from parent to child, or from master to disciple, mainly by imitation by a traditional system of hereditary succession in the professional world of the performing arts (Brazell 1998, p. 3).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The *iemoto*-system (*iemoto seido* 家元制度) is a hierarchical structure of teachers and students within a school of an art, whereas *iemoto* stands for the founder or the current head of the school, who is usually a direct descendant of the founder (Waseda, "The *iemoto*-system in

In contrast, folk performing arts show an extraordinary wealth and variety, which makes it difficult to approach to them comprehensively. Many folk performing arts are conducted nowadays by organised performing troupes who promote and preserve the art. In general, oral transmission (*kuden* 口伝) with little reliance on notation is a more common practice than verifiable documentation. The older generation often teaches the next generation in an informal way: the “students” imitate and internalize the movements of the instructor. The successor of the art is usually already connected to the group in a certain way due to a family relationship to one of the members, or neighbour relations. In many cases the successor already knows a lot about the traditional performance, because he or she has seen it from childhood on.

However, due to the ongoing changes in modern Japan accompanying a decline of agriculture and an increased depopulation of rural areas, the

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Japanese Performing Arts in Southern California,” p. 103; JIE 1993, “Iemoto,” p. 583).

preservation and transmission of these manifold folk performing arts has gradually become more difficult. The traditional life that once nurtured the folk performing arts has long since disappeared. Performing troupes have difficulties in finding successors among young local people (Lee, “Japanese Folk Performing Arts Today,” pp. 102, 107).

Many questions arise here. How was it possible for the traditional performance of the heron dance<sup>2</sup> to survive over several hundreds of years? What system of transmission was common in Yamaguchi and Tsuwano in the past and how do they preserve the dance

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<sup>2</sup> The folk performing art of the “Dance of the Herons” is a dance with instrumental and vocal accompaniment, performed every year by two dancers in full-body heron costumes. It is performed once on July 20 in Yamaguchi city (Yamaguchi prefecture), where it is called *sagi no mai* 鷺の舞, and twice on July 20 and 27 in the neighbouring castle town Tsuwano (Shimane prefecture), here known as *sagimai* 鷺舞. The dancers, who represent a male and female heron, are joined by other performance elements, such as a drum dance and rod wielders. The dance is part of the Gion festival, which takes place annually from July 20 to 27 in both places.

performance today? Based on former research on traditional Japanese transmission systems of (folk) performing arts and interviews with the present preservers of the tradition, the following study aims to introduce and discuss the preservation and transmission of the heron dance in Yamaguchi and Tsuwano.

### The *Miyaza* and the *Tōya*: Definitions and Characteristics

Research regarding traditional Japanese transmission systems of (folk) performing arts is mainly undertaken in the fields of sociology, ethnology, historical folklore and anthropology. Various aspects have been the object of consideration, such as the structure of Japanese villages and rural societies, as represented by terms such as “village structure discourse” (*sonraku kōzōron* 村落構造論). In the following, research that seeks to determine how festivals are organised is introduced. Two key transmission concepts are discussed, namely the *miyaza*

宮座 and *tōya* 頭屋<sup>3</sup> which are found mainly in the Kinki and Chūgoku regions of western Japan.<sup>4</sup>

### The *Miyaza*-system

One of the first researchers to examine the *miyaza* was the folklorist Nakayama Tarō 中山太郎 (1876–1947), who promoted a historical approach within folklore studies of the time. In his article “Miyaza no kenkyū” of 1924, Nakayama defines the *miyaza* as an organization among the shrine parishioners (*ujiko* 氏子)<sup>5</sup> that granted privileges different from the

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<sup>3</sup> There are several variations in writing: 当屋・禱屋・塔屋 (Kuraishi, “Tōya,” p. 225).

<sup>4</sup> Many names can be found for the *miyaza*; the suffix “za” 座 can mainly be seen in the Kinki and Chūgoku regions and in Kyushu. Whereas the term “za” indicates some guild-like group in the early beginnings, the connotation shifted to a simple “seat” at the shrine in latter times (Hagiwara, “Miyaza,” pp. 694–95).

<sup>5</sup> *Ujiko* are shrine parishioners by virtue of their residence in the community under the protection of the local Shinto deity (*ujigami* 氏神). The *ujiko*-system developed gradually throughout Japanese history. By the Edo period all families of a certain geographical area were considered the *ujiko* of the local shrine, and the Meiji government institutionalized it through keeping a census of the population. This was abolished after World War II (JIE 1993, “Ujiko,” p. 1646).

rest of the *ujiko* aiming to manage the shrine and its festivals. He further points out that the *miyaza* derives from the belief in a local tutelary deity (*ujigami* 氏神)<sup>6</sup> of a village, a family clan, or geographic area in ancient Japan (Nakayama, “Miyaza no kenkyū,” pp. 3–4).

The folklorist and historian Hagiwara Tatsuo 萩原 竜夫 (also 龍夫, 1916–1985) agrees with this definition and adds that the *miyaza* originated in the fifteenth century, and sought to prevent outsiders from gaining authority over expanding festivals. Likewise, the role of the *tōnin* 頭人 was established to secure a stable festival organisation system. The *tōnin* is not only an assistant, but can carry out, for example, the role of the shrine priest at the time of the festival. The role of the *tōnin* rotates among the members of the *miyaza*. Due to the increasing number of professional shrine priests since the Meiji Restoration, the *miyaza*-system has

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<sup>6</sup> The clan (*uji* 氏) system declined in the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, and the term *ujigami* came to refer, as it still does today, to the local deity who protects all the inhabitants of a region (JIE 1993, “Ujigami,” p. 1645).

declined over the last two centuries. Some *miyaza* disposed of fields or woodland which they administered. If a new social stratum emerged in a village, the *miyaza* began to have difficulty maintaining their restricted organisation and finally collapsed. Over the centuries, many *miyaza* managed to re-establish and adjust themselves to the social conditions. The state of development and maintenance of the *miyaza* depended on the state of the village in question, so that they showed manifold forms throughout the country (Hagiwara, “Miyaza,” pp. 694–95).

In the 1930s, the historical folklorist Higo Kazuo 肥後和男 (1899–1981) contributed first case studies on the *miyaza* of the Kinki region in west central Honshū, defining the *miyaza* as an organization for worshipping a shrine in communities, especially in villages. He introduced his concept of the closed “privileged councils,” or *kabuza* 株座, that dominated village affairs and ceremonies, and the open “village councils,” or *muraza* 村座, which permitted all families to take part in them (Higo 1938, pp. 16–57; Furushima,



“The village and agriculture during the Edo period,” p. 488).

Kuraishi Tadahiko 倉石忠彦 (1939–) notes that the *miyaza* is a council of elders mainly formed by men, but there are also a few examples of women’s *miyaza*. On the other hand, an organisation of young people exists in some places, which is commonly known as *wakashū* 若衆. Sometimes the oldest person of the *miyaza* takes over the role of the shrine priest (*kannushi* 神主), and sometimes the role is rotated every year among the members. As a rule, one shrine has one *miyaza*, but some villages have more than one due to the influx of new families. Open village societies usually organise themselves as a *muraza* so that the whole village is involved in the management of the festival (Kuraishi, “Miyaza,” p. 490).

The historian and folklorist Fukuta Ajio 福田アジオ (1941–) introduces his idea of a “*ban*” 番 village and a “*shū*” 衆 village: regions that attach great importance to the family and the house are called *ban*

(e.g. Kantō and Tōkai), whereas regions that consider the whole village and their individuals as important are called *shū* (e.g. Kinki and Hokuriku). A *shū* granted with privileges takes on the responsibility for community matters or festivals. He stresses that *shū* is an assembly of individuals deriving from families, whose ranks are based on age or the point of time of entering the *shū* (Fukuta, “Miyaza,” pp. 620–22; *ibid.*, “Miyaza no igi to sonraku ruikei-ron,” p. 15).

### The *Tōya*-system

Strongly connected to the *miyaza*-system is the concept of the *tōya*.<sup>7</sup> The *tōya*-system can be seen all around Japan; it is especially widespread in western Japan. In the Kinki region, it is often part of the *miyaza*.

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<sup>7</sup> The term *tōya* dates back to the medieval period, mentioned in 1430 in the collection of comments on the classical theatrical art of *sarugaku*, later called *noh*, *Sarugaku dangi* 猿楽談義, by the actor, playwright and critic Zeami (1363–1443) (NKD 2001, “Tōya,” p. 1055). Omote interprets this term as a description for the manager of the *sarugaku* troupe (Omote 1994, p. 108). De Poorter translates *tōya* as “head” and annotates “the monks who were in charge of organising the festival” (De Poorter 2002, pp. 131, 233). It is disputable whether *tōya* were monks.

Fukuta points out that the *miyaza* usually includes a *tōya*-system, but not every *tōya*-system requires a *miyaza* (Fukuta, “Miyaza,” pp. 620–22). The *tōya*-system is a system for burden sharing in the carrying out of a festival, involving rotation among a certain group, such as a family, a council of distinguished families or even the whole village. Higo states that the *tōya* had to prepare the sacred *saké* and food for the deity, usually at their own expense, and to supply food and utensils for the public feast of the members. This office was taken in order of age or the importance of the house, and was considered the greatest duty and of the highest honour; but the expenses were hard to bear (Engl. transl. of Higo 1938, p. 6; Kuraishi, “Tōya,” p. 225; Sekiya, “Tōya,” p. 193).

The role of the *tōya* is usually restricted to men and hereditary. If there is no specialized priest in the village, the *ujiko* take responsibility for carrying out the festival. The individual (or house) who takes the leadership and offers a lodging place for the deity is called *tōya*. The *tōya* can be chosen by lot, according to

a list, or in similar fashion. Sekiya Rune 関谷龍子 states that the order of rotation of the *tōya* role is generally based on age, family rank, a traditional order, or by drawing lots, and is sometimes fixed beforehand. The term of office is generally one year, and at the end a hand-over ceremony often takes place. The role of the *tōya* can be fulfilled at different ages, always indicating recognition as a full-fledged adult. Therefore, taking on the role of the *tōya* is an important rite of passage in acknowledgment as a full member of the village. In a broader meaning, the *tōya*-system provides equal burden sharing among all villagers (Sekiya, “Tōya,” pp. 193–94; Kuraishi, “Tōya,” p. 225).

To protect the *tōya* from ritual pollution, he has to purify himself by avoiding an exposure to death, eating meat, and sexual intercourse during the period of the festival. If a family member dies during the period of office, the *tōya* role has to be taken on by someone else. The entrance of the house of the *tōya* is decorated with bamboo and a sacred braided straw festoon (*shimenawa* 注連縄), brushwood, or a banner,

indicating the place where the deity descends. The festival room is ritually purified and decorated for example with a wand with paper or cloth streamers (*gohei* 御幣), and a hanging scroll (Sekiya, “Tōya,” pp. 193–94).

Sekiya adds that the first character of the word *tōya*, *tō* 頭, historically means “manager,” “headman,” or “leader.” Various terms evolved in the course of time, such as *tōyaku* 頭役, *tōnin* 頭人, or *tōya* 頭屋. During the Edo period, the focus shifted to rotation in the *tōya*-system, so the character for “taking charge of something” (Sino-Chinese-reading: *tō* 当) is commonly used. Not only can numerous terms be found for the headman of the festival, but also a diverse range of obligations: from the heavy duty of the management of the whole festival to preparations limited to the appointed day. This phenomenon was examined by Harada Toshiaki 原田敏明 (1893–1983), who stated that the *tōya* performs religious services for the *ujigami* as a representative of the shrine parishioners. The *tōya* used to be endowed with the authority of a deity himself, but with the

emergence of professional shrine priests in the Edo period, and the growing complexity of the festivals and ceremonies, the *tōya* was relegated to a supportive role, assisting the shrine priest in taking care of preparations (Sekiya, “Tōya,” p. 193).

Gamō Masao 蒲生正男 (1927–1981) focuses on the execution of the shrine festival when he speaks of this model as a *tōya*-system village. In a traditional Japanese village there are mainly two ideologies: one is the family bond (*dōzoku-sei* 同族制), and the other is the seniority system (*nenrei kaitei-sei* 年齢階梯制). However, a majority of villages lack both. Villages of this nature have a *tōya*-system (*tōya-sei* 頭屋制). The characteristics of this *tōya*-system are the equal burden sharing of the roles among every household for festivals, funerals, and other public events. It aims at administering festivals and religious services. This system developed on the basis of autarkic and stable agriculture, and is often seen in old villages of the Kinki and Chūgoku regions (Gamō 1979, p. 43).

## The *Tōya*-system in Yamaguchi

The sponsor of the heron dance in Yamaguchi is called *tōya*. The heron dance has been transmitted by craftsmen from the district Dōnomae-machi 堂の前町 in Yamaguchi city, located close to the castle of the Ōuchi. The center of religious faith in this district is the temple Manpukuji 万福寺, which has a black bodhisattva (Kurojizō 黒地蔵) as its object of worship.<sup>8</sup> In medieval times, ironworkers who made swords that were famous in the region inhabited this district. Later, many craftsmen were assembled in this district: makers of *geta* shoes, towels, and *tatami* mats, plasterers and woodworkers (*Yamaguchi-shi shi*, vol. 6, p. 457).

Originally, the rites connected to the heron dance were conducted in the house of the *tōya*. The role of the *tōya* was hereditary, but if descendants were lacking, the role was passed on to whoever lived in the house. In the past, the *tōya*—then called *sagi tōnin* 鷺頭

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<sup>8</sup> It is said that the heron dance was introduced to Yamaguchi from Mibu 壬生 in Kyoto, where the same bodhisattva is worshipped (*Yamaguchi-shi shi*, vol. 6, p. 469).

人 —was not identical with the dance performers (*Yamaguchi-shi shi*, vol. 6, p. 473). Historical records provide an insight into the former *tōya*-system in Yamaguchi.

The oldest source of a heron dance performance as a part of the Gion festival in Yamaguchi, *Gion mainen junkin ninzu no koto* 祇園毎年順勤人数之事 of 1583, records nine groups with about seven to nine members, who were in charge of the festival in yearly rotation.<sup>9</sup> The source gives the term *tōnin* 頭人 for the head of each group; this is the precursor of the *tōya*.<sup>10</sup> The source already lists the name Tsumori 津守.

The source *Suō no kuni Yamaguchi Gion-e sagi no ikkan* 周防国山口祇園会鷺之一卷 (abbr. *Sagi no ikkan*) of 1714 provides some details of the preparatory

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<sup>9</sup> Written by a townsman of Ōichi in Yamaguchi, called Yokoya Yajirō Masanobu 横屋弥次郎昌信 in the sixth month of 1583. The original source is stored at the Yamaguchi Prefectural Archives, Taga Shrine Collection (*Tagasha bunko* 多賀社文庫). A typographical reprint can be found in *Sagi no mai*, Yamaguchi Kyōiku Iinkai 1981, pp. 17–21.

<sup>10</sup> Refer to *Yamaguchi-shi shi*, vol. 6, p. 473.



events conducted by the *tōnin*.<sup>11</sup> A meeting is held in the third month, and the *tōnin* are requested to purify themselves through the period of the festival. The *tōnin* pay a visit to the teahouse on the first day of the fifth month. A gathering of the participants of the heron dance is held on the sixth day of the sixth month at the house of the *tōnin*. Nine decorative halberds (*kasaboko* 笠鉾) are provided by the *tōnin* of the next year. The remuneration of the heron dance performers, and the nine carriers of the *kasaboko* is provided by the *tōnin* depending on the size of his house. The costs of repairing the feathers of the heron costume are covered by the *tōnin* of that year. The source further reports that in the beginning of the Keichō 慶長 era (1596–1615), the responsibility of the heron dance shifted from Ōichi 大市 to Dōnomaemachi. From that time on, four

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<sup>11</sup> Compiled by the Yamaguchi townsman Yokoya (Nanba) Rokuemon Yoshinori 横屋 (難波) 六右衛門栄徳. The record served as a manual for the heron dance in the Edo period. It transmits customs and traditions connected to the performance. A typographical reprint is available in the volume *Sagi no mai*, Yamaguchi Kyōiku Iinkai 1981, pp. 45–57.

groups with about nine to ten people were in charge of the heron dance depending on the size of the *tōnin*'s house. The head of these groups was also called *sagi tōnin* and rotated every year.<sup>12</sup> Somewhat later, in 1784, an inscription on the lid of the costume storage box (replaced in 1898) records that four families from Dōnomae-machi carried out the role of the *tōnin*. From this, it can be stated that the number of four *tōnin* was established at this point.

The *Sagimai kiroku* 鷺舞記録 of 1924 records the inventory of the heron dance performance, listing the props, the costumes, the instruments, and the order of the *tōya*.<sup>13</sup> Whereas the preceding sources use the term *sagi tōnin*, the *Sagi kiroku* uses the terms *tōya* 当屋 and *hontō* 本頭, indicating the person in charge of that particular year (*Yamaguchi-shi shi*, vol. 6, p. 467).

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<sup>12</sup> Refer to Momota, “Ōuchi bunka no yūga na isan,” p. 270.

<sup>13</sup> A typographical reprint of the *Sagimai kiroku* of 1924 is provided in the compilation of historical sources on Yamaguchi, *Yamaguchi-shi shi*, vol. 6, by the city of Yamaguchi in 2015.

At present, the *tōya* is the “manager” of the festival and thus fulfils the important role of recruiting, gathering and supervising the people involved. He further has to meet miscellaneous duties, such as organising the schedule for meetings and training. It is always difficult to find someone who is willing to take over the role of the *tōya* for that year owing to their busy work. On the day of the festival, the *tōya* has to offer a branch of the sacred *sasaki* tree decorated with zig zag paper streamers (*shide* 紙垂) called *tamagushi* 玉串 in front of the three portable shrines and thus worships the gods praying for good luck and health for the people. After that, the heron dance is performed. Resulting from duplication of the role of the *tōya* and the heron performer, certain ceremonies traditionally conducted by the *tōya* cannot be carried out anymore.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Personal communication with Yamaguchi Masao 山口正則 in July 2016 and 2017.



*Figure 1: Tōya in Yamaguchi (far left). Photo taken by the author, July 2016.*

The *tōya* rotates yearly among four houses; one house takes over the role of the *tōya*, supported by the remaining three houses and the preservation committee. Hence, the groups that support their *tōya* mentioned in the historical sources do not exist anymore. Interestingly, only the name Tsumori<sup>15</sup> appears from the first record

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<sup>15</sup> According to the internet search engine *Myoji-yurai.net*, the name Tsumori 津守 is common in Yamaguchi. The approximate number of Japanese citizens with this name is 2,300.

(*Gion mainen junkin ninzu no koto*, 1583) on in each of the sources examined above. The Tsumori family was in charge as *tōya* until recent.<sup>16</sup> Assuming that there was no interruption of transmission within the family, the Tsumoris were conducting the role of the *tōya* for more than about 430 years.

The *tōya* role cannot be allocated in the traditional way anymore, which implies a transmission among one household, but new members have to be acquired who are willing to take over the responsibility of the *tōya*. Although conflicting with the tradition, major changes have occurred in the last twenty to thirty years. Three of the families have retired and three new *tōya* have been appointed. Although women are traditionally excluded from these roles, one of them is a woman. The descendants of *tōya* families nowadays also perform the heron dance.

According to information gained in an interview with Yamaguchi Masanori in July 2016, many of the old

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<sup>16</sup> Refer to *Yamaguchi-shi shi*, vol. 6, p. 461.

members of the heron dance performance prefer candidates for the *tōya* who have lived in Yamaguchi for a long time over young people or those who only have moved to Yamaguchi recently. In the past, only people who lived along the main street could become *tōya*, so that at the time of the festival umbrellas could be displayed in front of their houses.

Originally, the heron dance started with bringing the props from the Yasaka shrine to the temple Manpukuji. The preparatory events used to be conducted at the *tōya*'s house, but the venue was changed to the temple, where the props are now stored as well. Therefore, ceremonies are no longer held in the house of the *tōya*. A scroll (*kakejiku* 掛け軸) used to be hung and rice wine offered for one year in the *tōya*'s house until 2007. At present, the hanging scroll, the costume of the herons and the props are displayed at the temple. A *kasaboko* is displayed in front of the house of the *tōya* of that year (*Yamaguchi-shi shi*, vol. 6, p. 460; personal communication with Yamaguchi Masao in July 2016 and 2017).

## The *Tōya*-system in Tsuwano

During the sixteenth century, only one person took over the role of the *tōya* in Tsuwano: the head of the Hori 堀 family. The *tōya*-system was established when the heron dance was reintroduced from Kyoto to Tsuwano in the middle of the seventeenth century (Kuwabara, “Sagimai ni tsuite,” p. 51).<sup>17</sup>

According to the local historian Okimoto Tsunekichi 沖本常吉 (1902–1991), Hori Kurōbei 堀九郎兵衛 of Honmachi 本町, Nakanochō 中ノ丁, was the head of the *tōya*-system in Tsuwano, as recorded in the *Tōya zoku* 頭屋族 of 1677. Okimoto provides a list of twenty-six names of men from Nakanochō who were part of the *tōya*-system. The people in the city were expected to assist, and were later called *kumiko* 組子. If the Hori family was indisposed, other influential families from Nakanochō took over the role of the *tōya*.

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<sup>17</sup> Katō states that the heron dance was revived by the *tōya*-system in 1644 and has been transmitted to the present day, based on an entry of the *Yuishoki* 由緒記 of 1847 (Katō, “Sagimai kō,” p. 49). The source is lost and therefore not verifiable.

In this way, the *tōya yashiki* 頭屋屋敷 system came into being, aiming to share and limit the burden among the influential families. Thus, the role of the *tōya* came to rotate between influential families. The function of the *tōya* was connected to the house, not to the individual, 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, pp. 446–48, 458–60).

Only few of reprints of sources that provide insights into the *tōya*-system in Tsuwano survive to the present day. Subsequent to the *Tōya zoku* of 1677, a source of 1775 lists the names of the *kumiko* participating in the festival in the An'ei 安永 era (1772–1781). Although the original was lost in recent years, a typographical reprint is provided by Okimoto. Whereas most of the *kumiko* came from the districts of Honmachi 本町, inhabitants of other districts, such as Imaichi 今市 and Yorozumachi 万町, were also involved as *kumiko*. Their number counted twenty-two (Okimoto 1989, pp. 460–62).



Another source is the *Tōya kiroku* 頭屋記録 of 1847, which lists eleven *tōya* houses—beginning with the Hori family—and the number of *kumiko* that belong to each house.<sup>18</sup> This number ranges from twenty to thirty-two. The total number of *kumiko* is 293 (Okimoto 1989, pp. 462–66).

From the middle of the Edo period, twelve houses in the town center carried out the duties in rotation. The rest of the people living there were affiliated as *kumiko* with one of the twelve houses. Kuwabara and Katō state that their number was about thirty to forty people. 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 original *tōya*-system itself collapsed in the Taishō 大正 era (1912–1926). This system was too heavy a burden for the

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<sup>18</sup> Honda and Yamaji give the title *Gionsha tōya naka kumiko sō jinbetsu-chō* 祇園社頭屋中組子惣人別帳. They state that there are 294 ordinary families that are allocated in groups of twenty to thirty families to one *tōya* house (Honda and Yamaji 1974, p. 18).

working people of Tsuwano; it was changed in the Shōwa 昭和 era (1926–1989) so that representatives of the parishioners (*ujiko sōdai* 氏子総代) of the Yasaka shrine drew lots to determine the *tōya* (Honda and Yamaji 1974, p. 18; Katō, “Sagimai kō,” p. 50; Kuwabara, “Sagimai ni tsuite,” pp. 51–52 et al.). However, they no longer draw lots at present. Today, the role is generally rotated among fifteen representatives of the *ujiko* who either live or work in the Tsuwano town center and usually fulfil an important role within the town.<sup>19</sup> New *tōya* are recruited on recommendation. Their order is discussed and decided in a meeting. At present, one position is vacant so only fourteen people are involved in festival as *tōya*. One of the present members was chosen as *sōdai* and future *tōya* for the year 2019 despite the fact that he does not live in Ushiroda. Still, he works in Ushiroda, so the preceding *sōdai* regarded him as suitable. The *tōya* is usually not involved in the heron dance performance.

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<sup>19</sup> This system was established in 1962. Personal communication with the local historian Yamaoka Kōji 山岡浩二, November 2014.

They do not have any purification rites before the festival. Usually men carry out the role of the *tōya*.



Figure 2: *Tōya* in Tsuwano. Photo taken by the author, July 2012.

In Tsuwano, the Yasaka shrine offers protection as an *ujigami* shrine only for the 150 families living in Ushiroda.<sup>20</sup> It is said that members of the Kuwabara

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<sup>20</sup> According to local informants, there is no official number of the *ujiko* owing to the fact that the Yasaka shrine is a *sūkei jinja* 崇敬神社. Bocking states that ‘*sūkeisha*’ 崇敬者

family have served as professional priests for the Yasaka shrine for the last four hundred years. Nowadays, the grandson of the previous priestess Kuwabara Fumiko 桑原典子, Kuwabara Hideyuki 桑原秀幸, is in charge of this role.

In the past, the preparatory events for the Gion festival started in the first month and were held until the sixth month. They were organised by the *tōya* and his helpers, the *kumiko*. The *kumiko* offered food, collected donations, prepared the props and the costumes, and took charge of the communication between the *tōya* and the heron dancers. Meetings and ceremonies were held at the *tōya*'s place, which was purified and decorated with a *shimenawa* and thirteen *kasaboko*. A Shinto priest conducted the ceremonies. The townspeople gathered in the room with the alcove (*tokonoma* 床の

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appears to have meant only worshippers outside the *ujiko* area until the Second World War. In modern urban Japan, increasing mobility and rebuilding of areas has caused an elimination of clear borders of Shinto 'parishes.' Consequently, some parishioners attend and support other shrines than those they technically belong to (Bocking 2005, p. 141).

間) where the costume of the herons was displayed (Okimoto 1989, pp. 450–57; Honda and Yamaji 1974, p. 19).

Extensive ceremonies were associated with the role of the *tōya* in the past. Not only did they entail high financial costs, but also a lot of work; the latter also applies to the *kumiko*. After the Meiji period, many of the ceremonies and customs were simplified. Some of them were sustained until about 1965, for example the food served, including the salted mackerel. However, since the ceremonies are conducted at the community center nowadays, they have lost much of their original atmosphere (Honda and Yamaji 1974, p. 20).

To lighten the burden of the *tōya*, associated ceremonies are no longer held at private residences, but at the community center in Tsuwano. The *tōya*, however, has to fulfil several tasks in a supportive role to the Yasaka shrine in Tsuwano during the year, such as scattering dried beans to drive out evil spirits one day before the beginning of spring (*setsubun* 節分). With

regard to the Gion festival and the heron dance in July, the *tōya* are obliged to take part in several preparatory events.<sup>21</sup>

- June 30: The first important day of duty as *tōya* is on June 30, when greetings are extended by the *tōya*. Preparations are held at the shrine office, short speeches are given by the chief of the *sōdai*, the chief of the preservation committee, the chief of the heron dancers (*sagi-gashira* 鷺頭) and the *tōya*.
- July 15: The *tōya* and the heron dancers decorate the big zelkova tree with a *shimenawa*. In the evening, consultations on the ceremony are held.
- July 19: An altar (*saidan* 祭壇) is installed at the *tōya*'s house (nowadays the community center), on which the heron dance costumes are placed. About a dozen *kasaboko* are erected in front of the

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<sup>21</sup> The following information is taken from the pamphlet on the heron dance *Sagimai* published by the preservation committee in 2003, the DVD *Yasaka jinja: Sagimai (Kiroku-hen)* 弥栄神社: 鷺舞 (記録編), produced by the Center for Ancient Culture, Education Bureau of Shimane Prefecture (*Shimane-ken kyōikuchō kodai bunka sentā* 島根県教育庁古代文化センター) in 2002, and field research.

community center. In the evening, a ceremony is held at the shrine for the *sōdai*.

- At night July 19–20: Around 2:00 am, 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, “Come to the *tōya*’s house, let’s beat the drum” (*tōya e gojare, furedaiko o tatakashō* 頭屋へご座れ、触れ太鼓をたたかしよ っ), indicates that it was originally a call for participants to gather at the *tōya*’s house.
- July 20: A ceremony centering on the shrine priest takes place on the first day of the festival from 10:30 am inside Yasaka shrine, in which some of the *sōdai* take part. For the *tōya* and the *maikomi tōya* participation at this event is mandatory. On the day of the transfer (*togyo* 渡御) of the deity from the shrine to the temporary lodging of the portable shrines (*otabisho* お旅所), 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 2:00 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 order, 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 sacred rice wine (*omiki* お神酒) are served. The *tōya* of the year asks the dancers to perform.

- July 26: The ceremony for the next *tōya* (*maikomi tōya* 舞込み頭屋) is held. The parishioners (*ujiko*), representatives of the parishioners (*ujiko sōdai*) and the priest of Yasaka shrine gather at the *otabisho* to hand the role of the present *tōya* to that of the following year.
- July 27: The return (*kangyo* 還御) starts again from the community center; the heron dancers proceed to the *otabisho*. At the end, the present *tōya* hands over



his hat to the *maikomi tōya*. The latter leads the heron dancers to the *tōya*'s house (community center), where they give their last performance.

## Conclusion

In both places, Yamaguchi and Tsuwano, the role of the *tōya* was hereditary and connected to the house rather than the individual; however, it is no longer hereditary. Ceremonies associated with the heron dance performance were conducted in the house of the *tōya*. Nowadays, in Tsuwano the community center is used to display associated decoration and to conduct the ceremonies. In Yamaguchi, the temple Manpukuji fulfils this function.

Regarding preparatory events held by the *tōya* as described in the *Suō no kuni Yamaguchi Gion-e sagi no ikkan* of 1714, it can be stated that the number of tasks carried out by the *tōya* at present has decreased significantly in both places. Yet the *tōya* has to discharge his duties as a representative of the Yasaka shrine, such as driving out evil spirits on *setsubun*,

making a *shimenawa*, and organising meetings and trainings with the performers. It seems that Tsuwano has a greater number of tasks fulfilled by the *tōya*: for example, there is no handing over of the *tōya* hat to the *maikomi tōya* in Yamaguchi.

In both places, the *tōya* group usually only comprises men. However, due to dramatic changes in the social structure, they are being forced to let women participate permanently in their tradition, as can be seen in Yamaguchi. In Tsuwano, the *tōya* are still mainly men. Women only participate if they are replacing their recently deceased husband for a short time. Although the preservation committee heads in both places stress that they generally welcome new members even from outside the usual pool of acquisition, for example from neighbouring towns, there are as yet no examples of that case. The *tōya* candidates are *sōdai* of the Yasaka shrine. The traditional number of twelve *tōya* houses has risen to fifteen people at present. There are no *kumiko* anymore; instead, members of the preservation committee support the performance. Compared to

Yamaguchi, the *tōya* role is allocated in a stricter way: usually only influential and respected persons who live or work in a certain area, in Tsuwano represented by the district of Ushiroda, are chosen as *tōya*. Once chosen as *tōya*, there is usually no double appointment of roles in the same year (being *tōya* and heron performer at the same time). In Yamaguchi, a new member should be from the neighbourhood.

Neither in Yamaguchi nor in Tsuwano does the *tōya* carry out the role of shrine priest. In both places professional shrine priests conduct the necessary ceremonies.

Although interviewees in both Yamaguchi and Tsuwano said that they had never heard of the term *miyaza*, some elements apply to the systems in both places: following Hagiwara's and Nakayama's definition of a *miyaza*, both places have a group with a special function of carrying out shrine rituals among the *ujiko* of a certain village with a *tōnin* (or *tōya*). To call it a guild is probably an overstatement.

Higo's concept of *kabuza* and *muraza* might be outdated for the present system. However, it seems that the *tōya*-system in the past showed *muraza* elements for Yamaguchi due to the fact that the *tōya* role was shifted among a number of families. *Kabuza* elements may be found in the *tōya*-system in Tsuwano of the past, for the reason that only the Hori family occupied that position. In the course of time, it changed into a *muraza*, involving twelve houses and their helpers (*kumiko*). Nowadays, it is mainly the group of the *tōya* and supporters, organised as a preservation committee.

Higo's statement that the *tōya* had to prepare the sacred *saké* and food for the deity and supplied food and utensils for the public feast at their own expense holds true for the past in both Yamaguchi and Tsuwano. Nowadays, the financial burden is shared and covered by subsidies and donations from the prefecture, town, and community.

The *tōya* in Yamaguchi as well as in Tsuwano carries out the role of a headman of a shrine festival or

ceremony for a certain period of time, responsible for its preparations and management. In Tsuwano, they put emphasis on writing “*tōya*” with the Chinese character 頭<sup>22</sup>, contrary to Sekiya’s observation of a focus shift towards the rotation expressed by the usage of the character 当. Moreover, the role of the *tōya* was rotated based on family rank or lot in the past in Yamaguchi and Tsuwano, but nowadays the *tōya* is appointed in a meeting considering everyone’s work schedule. Ritual pollution does not matter in either of the places. Yet the house of the *tōya* is decorated, originally to indicate the place where the deity descends, as Sekiya has stated. Further, the heron dance is performed in front of the house of *tōya* of that year in both places.

Gamō’s formula for a *tōya*-system without family bondage or seniority system can be applied to the system in present day Yamaguchi and Tsuwano,

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<sup>22</sup> Personal communication in July 2017 with Kurisu Yukimasa 栗栖志匡, ceremonial guard (*keigo-gata* 警固方) in 2012, head of secretariat and parishioners and *tōya* in 2017.

because it implies an equal burden sharing of the roles among every household, aiming at undertaking religious services and festivals. Corresponding with Gamō's research, both places are located in the Chūgoku region. Neither in Yamaguchi nor in Tsuwano do they have a seniority system, yet elders gain respect. According to Gamō, a long-term equality can be seen in the fact that the preservation committee refuses to make a list of their members, because it could imply a ranking which would lead to dispute.<sup>23</sup> It can be questioned, however, whether agriculture plays or played any significant role in either place, as Gamō argues for the importance of an autarkic agriculture connected to this kind of *tōya*-system.

The definition of a *miyaza* as an organization of men with a specific qualification who worship the rural protective deity in a certain rural community could be

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<sup>23</sup> Personal communication with Yoshinaga Yasuo 吉永康男, former president of the preservation committee, Inomura Mitsuo 井野村光雄, former heron dancer, and Kurisu Yukimasa in July 2012.

applied to the organisation structure in Yamaguchi and Tsuwano in the past as well as the present. Neither Fukuta's "*ban*" nor "*shū*" theory necessarily applies to Yamaguchi and Tsuwano, because the *shū*—mainly found in Kinki and Hokuriku regions—describes a group with certain privileges taking on the responsibility for community matters or festivals. Privileges for the members that carry out the role of the *tōya* cannot be observed in the present system in either place, but there may have been some in the past, e.g. for the Hori family in Tsuwano. Fukuta further points out that the *miyaza* usually includes a *tōya*-system, but not every *tōya*-system requires a *miyaza*. The present system in Yamaguchi and Tsuwano can be seen as representative of a *tōya*-system without a *miyaza*.

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## 和文要旨

本論文では、山口と津和野における祇園祭りの一部として披露される鷺舞の伝承について考察する。日本の民俗芸能は数多くの伝承制度をみせるなか、とくに「宮座」と呼ばれる祭りの執行に携わる集団と祭祀を輪番で主宰する「頭屋」に重点をおく。先行研究や歴史的記録及び現地調査の結果を踏まえた上、山口と津和野でみられる「頭屋制」を分析し、それが時代とともにどのように変遷してきたのか、また山口と津和野における伝承方法の相違点を検討する。