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# Reviving tradition in disaster-affected communities: adaptation and continuity in the *kagura* of Ogatsu, Miyagi Prefecture

**Abstract:** Questions of continuity and transmission, as well as relationship to the community, have long occupied an important part of folk performance scholarship. These topics take on a different urgency in disaster-affected communities, where preexisting socioeconomic issues become more pressing and endanger not only the continuity of folk practices but the communities themselves. The aftermath of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami has seen a surge of folk performance revivals in affected areas, hinting to the depth of the ties between local folk performance and community. Following an ethnographic approach, this paper explores the case of the community of Ogatsu (Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture) and its folk performance, the Ogatsu *hōin kagura*, as one expression of the revival process in an isolated, rural community extensively affected by the 2011 disaster. Putting in perspective the underlying dynamic of continuity and change that characterizes folk performances, the objective is to explore the nature and usage of the *kagura* and its relationship to the post-disaster community as it responds to changing circumstances.

**Keywords:** folk performances, community, Tōhoku, Great East Japan Earthquake, disaster recovery, revival movement

## 1 Introduction

Only weeks after the Great East Japan Earthquake and subsequent tsunami on 11 March 2011 devastated the northeastern coastline, survivors started to organize folk performances in front of shelters, with costumes and props that had escaped the flooding or were salvaged from the debris. A couple of months

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later, supported by local efforts and various institutions, a folk performance revival movement was spreading to numerous communities affected by the disaster, many of them in Iwate and Miyagi Prefectures, where a large number of residents were still living in shelters.

The preservation of folk performances has long been a concern of local residents, folklorists and cultural heritage administrations alike, notably in rural Japan. Aging population, depopulation and the related amalgamation of villages with larger towns nearby have been endangering the preservation and transmission of these local traditions, as the number of practitioners, allotted budget, and potential successors decrease (Thornbury 1997; Traphagan 2000; Thompson 2008). The 2011 earthquake and tsunami made the situation even more dire, magnifying these preexisting issues and adding pressing new ones.

Japanese ethnology and folklore studies have given a lot of attention to folk performances. The first generation of Japanese folklorists was mostly concerned with documenting and categorizing the variety of folk performances found throughout Japan, with focus on the ritual aspects and performance itself (Yanagita 1946; Honda 1960). This extensive body of work has placed much emphasis on the continuity and authentic character of these practices, as embodying the cultural essence of Japan. Later on, Yamaji's work (1984) provided insight into the process of localization of folk performances.

Contrasting with the beginnings of folklore studies in Japan, contemporary folklorists have approached folk practices as adaptive constructions not only reflecting local history, but also reacting and adapting to ongoing sociocultural changes (Shinnō 1993; Iijima 2001). More recently, scholars have examined the contemporary sociocultural purpose, place, and significance of folk performances in community life (Bestor 1989; Hashimoto 1993; Schnell 1999). The topics of preservation and transmission have been persisting in these studies, quite organically complemented in recent years by work on folklorization and tourism (Thornbury 1993, 1995; Hashimoto 1998, 2003), and the politics of authenticity (Robertson 1991; Creighton 1997). True to the nature of the subject, research has reflected the constant tension between adaptation and continuity, fabrication and authenticity.

While questions of transmission and relationship to the community have long occupied an important part of folk performance scholarship, these topics take on a different urgency in disaster-affected communities, where preexisting socioeconomic issues combine with post-disaster problems that threaten not only the continuity of folk performances but the survival of the communities themselves. As Stallings (2002) points out, disasters provide a lens through which to observe aspects of social processes that are generally not visible. While the social function of folk practices for community cohesion is well docu-

mented (Kikuchi 1991; Thompson 2006; Peterson 2013), the 2011 disaster has shed new light on the extent of the ties between local folk performances and community, as well as the dynamic nature of their continuity and adaptation.

Already a favored target of Japanese folklore studies before the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, Tōhoku local folklore became the focus of a large array of research after the disaster. Initially devoted to record the state of affected folk performances (Takakura et al. 2011, 2012), it quickly shifted to discussing community rebuilding and local heritage revival, focusing on the role of the community in the reconstruction process and the positive impact of living heritage revival on recovery (Hayashi 2012; Takizawa 2013; Takakura et al. 2014; Hashimoto 2015).

The present paper resides within this folklorist body of research. It explores the relationship between the disaster-affected community of Ogatsu (Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture) and its local folk performance, Ogatsu *hōin kagura*. Data were collected from informant interviews and participant observation conducted in Ogatsu and Ishinomaki during visits between March 2013 and April 2015. A total of 35 interviews (including follow-up interviews) were conducted, with 14 different informants, all from Ogatsu, including both *kagura* practitioners and remaining and relocated residents.

Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted to explore Ogatsu residents' experience of disaster and reconstruction, their relationship with the *kagura*, the meanings and functions they assigned to it before and after the disaster, and how they believe *kagura* and *matsuri* can contribute to the community. The interviews aimed at *kagura* practitioners also included complementary questions regarding their initial thoughts about and motivations for restarting the *kagura*, their involvement in and perceptions of the different steps of the revival process, and their mid- to long-term vision for the *kagura* in terms of preservation and transmission.[1] This approach allowed the collection of local narratives of the *kagura* and its relationship with the community.

Aside from primary and secondary sources collected during fieldwork, this research also utilizes Japanese media (newspaper and Internet postings) and video recordings of the performance before and after 2011. In addition, document collection – notably classic and contemporary folklore research, public reports on the extent of the disaster and disaster-affected cultural heritage, and reconstruction plans – and analysis were conducted to ensure a solid grasp of the positioning of folk performances in the Tōhoku area, the meaning and im-

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**1** Informal interviews were also conducted with former residents of Ogatsu and with residents of nearby districts.

pact of loss of place in disaster-affected communities, and the overall progress of reconstruction plans.

This paper does not intend to provide insight on the revival movement in Tōhoku as a whole, or claim to be representative of other disaster-affected communities and their vision of folk performances. Taking these limitations into consideration, the main objective here is to contribute another piece to the portrait of folk practices in extreme circumstances.

Starting with a brief contextualization of Ogatsu before and after the 2011 tsunami, this paper situates Ogatsu *hōin kagura* within its community. The aim is to explore the nature and function of this folk performance within the community and its role as a social tie. On this basis it is then possible to examine the revival process as experienced by the Ogatsu community and its effect on the nature and usage of the *kagura*.

An ongoing theme in folk performance scholarship, notably in relation to cultural heritage preservation and tourism, is the notion of authenticity. Often maladapted to the reality of folk practices, it needs to be redefined within the scope of this paper. In order to reflect the fluid, living nature of the *kagura*, authenticity here refers to what the people involved recognize as "their *kagura*." It is defined as what practitioners, as representative of other residents, deem necessary to preserve and transmit in terms of tangible and intangible aspects, and what makes it recognizable as the local *kagura* that residents can identify with. This type of authenticity may likewise be described as a form of integrity.

As the analysis will show, the revival process in Ogatsu appears as an ongoing process of setting boundaries while renegotiating authenticity. This allows us to witness the back and forth of adaptation and continuity: from the emergency response stage where anything goes, through concerns of authenticity and the efforts to retrieve the material and contextual integrity of the *kagura*, toward the longer renegotiation of its acceptable usages in order to contribute to the community.

# 2 Contextualizing Ogatsu: before and after 3/11

Scattered in a succession of narrow bays along the Tōhoku coastline, Ogatsu is tucked between mountains and ocean in the northeastern part of Miyagi Prefecture. Covering an area of approximately 46 km², most of which is covered by mountainous forests, the population has concentrated across 15 settlements on the 4.6 % of flat land or on gentler slope terrain on higher ground. Ogatsu is mostly known for its fishing industry, with an important production of scallops,

oysters, and sea squirts. It also has a notable production of ink stone, used for calligraphy and as roof slate material, which used to cover 90 % of the domestic market. Another well-known feature of Ogatsu, and the core topic of this paper, is its 600-year-old folk performance, the Ogatsu *hōin kagura*, which was designated Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property in 1996.

In the Tōhoku region, population aging and decline have been occurring at an even faster rate than the national average. Like many rural communities in Tōhoku, Ogatsu has been experiencing depopulation since the 1960s, from a peak of 11,214 inhabitants in 1955 to 4,300 in February 2011 (Ishinomaki-shi 2011a). In the past few decades, a policy of amalgamation has been implemented in an attempt to consolidate small towns with declining populations, merging them together into larger towns, often with negative impacts on the merged community (Thompson 2001, 2008). Originally an independent town, Ogatsu was merged with the city of Ishinomaki, located about 40 km away, in 2005.[2]

Most of the Ogatsu area was struck directly by the 2011 tsunami and suffered extensive damage. According to the City of Ishinomaki, the number of deaths and missing persons amounts to 241 in the Ogatsu area (as of September 2013). In terms of material destruction, it is estimated that 90 % of Ogatsu was destroyed, including most private homes and public facilities at the core of local community life (Ishinomaki-shi 2011b). About half of the residents had to evacuate to nearby Kahoku district, while the rest of them were scattered throughout several shelters across Ogatsu. By the end of 2011, all evacuation centers closed and residents who could not return to their homes were accommodated in temporary housing, mostly in Ishinomaki. Elementary and junior high schools were also transferred there.

Given the extent of the damage and the scattering of the community, virtually every aspect of the Ogatsu *hōin kagura* was heavily affected, too. Most costumes and masks, drums and flutes were washed away. Most practitioners lost their homes. The chairman of the Association for the Preservation of Ogatsu *hōin kagura* went missing. Many shrines associated with the *kagura* sustained extensive damage or were completely destroyed. Among them, the Hayama Shrine was flooded, as were historical documents related to the *kagura* that were kept in one of the buildings. With most elements constitutive of the *kagura* washed away or destroyed and the bearers of the tradition, practitioners and residents alike, being relocated, this tradition was at risk of disappearing along with its scattered community.

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**2** Focusing on Iwate Prefecture, Thompson (2008) provides invaluable insight on these amalgamation policies, specifically in regard to their repercussions on folk performances in rural communities.

# 3 Folk performance and community in Ogatsu

Occurring at regular, set intervals, folk performances are generally linked to the celebrations of local shrines or temples as an important part of the local calendar. Most participants, from practitioners to audience, are locals, and the folk performance itself is related to local beliefs and celebrations, in close relation with agriculture and the passing of the seasons. In Ogatsu, the local folk performance is a kagura, a type of theatrical dance with many local variations, generally associated with a shrine and presented as offering to the local *kami* ('god') during a *matsuri* ('Shinto festival').

## 3.1 Characteristics of the Ogatsu *hōin kagura*

The Ogatsu *hōin kagura* (or *kagura* of the *hōin* type) belongs to the *yamabushi kagura* tradition. Common along the Tōhoku coastline, the term *hōin* refers to mountain ascetics, or *yamabushi*. Few Japanese or English publications are available on this particular folk tradition, the main scholarly work being that of Honda (1975 [1935]). Nonetheless, interest has somewhat increased since 2011, notably in folklorist work related to the revival movement (Takakura et al. 2014).[3]

The Ogatsu *hōin kagura* is part of the celebrations of 15 different shrines throughout the Ogatsu peninsula, annually in nine shrines, and every three or four years in six others. The repertory of 28 episodes draws from the mythology of the ancient classics *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*. Each episode is performed as a masked dance, and based on a script delivered by 1 to 14 or 15 practitioners. A colorful and rhythmic experience, due to the characteristic use of two drums, it provides several quiet, dignified pieces, but comes to life in the more dynamic scenes, where practitioners leave the boundaries of the stage to pursue battle scenes in the nearby streets or don acrobatics using the two beams crossing over the stage, to the delight of the younger audience. An interactive element also comes into play, with locals being called to participate on stage and local anecdotes woven inside the text in a humorous way. The participation in the *kagura*, across gender and generations, is one of the pleasures of the celebration and, as emphasized by practitioners, one aspect that solely belongs within

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**3** A description can be found in Lancashire (2011). While not directly discussing *hōin kagura*, the comprehensive work of Averbuch (1995) on *yamabushi kagura* in Iwate Prefecture also provides relevant insights into the tradition.

the community and cannot be experienced during *kagura* presented as public performances.

Most shrine celebrations in Ogatsu are held in a similar fashion. After the *shinji* ('Shinto ritual') held in the shrine in the morning, the *mikoshi* ('portable shrine') procession starts. *Shishimai* dance is performed by shrine parishioners behind the *mikoshi*. Before noon, the *mikoshi* arrives at the house of the *miya-mori*, literally 'protector of the shrine', a role bestowed upon an old family. After lunch, a *yudate shinji* is held,[4] followed by the *kagura* offering. The *kagura* extends until the end of the afternoon, featuring an average of five plays. The *kagura* offering ends with an unmasked dance called *chiratsu*. *Shishimai* performed by local people immediately follows and the *mikoshi* is brought back to the shrine.

As in many rural communities, *kagura* and *matsuri* in Ogatsu are not the public, widely advertised affair that urban *matsuri* can sometimes be (Ikeda 1999). They are often more exclusive and private than their counterparts in the city (Moriarty 1972; Thompson 2014). Until recently, *kagura* and *matsuri* in Ogatsu were mostly inward-focused and private, performed by locals and mostly for locals. As one practitioner explains,

> Before [the designation as Intangible Folk Cultural Property] nobody knew [about the *kagura*]. Just the people in the peninsula. Because ours is a *kagura* that doesn't go outside [*soto ni ittenai kagura*]. Even the people in Miyagi Prefecture, they didn't know there was such a *kagura* here.[5]

Indeed, it was only the designation as Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property in 1996 that brought more people "from the outside," notably *kagura* enthusiasts, and prompted the troupe to present the *kagura* as a public performance in annual folk festivals throughout Japan. Nevertheless, the *kagura* as an offering to the *kami* in Ogatsu is still mostly a local, private affair.

## 3.2 Historical development of the Ogatsu *hōin kagura*

Folk performances are often the product of various influences coming from various places, transmitted through a process of adaptation and recreation in response to the changing circumstances of their community. As Thompson

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**4** The *yudate shinji* is a purification practice involving boiling water in a large pot and sprinkling the participants with it using bamboo leaves.
**5** Unless otherwise specified, all quotes from this point on come from interviews with Ogatsu residents conducted during fieldwork.

(2006) notes, it is this very capacity for adaptation to social change that has ensured their transmission and survival. Most folk performances are not the creation of the community itself, and have generally been brought from cultural centers, often by professional groups (Yamaji 1984). Only once they took root in the locale did they become associated with local shrines and celebrations.

In Miyagi, two groups of mountain ascetics (*hōin*) used to perform the *kagura*, one from the Honzan-ha lineage (based in Shōgōin, Kyoto) and the other from Haguro-ha lineage (based in the Dewa Mountains in Yamagata). The *hōin* in Ogatsu belonged to the latter (Nihon Nashonaru Torasuto 1976; Ogatsu-chō kyōiku iinkai 2000). The *O-kagura no daiji* (1739), a document kept at the Hayama Shrine in Ōhama (Ogatsu), helps trace their activity back to the Edo period. The *hōin* in those days were the sole practitioners of the *kagura*. Transmitted only orally within these families, *kagura* offerings were not a common occurrence then and only held for special occasions, like a newly built shrine. The shrine would send parishioners to gather the *hōin* from their respective locations and have them hold the *kagura* offering. At the time, the *kagura* was not associated with a specific shrine (Ogatsu-chō kyōiku iinkai 2000). Prompted by the separation of Shinto from Buddhism *(shinbutsu bunri)*, the tradition was passed on to local shrine priests or parishioners and between the Meiji and Taishō periods took root in each shrine along the coast.

Only after Meiji did *kagura* offerings become a regular feature of local shrines and their respective *matsuri*. It is likely around that time that transmission of the *kagura* became a subject of attention in each location. In 1912, practitioners from Ogatsu organized for the first time into a group called Jūgohama *kagura-dan* ('*kagura* troupe of Jūgohama', the then name of Ogatsu), at the initiative of a local Shinto priest, in order to ensure the preservation and transmission of the *kagura*, notably through training of practitioners and their successors. Efforts to protect and transmit continued during the post-war period, and passed on to a new group, the Association for the Preservation of Ogatsu *kagura* (Ogatsu *kagura hozon-kai*) in 1951. It was renamed into the Association for the Preservation of Ogatsu *hōin kagura* (Ogatsu *kagura hōin hozon-kai*) in 1976, which is still active today (Ogatsu-chō kyōiku iinkai 2000).

## 3.3 Folk performance and community

Like other folk performances in rural Japan, *kagura* would not be possible without the involvement of the community. Especially in rural, isolated areas, social organization and networks are both reaffirmed and strengthened through the collective participation in rituals and celebrations (Befu 1971), and the necessa-

ry preparations. The organization and logistics involved in folk performances require the existence of active local relationships and a fair amount of goodwill and cooperation. The organizational aspect of the *kagura* and related celebrations extends far beyond the timeframe of the event. In Ogatsu,

> the whole preparation for the *matsuri* and *kagura* is only possible because of the community. Each person is assigned a task, and they all join forces. It's not something that can be achieved if people are unwilling. Each *kagura* offering (shows) the strength of the community.

Recalling the organization of the *kagura*, one practitioner emphasizes the role of locals in the staging, and the comparatively minor role of practitioners, who, traditionally, just had to show up:

> So much effort is needed apart from the practitioners. The building of the stage, the people of the community do it. Each time there's a *kagura*, they come and assemble it, and once it's over, they disassemble it and put it away. [...] There's a lot to do. Even if you're not a practitioner, it has to be done [for the *kagura* to take place]. Us practitioners, we just had to head to the community, while they come and fetch all the props and assemble the stage.

Here, the *kagura* appears as the product of a collective effort by no means restricted to the practitioners.

Efforts and goodwill are expressed in various ways. For many practitioners, combining professional obligations with the busy schedule of *matsuri* seasons in spring and fall is a complicated endeavor when the day of the celebration does not coincide with a weekend. It generally means they have to take a day, or a few, off of work. The motivations for such goodwill and participation are often described as "(people in the community) do it because they like it, so they cooperate."

Folk performances, especially in rural communities, are also an opportunity to renew relationships and a bond to the place. The *kagura* is meant as an offering to the local *kami*, but it is also an entertainment for the community (Miyao 1977), and offers a space out of the ordinary context of daily life, where locals can share a different quality of time. If collective participation and effort undoubtedly create and strengthen community ties, the time of the *kagura* offers another type of bonding for the local community. Along with the local *matsuri*, the *kagura* in Ogatsu is something people share, a culmination of daily life in an extraordinary event.

As one Shinto priest in Ogatsu recalls about the pre-disaster *matsuri* and *kagura*:

> the *matsuri* is a lot of work, but we're all together. We share a meal and sake, and talk with each other. We'd share stories, memories, sometimes a bit of work talk too. It really was a place of community [*komyuniti no ba*].

The *matsuri* and *kagura* thus strengthen social ties in reminiscing, sharing past memories, and making new ones. They are also a tangible expression of the passing of time and a reaffirmation of belonging to the place:

> At the same period every year, we do [*matsuri* and *kagura*] invariably. [It marks] that one year has passed. It's an occasion to look back. For older people, it's the occasion to think "I have made it to another *matsuri*" and to turn to the following year thinking "I hope I can make it to the next one too." […] There's a lively part, necessarily. It's a space for local people to be reminded of the good parts of where they live.

This bond between locals and folk performances can be interpreted as an extension of the bond to the *furusato* ('hometown'), and often goes beyond the limits of the locale:

> Those who were raised here have grown up with the sound of flutes and drums, and have many memories associated with it. Before the earthquake, when the *matsuri* fell on a Sunday, people who lived here as children, and who moved away for work or to get married, came to the *matsuri*. They met with their former neighbours or classmates, and it was the occasion to exchange news about each other.

In Ogatsu, as in many rural communities, the folk performance is both the repository of local history and cultural traditions, and the expression and reaffirmation of shared values, social ties, and belonging (Schnell 1999). The level of trust required for making it work both reflects and reinforces the community's health, its bonds, the depth and width of its relationships (Coleman 1988). Folk performances feature an integrative quality, contributing to identity and community formation and signaling the belonging to a specific group. By offering significant cultural and social functions, the continuity of such practices contributes to the continuity of the community. The next section explores the nature and usage of the *kagura* during the different stages of the revival process in Ogatsu in relation to the community and how it has been adapted to the post-disaster circumstances.

# 4 Making the *kagura* possible again

On 19 May 2011, a little over two months after the tsunami, the first post-disaster Ogatsu *hōin kagura* was held. It took place during Ogatsu Reconstruction Market (Ogatsu *fukkō-ichi*), using salvaged and lent props, with most residents and practitioners still in shelters. A month later, the *kagura* was presented in one of the emergency shelters, in front of evacuated residents. From the fall on, the Ogatsu troupe participated in several folk performance events across Japan, while gathering missing props, notably the masks, drums, and stage with financial aids received from private and public sources.

## 4.1 Restarting: motivations and concerns

The question of reviving the *kagura* did not come up immediately and was difficult for several reasons. First of all, the revival did not seem a realistic endeavour in the midst of reconstruction. The situation of the practitioners themselves, most of them having lost their home and livelihood, was a core issue. Along with the general confusion of immediate disaster aftermath, obstacles included the missing props, the scattering of the practitioners, and the difficulty to communicate, meet, and rehearse.

Recounting the daze of the first couple of weeks, practitioners mentioned spontaneous efforts to find and salvage props and parts of the flooded Hayama Shrine in Ōhama: searching the debris for masks and drums a little more than a week after the tsunami, or washing old costumes in a stream. The local Shinto priest recounts how a few locals spontaneously went and lifted the bell that had been washed away to the side of the road, because "they thought it was precious and didn't want it to get stolen." While these first acts of preservation testify to the attachment to the *kagura* and the shrine, practitioners and locals I interviewed admit that, in the early days, they did not think restarting would be possible, "because there was nothing left." Most telling perhaps of the relationship between *kagura* and locals, one explains: "I didn't think [it was possible], but I still wanted to try."

Scattered in emergency shelters in or outside Ishinomaki, members of the Association were finally able to gather at the beginning of May to assess the situation. Meanwhile, volunteers had been organizing small entertainments in the largest shelter in Kahoku as a way of providing reprieve from shelter living, and Ogatsu residents started asking to see the *kagura*. The request was relayed to one core practitioner. While the will to revive the *kagura* was already clear among most practitioners, one cause of hesitation was how disaster-affected

residents would perceive this out-of-context *kagura*. The question of appropriateness is one that would keep on being raised. A Shinto priest in charge of several shrines in Ogatsu, who would go on to assume a leadership role in the revival of the *kagura*, explains his own conflicted feelings at the time:

> Honestly I was worried. Everything had been washed away, and only the old costumes stored away were left. [...] Volunteers were organizing small events every evening, and different groups were coming. And the people from Ogatsu asked to see the *kagura*. One of my worries was that, among [the evacuees], some of them must have had so much on their mind. [...] A lot of people lost family members. It felt dangerous to involve everyone in something that only a few requested. So I looked into it without replying immediately. Once I knew the context, I thought [it was alright] to go. This was a real fear [of mine]. [The *kagura*] had been so well-loved. I didn't want to create a negative image.

## 4.2 Looking for "normal"

While the restarting of folk performances in Tōhoku mere weeks after the tsunami surprised even seasoned anthropologists (Hayashi 2012), it may in fact have been the natural expression of a search for a new normal, an attempt at a re-appropriation of ordinary life. When talking about their *kagura*, most informants repeatedly mentioned how it was part of Ogatsu, and that it was difficult to imagine it not being held. They described the bond between the *kagura* and Ogatsu as indivisible, the *kagura* being "something natural" (*atarimae na sonzai*), like "the air [we breathe]." The *kagura* was something they had always known and which was therefore strongly associated with life in Ogatsu.

This search for something normal, a remnant of life before the tsunami, and perhaps implicitly the hope that not all was lost is expressed in the following statement:

> Before the earthquake, the *matsuri* was a special day. For the community, this is exactly that, a special occasion. Usually it's very quiet, but on this day, it bustles with the sound of flutes and drums. But now, the community that there was before has been shattered, and there's nothing [left]. But when we hold a *matsuri*, the practitioners are on stage [...] we're surrounded by faces we know, and really, it's like before the earthquake. It's [like] normal life. And the landscape around is so out of the ordinary [*hi-nichijō*]. It feels like things are in reverse. So when people asked to see the *kagura*, I think they wanted to see something that hadn't changed with the earthquake [...]. The normal landscape has completely changed, so what's there from before the earthquake that we can have for our eyes and ears. And so they thought of the *kagura*.

## 4.3 Immediate post-disaster *kagura*: shape and functions

In the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, the *kagura* was adapted to the circumstances: first materially, due to the lack of original props, and functionally, to respond to the needs of the community. Here we can observe the preexisting dichotomy of inward and outward common to many folk performances. In Ogatsu, such dichotomy already existed before the disaster, to the limited extent of the designation as Intangible Folk Cultural Property and the related public performances mainly held in folk performing arts festivals. This outward aspect became more prevalent post-disaster, with added functions.

Just as the community to which it belongs, the *kagura* is now part of a new context imposed by the post-disaster circumstances. Organized with salvaged and borrowed props, it is not the "normal" *kagura*. Yet it resembles the normal *kagura* in the sense that its main component remains: it is for the locals, by the locals.

Despite the alterations of usage and context in these first post-disaster *kagura* events, a fundamental element remains in that the *kagura* was still for the community. The *kagura* here is neither an offering nor a public performance *per se*. The use of the *kagura* in the shelter, for instance, out of any normal context, is a direct reflection of the extreme circumstances. Its presence in such a liminal time and space confirms and reaffirms the position of the *kagura* within the community, as part of a mutual relationship between *kagura* and locals and as part of the "normal" Ogatsu.

Practitioners express their hope that the *kagura* may bring a little comfort, to the living ("I want to lift the locals' spirit"), but also of those who have passed ("[I did it] for the spirit of the dead"). This last part is a departure from the normal usage and context of Shinto-related practices, where anything related to death is a great source of impurity. After the disaster, notably during the 100-day memorial service, many troupes offered their *kagura* in memory of the dead.

On the other hand, the *kagura* also turned outward in the immediate disaster aftermath. Like other Tōhoku *kagura* groups, the Ogatsu troupe was invited to various places, notably to events related to reconstruction efforts, and while the *kagura* was not yet in its best shape in terms of props, practitioners put a lot of effort in making themselves available. Among their motivations was the will to literally put Ogatsu on the map:

> because Ogatsu is now part of Ishinomaki, [the name] doesn't come out. First we wanted to say that Ogatsu has been affected and it's really bad, but we're hanging in there. We really wanted to put Ogatsu on the map [*chimei o hirometai*]. So those who could go participated.

In practitioners' accounts, the *kagura* was also their way to express gratitude for the support and financial aid received from all over Japan: "We have received so much aid from the whole country. So when [requests] come […] we try to go as much as possible." Also, "for me, it is a dance of gratitude, for all the energy [*genki*] I received from so many people." At a time where the media presented Tōhoku as a pile of debris, the *kagura* served to convey something positive: "[The *kagura*], it's the good, lively part. It's the only thing there was to show. We receive so much aid from all across Japan. It's not really a repayment, but it's a good thing to be able to show a positive side."

During this first stage, the meaning and importance of the *kagura* for the community, at the individual and collective levels, was reasserted. In the midst of extraordinary circumstances, and in order to respond to them, the *kagura* also took on new functions, beyond the boundaries of its preexisting usages. Here, the presentation of the *kagura* to the outside, out of context, is accepted as necessary, as a means to preserve it and to contribute to the community.

# 5 Reviving the *kagura* inside the community

As mentioned earlier, the *kagura*, along with the *matsuri*, is originally a local, inward-looking event, organized by locals for locals, in a very local setting. Reviving it would mean bringing it back inside the community, in a form and a feel that locals would identify as their own. While the first year after the disaster witnessed the adaptive and fluid nature of the *kagura*, the following stage of revival hints more to preoccupations of continuity.

A variety of fundings from private organizations and benefactors, along with financial support by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, were used to gather masks and props. The Ogatsu *hōin kagura* was also performed in many events surrounding reconstruction, contributing to building a network of aid that would eventually make the revival a reality. Later on, funding from the Nippon Foundation as well as the Association of Shinto Shrines allowed repairing or entirely rebuilding damaged shrines, literally returning the *kagura* to the community.

In May 2012, the first *kagura* offering after the tsunami was held. Unlike the many representations staged for various events outside of Ogatsu, or even the one held in Ogatsu in the shelter, this brought back the *kagura* to its original place, among local residents, in a local and traditional setting. Here the *kagura* was finding its way back to, as informants expressed it, "what it originally was" (*honrai no*), "what it should be" (*aru beki sugata*), "proper" (*chanto shita*).

As described in the introduction, authenticity here is defined by what practitioners envision as the proper form of the *kagura*. Given the setting of boundaries and a focus on continuity, it may be better described as a form of integrity. Boundaries reflect what is deemed acceptable, considering a variety of factors from respect toward previous generations, responsibility toward next ones, the local audience, and the needs of the community. Authenticity, or integrity, is located in the will to preserve, transmit, and eventually use the *kagura* in ways that are consistent with its past, in a recognizable form retaining its main tangible and intangible characteristics.

## 5.1 Regaining material integrity

One element that made restarting the *kagura* possible so early was the fact that some of the props in Ōsugi district, located on higher ground and subject to less damage, were still intact. Because of specific local history, when *kagura* props from the different settlements were pooled for common use, those from Ōsugi were not included but remained for exclusive use there. For such reasons, the props used in Ōsugi were limited in type and did not cover the entire repertory of Ogatsu *hōin kagura*, but were enough for a few episodes. Borrowing these props allowed the restarting of the Ogatsu *hōin kagura*, but it would not revive it.

It is important here to consider what reviving the *kagura* meant for the local community, especially practitioners. In order to give the *kagura* its true feel, it was necessary to revive each characteristic element. This included masks, costumes, stage, and ultimately the repair or rebuilding of the associated shrines, to physically bring the *kagura* back into the community and its ritual context. Each step of the revival had its own set of challenges and setbacks, but the concern for the *kagura*'s "true face," in a most literal sense, is perhaps best seen through the efforts of retrieving the masks. It was not enough to get masks back, but it was imperative for the *kagura* that these masks "felt right," especially to the practitioners and the local audience. Originally, the community where the celebration was held prepared the props. The use of their own masks made it their own distinct *kagura*. It is one of the main elements that differentiate their performance from that of other settlements, a distinctive sign, a marker of a specific identity.

Practitioners thus expressed concerns that people seeing the *kagura* would not recognize it as Ogatsu *hōin kagura* if they kept using borrowed masks, which, while quite similar, were "a bit off." After several failed attempts, most masks were gathered again in the spring of 2013. This concern reflects the very

local quality and historical development of the *kagura*, and the link it fosters between people and place. Similarly, a special meaning is assigned to seeing the *kagura* locally, with a distinction made between just seeing "a" *kagura* and seeing "our" *kagura*:

> In Ogatsu, the *kagura* takes place in five or six places. So, even if it doesn't happen in your own area, you can still go and see it if you want to. But it seems [people] want to see it in their own place. So, this grandma in a wheelchair, she has her son coming from far away to take her [to the *kagura* where she lives].

## 5.2 Regaining contextual integrity

Out of their local and traditional contexts, in shelters, for charities or memorials for the deceased, folk performances took on a variety of meanings. They were used to convey the comfort of familiarity, gratitude toward the aid aimed at the Tōhoku region, or as a promotion tool to attract further funding. In many instances and many ways, Ogatsu *hōin kagura*, along with other Tōhoku folk performances, became a symbol of the recovery process, and a way for practitioners to contribute to their community. In a dire situation, practitioners resolved to support their community through the *kagura*, and this decision was a direct reflection of the needs of the community at the time.

After the tsunami, practitioners actively answered requests for public performances and, out of need, became more outward looking. However, once the material integrity had been re-established, they had to consider the very nature of the *kagura*, as a celebration directed at and for the people of Ogatsu. Past the emergency response stage, the gap between the frequency of public performances and the fact that the *kagura* offering was still not back within the community caused a wake-up call. People were reminded of the original nature of the *kagura*, its strong relationship with the community and how faint this aspect had become. There were concerns that despite the material recovery, the *kagura* would be lost if it could not recover its place within the community, as a regular feature of shrine celebrations. This realization brought a sense of urgency and the focus shifted from simply restarting the *kagura* to reviving it "back to its original form," in its original setting.

Here preexisting tensions came back to the forefront, dividing practitioners on the appropriate use of the *kagura*. Most people involved make a very clear distinction between *kagura* offerings (*hōnō*) and public performances (*kōen*). While both feature the *kagura*, most practitioners agree that the true nature of the *kagura* is only expressed as an offering within and for the community. This distinction informs decisions as to what is appropriate *kagura* use.

The consensus, though, is that the *kagura* first belongs to the people of Ogatsu, to the shrine, to the *matsuri*, and only occasionally can appear as public performance. The tension still remains, with a few deploring the lack of promotional use of the *kagura*, stating that "[with the designation], more people came to see the *kagura*. But if we did more promotion, many more would come," while others express anger toward public institutions that treat the *kagura* as mere entertainment at their disposal, emphasizing the lack of understanding of the true nature of the *kagura* ("We're not a marching band!") and the lack of acknowledgement of the burden on practitioners ("This type of requests [for promotional events out of town] has nothing to do with us. Practitioners have their own life too. There's nothing in it for us.").

In sum, recovering the material integrity of the *kagura* brought it out of the emergency response stage, and allowed concerns to shift back to questions of authenticity or, perhaps more accurately, overall integrity, where the value of the *kagura* lies in its link to the place and its ties to the community. This prompted a reaffirmation of the proper nature and usage of the *kagura* and its position within the community, as a local affair.

# 6 Toward the future

The Ogatsu *hōin kagura* is now again part of the yearly celebrations in Ogatsu. The rebuilding of the Hayama Shrine, damaged by the tsunami, was started in June 2013 and completed in September 2015, celebrating its new life with a three-day *matsuri* and *kagura* offering. The different phases of the revival process reflect to some extent the post-disaster development of community rebuilding, from initial confusion and emergency response, gathering the basics and starting a new form of daily life, to the many uncertainties regarding the mid- and longer terms.

Contrary to the *kagura*, the Ogatsu community is nowhere near its pre-disaster situation. Reconstruction plans are considered dissatisfactory at best, "a joke on us" at worst. Having lost their homes to the tsunami, faced with job and school obligations and non-advancing higher ground housing provision, about half the residents have left Ogatsu. Most feel as if their voice has not been heard, causing an ever-growing lack of trust in the administration. Concerns toward the financial burden imposed on future generations by the reconstruction plan make it even more unlikely that people will come back.

As for the *kagura*, echoing the state of the community and directly affected by it, preexisting concerns are back, namely (i) its preservation and transmis-

sion and (ii) population issues, magnified by the experience of the disaster and its impact on Ogatsu. Both topics relate to the future of the place and its community.

## 6.1 Ensuring transmission

Linked to the notion of authenticity, that of transmission, too, poses a certain conundrum. It needs to be situated in the particular context of folk performances, where it consists in preserving a fluid and constantly recreated form (Schechner 1985). The script ensures the transmission of the episodes. Props are transmitted as well, but the physical dance itself and the possible decontextualization are elements most subject to variation. Here concerns related to the transmission are mostly focused on sufficient experience on stage, the form of the dance and knowledge of the (possibly evolving) acceptable context for the *kagura*.

The responsibility to pass the *kagura* on, out of respect for the previous generations, or out of consideration for the designation as Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property, has been a recurring topic since the *kagura* restarted. A constant concern in regard to folk performances in rural areas, transmission has taken on a new urgency following the drop in population and most children having relocated to communities outside Ogatsu. Older practitioners, already involved in teaching *kagura* in local schools before the tsunami, have resumed their teaching. The scattering of children in different areas outside Ogatsu has entailed a reflection on how to reach them to ensure transmission. One option being discussed is to gather them on Saturdays in a public hall, but the logistics of such a project have proven difficult.

The efforts put into the training of successors go beyond school-age children. After the tsunami, a couple of young adults and middle-aged professionals have started to train. Some of them have seen their parents dance the *kagura* and followed their path, while for others the disaster has been an eye-opening moment that prompted them to "add value to their own life" in the form of the *kagura*. Older practitioners are training them, but the difficulty to manage schedules, places of rehearsal, and distance from each other comes in the way.

While the *kagura* had traditionally been taught mostly through experience on stage, it seems practitioners are feeling an increased responsibility and urgency to transmit it in a more explicit way. A clear emphasis is being put on the right form and mastering the basics: "Most practitioners still think of it as an offering. This is what we have to transmit to the younger generation."

## 6.2 Bringing people back

Recent research has shown that local folk performances can potentially tie people and place, bringing back former residents who have left (Averbuch 1995; Ikeda 1999). In terms of community rebuilding, the revival of the *kagura* has to a certain extent helped reestablish a sense of place that extends to relocated residents, glad to come back for the festival and who express relief and joy at the prospect of seeing the *kagura* again.

Yet the community is in every way still living in disaster-affected circumstances. As mentioned above, the reconstruction plan based on relocation on higher ground and concomitant depopulation casts a shadow over the eventual continuity of this link to the place, making it a bitter issue for both those who left ("I wish I could have stayed, but …", "I wish I could come back, but …"), and those who stayed ("Our voices have not been heard", "Our opinions have been ignored").

Against this gloomy background, practitioners and residents have expressed their hope that *kagura*, *matsuri,* and shrine will create an occasion and place for former residents to come back to: "The *matsuri* and *kagura*, it's an atmosphere that's easy to come back to. And there are not many occasions that can gather people like that." This binding force of the folk performance and the *furusato* is expected to contribute to the continuity of the community, even in its scattered state.

As discussed above, folk performances contribute to strengthen local community ties, reflecting shared identity and values. Their reviving process can contribute to disaster-affected communities in maintaining social capital and reestablishing a sense of place. While acting to enforce continuity of culture, living heritage in this instance becomes a vector of adaptation, bridging past and present. As the post-disaster community has taken a different shape and is facing many challenges, the *kagura* is becoming an agent of continuity and change, contributing to a new form of community tie based not on physical proximity but on a shared past and present, reaffirmed periodically around the festival and *kagura*. If so, and if this tie persists, then the *kagura* will have truly reached the revival objective of being a "place to come back to."

# 7 Conclusion

As this paper has shown, the revival process of the *kagura* has ignited or perhaps renewed concerns of authenticity. The extraordinary circumstances of the

immediate disaster aftermath made the unorthodox usage and form of the *kagura* acceptable and reaffirmed its strong link with the Ogatsu community. The necessary negotiations of the true nature of the *kagura*, as an offering within the community, were temporary and led to renewed concerns regarding its integrity and ultimately its proper transmission. Preventing the *kagura* from becoming something it is not (a promotional tool transplantable to just any setting) became a stronger guideline for the practitioners to filter which event outside the community to take part in and which not to.

This tension between the need to adapt and the will to preserve the integrity or authenticity of the *kagura* is as strong as ever, as Ogatsu needs all the help it can get to survive the ongoing consequences of the disaster. The difficulty to accommodate adaptation and authenticity is perhaps best expressed by one practitioner, reflecting on the next possible step:

> Since it's not something we have created ourselves, and it was left to us as such a great [tradition], it's our responsibility to pass it on to the next generation in as good a shape as possible. So we can't do anything [we want] with it.

Here, the responsibility to transmit the tradition and the limited usage of the *kagura* come in contradiction, as transmission will not be possible if the community socioeconomically disintegrates.

However, with pressing issues of depopulation and the future of the community still unclear, tensions between what is acceptable and the needs of the community will have to be reconciled. Using the *kagura* as an asset for the community, alongside seafood, beautiful coastline and mountain, and ink stone industry, will once again call for negotiations to accommodate the true nature of the *kagura* with its potential contribution to the community. One older practitioner gives the example of places where the local *kagura* is available for tourists at any time, not just during the *matsuri*.

Most practitioners do not consider this a desirable development, not least due to the lack of practitioners available full-time. However, most are also aware that Ogatsu needs as many assets as possible for visitors to come and spend time there and, eventually, for people to want to live there again. Finding ways of combining these needs without denaturing the *kagura* will undoubtedly continue to cause debate. Ensuring the future of the community – and in so doing, the survival of the *kagura* – is already calling for compromise. True to the nature of folk performances, the *kagura* will likely adapt in a renegotiation process of authenticity, finding the middle-ground between integrity and contribution to the community.

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