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Entering the Pure Land

Hanamatsuri and the *Ōkagura Jōdo-iri* Ritual of Okumikawa

While the concept of the Pure Land found its way into many mainstream Buddhist doctrines and practices, it also was adopted by *yamabushi* of the syncretistic Shugendō cult. This article examines one example of this incorporation, namely the *kagura* of the Okumikawa region (present-day Aichi Prefecture). Today this region is perhaps best known for its many *hanamatsuri*, the year-end festivals that are characterized by *yudate* rituals and the appearance of masked demons (*oni*). The *hanamatsuri*, however, can be seen as a variant of an older *kagura* festival, which during the Edo period continued to be mounted periodically by several villages acting together. Although now extinct, several records have survived and have made it possible to piece together not only the general outline of this now non-extant festival but also some details of its individual steps. One of the most intriguing of these was the *jōdo-iri* ritual, a symbolic re-creation of the act of entering the Pure Land. While the symbolic enactment of death and rebirth has long been recognized as a ritual practice of the *yamabushi* themselves, the *jōdo-iri* indicates that it was also an important part of Shugendō-influenced religious services for the laity. Its trace, moreover, while faint, can still be seen in the surviving *hanamatsuri*.

KEYWORDS: *hanamatsuri* – *kagura* – *jōdo-iri* – Pure Land – Shugendō

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THIS ARTICLE takes as its subject the incorporation of the concept of the Pure Land into Shugendō rituals. In particular, it will focus on the *hanamatsuri* 花祭 of Aichi Prefecture as well as a now defunct related festival, the so-called *ōkagura* 大神楽 or *honmikagura* 本御神楽 of the same area. While it is not difficult to detect the Shugendō influence on the *hanamatsuri*, the common conception of Shugendō is that it draws its doctrine and practices primarily from esoteric Buddhism and Shinto. One does not, therefore, anticipate encountering the notion of the Pure Land in such a festival, and indeed this aspect of the *hanamatsuri* has been obscured by changes and abbreviations to the festival in the modern period. The Pure Land element is there, however, and is even clearer to see in the related *ōkagura*. Its presence in both festivals is rather telling, for it is another indication not only of the widespread appeal of Pure Land ideology, but also of the syncretistic nature of Shugendō itself. And it is not simply the use of the notion as part of Shugendō doctrine, however, but its incorporation into ritual which is probably the most revealing. For if the practitioners of Shugendō historically have tended towards eclecticism, they did so not simply as the passive recipients of new religious doctrines that found their way to Japan, but in an effort to expand their resources and cover more ground. And they did this, I would argue, not only to increase their own spiritual or magical powers, but in order to provide better or more comprehensive magico-religious services to the clientele they served. This practical—one might even say “service-oriented”—tendency is readily apparent in the *jōdo-iri* 浄土入り (entering the Pure Land) and other rituals of the original *ōkagura*, and traces still survive in the many *hanamatsuri*.

Hanamatsuri and Related Yudate Festivals Today

The *hanamatsuri* festival today takes place in some seventeen locations in the Okumikawa 奥三河 region of northern Aichi Prefecture. Eleven of these locations are in the town of Tōei 東栄町, five in Toyone Village 豊根村, and one in Tsugu Village 津具村. In addition, there is one festival in the village of Tenryū 天龍村 in neighboring Nagano Prefecture and one in Sakuma 佐久間町 in Shizuoka Prefecture that are recognized as festivals of the *hanamatsuri* lineage. There were at one time several other hamlets in the area that held *hanamatsuri*,

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but these have disappeared because the hamlets themselves have vanished, some as a result of depopulation and others because they were submerged in the reservoirs created by the construction of the Sakuma (1956) and Shin-Toyone (1973) dams (HOSAKA 1984, 48).

The *hanamatsuri* shares important features with several other well-known festivals found across the border in southern Nagano Prefecture. Among these related festivals are the *fuyu matsuri* 冬祭 of Sakabe 坂部 and the *okiyome matsuri* お潔め祭りの Mukōgata 向方, both in Tenryū Village, and the several *shimotsuki matsuri* 霜月祭り held in the former villages of Kami 上村 and Minami Shinano 南信濃村, now both part of the city of Iida 飯田市. As the term *shimotsuki matsuri* indicates, these are all festivals that were traditionally held in the eleventh month (*shimotsuki*), which on the old lunar calendar would have corresponded to a period some four to six weeks later in the year.¹ They were, in other words, festivals held in the dead of winter, and their original and most basic function was to revitalize the community and pray to the kami for the return of spring. Today the dates vary. Some are now held in the eleventh month (that is, November) according to the new calendar, while others have been rescheduled to December in order to compensate roughly for the differences between the two calendars. Still others are held in the first few days of the New Year in order to take advantage of that holiday period. In modern times, having the festivals fall on holidays has become a distinct advantage and key to their survival. For these are long festivals, made up of a large number of ritual or performance steps, and they can be very exhausting. They can last anywhere from twelve to twenty-four hours or more, and what can be considered their highlights—the most spectacular rituals or dances—often take place in the middle of the night. For this reason, in recent years many of the festivals that have traditionally taken place on fixed dates in November or December have been moved to the closest weekend.

Another common feature of these festivals is the *yudate* 湯立 or boiling water ritual. Typically, one or more large cauldrons are set up on stands or on earthen ovens in the center of the festival site. Fires are built to boil the water, which is then offered to the kami who have been invoked. The water may also be sprinkled or, more commonly, splashed around the performance area to purify the participants and spectators. Yet another common feature is the large number of masked and other dances that are performed. The *hanamatsuri* is most famous for the appearance of several demons (*oni* 鬼) in colorful costumes, but there

1. For the *shimotsuki* festival as a major category of *kagura*, see the pioneering work by Honda Yasuji, which covers many of the festivals mentioned here as well as the *shimotsuki kagura* of Horohasan 保呂羽山, Akita Prefecture (HONDA 1995). As Honda notes, one of the chief characteristics of such festivals is the *yudate* ritual (discussed below), which he later identified with the now defunct *Ise Kagura*, for him the prototype of this form of *kagura*.

are many other kinds of dances, most of which can be traced back to medieval performance genres such as *sarugaku* 猿樂 (YAMAJI 1997, 73–74).

Finally, one other thing that all these festivals have in common is their Shugendō origins, which are evident not only in some of the rituals but also in the prayers or chants (*saimon* 祭文) and songs (*kamiuta* 神歌) that accompany them. In the *hanamatsuri* this Shugendō aspect is most clearly seen in the *yudate* ritual, where the chief ritualist (*hanadayū* 花太夫) performs the Shugendō *kuji* 九字 with their corresponding *mudrās* in front of the cauldron (see FIGURE 1).² The *hanamatsuri* as it is performed today, however, has undoubtedly lost much of its Shugendō coloring. As Takei Shōgu has pointed out, the festival has suffered not only from the banning of Shugendō in 1872 but also from the anti-Buddhist *haibutsu kishaku* 排仏毀釈 movement during the early Meiji period (TAKEI 1980, 451). This has made the *hanamatsuri* much more of a Shinto festival, and apart from the performance of *kuji* the only references to Buddhism are in the texts of the *saimon*, several older versions of which have survived.³

It would be a mistake, however, to think of the *hanamatsuri* as a festival that was suddenly and dramatically transformed once and for all at the beginning of the modern period, for in fact the *hanamatsuri* has always been evolving and itself developed out of a larger festival that dates back to the latter part of

FIGURE 1. The *hanadayū* performing a *kuji* before the cauldron. Tsuki, Tōei-chō (photo by author).



2. On the *kuji* and their incorporation into Japanese Buddhist and Shugendō rituals, see the excellent account by WATERHOUSE (1996). It is interesting to note that, although the *kuji* are usually associated with esoteric Buddhism and Shugendō, the earliest surviving evidence of their use suggests they entered Japanese thought and religious practice via Pure Land Buddhism (WATERHOUSE 1996, 13).

3. On changes to the *hanamatsuri*, especially since the Meiji Period, see also NAKAMURA 2003.

the Muromachi period (1333–1600). This larger festival, the so-called *ōkagura* referred to earlier, continued to be performed until the late Edo period. It is thus tempting to see the *ōkagura* rather than the *hanamatsuri* as the real victim of the Meiji period anti-Buddhist movement. The fact is, however, that the *ōkagura* had by the late Edo period already lost much of its vigor and popularity to its shorter relative, and its demise cannot be attributed to the spread of anti-Buddhist sentiments alone. I will have more to say about the *hanamatsuri* and its appeal over the *ōkagura* later, but first I would like to turn to the *ōkagura* itself and the focus of this article, the *jōdo-iri* ritual.

Ōkagura and the Jōdo-iri Ritual in the Edo Period

Unlike the *hanamatsuri*, the *ōkagura* was not an annual event but was held only periodically. The folklorist Hayakawa Kōtarō, author of a pioneering work on the *hanamatsuri*, suggested the festival was held as a rule once every seven years (HAYAKAWA 1972, 2: 19),⁴ but Takei has shown that some of Hayakawa's dates are wrong and for others there is no evidence (TAKEI 1977, 194–97). According to Takei, the only dates in the nineteenth century that can be verified are 1822, 1833, and 1856, which would mean an interval of sixteen or eighteen rather than seven years between festivals. The *ōkagura* also differed from the *hanamatsuri* in that it was not a festival put on by a single hamlet but was a cooperative affair in which five or six different hamlets took part and shared responsibilities and expenses. Both the long interval between festivals and the system of cooperation between several hamlets can be explained in part by the scale of the festival. For if the twenty-four-hour *hanamatsuri* with its thirty or so individual steps seems long and complicated, this pales in comparison with the *ōkagura* festival, which lasted three days or longer and involved seventy or more steps. The last recorded performance of the festival was in 1856 at Shimokurokawa 下黒川 in the present village of Toyone. Also participating were the hamlets of Kamikurokawa 上黒川 and Sakauba 坂宇場, also in Toyone, Shimotsugu 下津具 of the present village of Tsugu, and Futto 古戸, now part of the town of Tōei (HAYAKAWA 1972, 2: 20).

Fortunately, despite the fact that it no longer exists, it is possible to construct a picture of what the *ōkagura* festival was like. Our present knowledge of the festival comes from two main sources. The first and most important is written documents. These are basically of two kinds: lists of the stages or steps of the festival (*kagura no shidai* 神楽の次第); and collections of *saimon*. The other source is accounts of the last *ōkagura* festival gathered by Hayakawa from interviews held in the 1920s with several surviving eyewitnesses to the 1856 festival. Because of the amount of time that had elapsed and the fact that the witnesses were all very

4. Hayakawa's study, *Hanamatsuri*, first appeared in 1930. It has been republished as the first two volumes of his collected works. See HAYAKAWA 1972.

young when they experienced the festival, this second source is admittedly not very reliable. Moreover, this last recorded festival may have changed considerably from earlier versions. The documents that survive from earlier periods, therefore, may give us a better idea of what the festival was like in its heyday.

Among the extant documents, the oldest is the *Mikagura nikki* 御神楽日記, which is dated 1581 and has been preserved in the hamlet of Yamauchi 山内 in the Misawa 三沢 area of Toyone Village.⁵ The *Mikagura nikki* lists some seventy different steps to the festival. An analysis of these shows that the festival can be roughly divided into two major phases. The first includes the *yudate* ritual and a large number of dances, many of which are still performed as part of the *hanamatsuri*. The second phase was centred around the *jōdo-iri* ritual, which is not a part of the *hanamatsuri*. This ritual was performed specifically for the benefit of the elderly, that is, those who had completed the first sixty-year cycle of their lives (*honkegaeri* 本卦還り) (HAYAKAWA 1972, 2: 58). It was in this sense a kind of preparation or rehearsal for the actual entering of the Pure Land following death. Accordingly, participants wore the traditional white funeral dress.

The *Mikagura nikki* mentions as one of the first steps of the second phase of the festival the construction of the *shirayama* 白山, the enclosure the participants enter during the *jōdo-iri*. The information gained from eyewitnesses suggests that the *shirayama* was a separate structure, at some distance from the dance area (*maido* 舞処) where the first phase of the festival took place. It was apparently square and made of brushwood lashed together and covered with reed matting. In place of a roof, overhead was a large paper decoration similar to the *yubuta* 湯蓋 of the *hanamatsuri*.⁶ This was connected to the sides of the structure by paper streamers of different colors. Hayakawa included his own visual conceptualization of the *shirayama* in his study of the *hanamatsuri* (see FIGURE 2). Not all scholars agree with this visualization, however, and indeed, for the 1990 revival of the festival in Toyone the organizers, in consultation with Takei Shōgu and other scholars, came up with a different conceptualization (see FIGURE 3).⁷

According to the *Mikagura nikki*, the *jōdo-iri* included the following steps:

- inspection at the bridge (*hashi no haiken* 橋之はいけん)
- departure rice and tea (*shuttatsu no kui chatō* 出立の喰茶とう)
- appearance of demons (*oni nokorazu dasu* 鬼不残出ス)
- seven-five-three precepts (*shichigosan honkai* 七五三本かい)
- hanging an icon of the Pure Land (*jōdo ni honzon o kakeru*)

5. The *Kagura no shidai* section of the *Kagura nikki* is reproduced in TAKEI 1980, 457–61; also SS, 234–36.

6. The *yubuta*, literally “hot water cover,” is a large square decoration made of white paper attached to a wooden frame. It is suspended above the cauldron and serves as the temporary seat of the kami who are invoked.

7. On the 1990 revival, see TOYONE-MURA KYŌIKU IINKAI 1990.

じやうどに本尊おかける)
 priest's address [to the ritually deceased] (*shukke indō suru* 出家いんどうする)
 (SS, 236)

While the list gives us some idea of the structure of this part of the festival, it is only by consulting the surviving *saimon* that it becomes possible to reconstruct the ritual in more detail. The following summary of the ritual is based largely on the analysis carried out by Yamamoto Hiroko, who draws heavily on the *saimon* of Komadate 古真立 and Futto, as well as the texts of medieval *jingi kanjō* 神祇灌頂 and other Buddhist, Shinto, and *yamabushi* rituals (YAMAMOTO 1990).⁸

FIGURE 2. HAYAKAWA'S conceptualization of the *shirayama* (1972, 2: 78). Courtesy Miraisha.

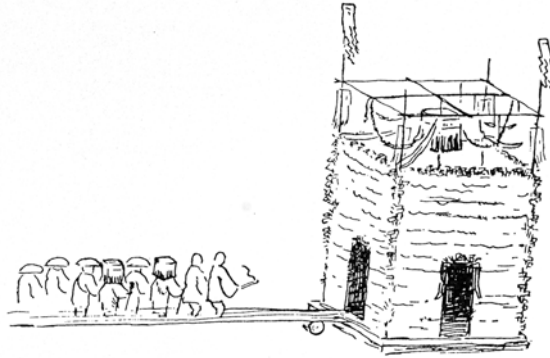
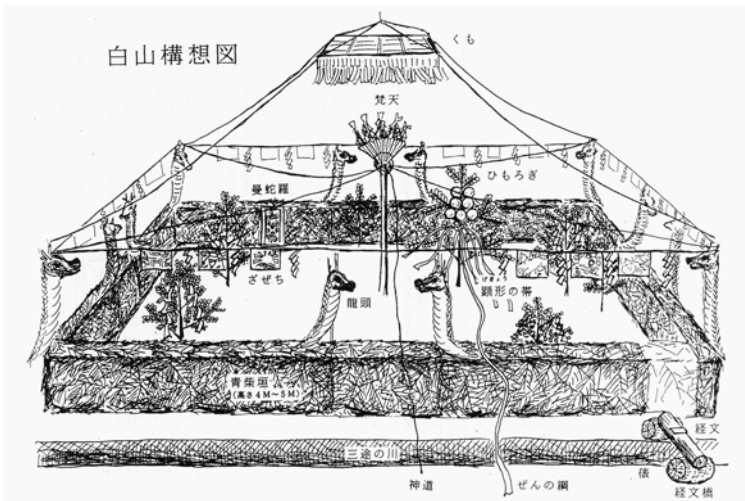


FIGURE 3. Conceptualization of *shirayama* for 1990 revival. (TOYONE-MURA KYŌIKU INKAI 1990, 8). Courtesy Toyone-mura Kyōiku Iinkai.



8. For the *saimon* of Komadate and Futto, see SS, 239–42.

The participants were first led to the bridge by which they will symbolically cross the Sanzunokawa 三途川, the river separating the world of the living from the world of the dead, to reach the Pure Land. The *saimon* indicate that they are there questioned by the King of the underworld, Enma 閻魔 (Sk. Yama), and by the guardian deity Taishaku 帝釈 (Sk. Śakro devānām Indra) about their good deeds. The participants reply that they have performed no particular good deeds other than having participated in and contributed to previous *ōkagura*. When asked to show proof of this, they produce multi-petalled flowers (*jūroku no hana no hanabera* 十六花の花べら), which satisfies the judges. Before setting out across the bridge, however, they have to perform the next step. The reference in the *Mikagura nikki* to eating and tea suggests that this step involved *makurameshi* 枕飯 and *chatō* 茶湯, that is, the rice and tea offerings made during memorials to the deceased. Taking the role of the dead, the participants most likely ritually partook of these offerings before crossing the bridge. Exactly at what point the participants entered the *shirayama* is debatable due to the uncertainty surrounding the timing of the next step, the appearance of the demons (*oni*). Later documents suggest the *oni* actually entered the *shirayama* while the participants were inside, and this is the interpretation that Hayakawa makes (HAYAKAWA 1972, 2: 90). Yamamoto, however, believes that this is a later development, arguing that it would be more in keeping with the medieval conception of the Pure Land to have the demons appear and threaten the participants while they are crossing the Sanzunokawa (YAMAMOTO 1990, 62).

Once they have safely crossed the bridge the participants enter the *shirayama* for the next step, the *shichigosan no honkai*. Judging from the surviving *saimon*, this was a rather long step leading up to a kind of initiation ceremony or *kanjō*. The step begins with a listing and invocation of seven heavenly kami and five earthly kami. This is followed by the *shime no honkai* 四目之本戒, a section espousing the benefits of three levels of *shimekiri* 四目切, that is, the demarcation of three progressively higher levels of sacredness or purity. *Shime*, of course, is also the term used for marking sacred space in Shinto, which is usually accomplished by means of a special rope called a *shimenawa* 注連縄. It is possible that this step actually involved the stringing of three different *shimenawa*. In the *saimon*, however, the three different levels of sacredness are also related to the *kuhon* 九品, the nine different ranks of the Pure Land (which are actually made up of three levels, each of which is further subdivided into three). The invocation of the two groups of seven and five kami plus these three stages (or three times three) of purification are probably what is meant by the *shichigosan* 七五三 in the name for this step of the ritual. What is of note is that kami are invoked and a Shinto act of purification is performed in order to prepare the participants for their (symbolic) rebirth in the Pure Land. What follows, however, is of a decidedly more Buddhist nature. The *saimon* continues with a description of journeys to the Pure Lands of Shaka and Amida. As was typical

in Shugendō, this ritual works with the conception of more than one Pure Land. Although only two are mentioned at this point, a *saimon* from Futto entitled *Hana no hongen* 花のほんげん lists five different Pure Lands, each corresponding to a different Buddha or bodhisattva (TANIGAWA 1972, 374).

The latter part of the *saimon* corresponds to the last two steps of the ritual, the image of the Pure Land and the priest's address. As for what might have been the image involved, Yamamoto believes it was probably a mandala. Her argument is based on a list of steps of the festival preserved in Shimotsugu, which mentions "hanging a picture in the *jōdo*" (*jōdo ni e o kakeru* じやうどにゑをかける) (YAMAMOTO 1990, 82). The above-mentioned *Hana no hongen saimon* also refers to the *shirayama* as a "mandala hall" (*mandaradō* 曼荼羅堂) (TANIGAWA 1972, 377). Yamamoto suggests that a Womb Mandala (*taizōkai mandara* 胎藏界曼荼羅) would be most appropriate because of the arrangement of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas on the petals of a lotus "flower" (*hana*) (YAMAMOTO 1990, 85). If this is so, then the activities inside the *shirayama* would have taken place in front of the mandala. The climax of these activities seems to have been the last step, the priest's address, which, judging from the Komadate *saimon* took the form of an initiation ritual. The phrase used is actually

Pouring the water of the *kanjō* of the five wisdoms and the five Buddhas to remove the grime of sinful deeds and evil passions.

Gochi gobutsu kanjō shasui o susugi akugō bonnō no aka o nozokite
五智五仏勸請社水ヲス、ギ悪業煩惱ノアカヲ除テ (SS, 240)

Although such initiation rituals are usually associated with esoteric Buddhism, as Rambelli shows, they also were used for the transmission of kami-related knowledge and practices, in which case they are usually referred to as *shinto kanjō* or *jingi kanjō* (RAMBELLI 2002). While such *kanjō* were often performed for the transmission of secret knowledge and practices among professional ritualists, the present *kanjō* is more straightforward and can perhaps best be regarded as *kanjō* of accepting Buddhism (*kechien* 結縁) for lay followers (YAMAMOTO 1990, 94). It is the acceptance of Buddhism, however, in a cosmic framework that also gives important place to the native kami. In this it shares some of the characteristics of *jingi kanjō* and reflects the syncretistic nature of Shugendō itself. The whole ritual, in fact, can be seen as modelled on Shugendō practices. Just as the *yamabushi* would regularly "enter the mountains" (*mine-iri* 峰入) to undertake austerities that included a symbolic death and rebirth, so the participants of the *jōdo-iri* don funeral attire, cross the Sanzunokawa, and enter the *shirayama* to be reborn as Buddhists and prepared for their future rebirth in the Pure Land.

This connection between Shugendō and the *jōdo-iri* ritual has not been lost on scholars who have sought to trace the origin of the ritual. Although it is widely assumed that much of the *ōkagura* and *hanamatsuri* can be attributed to

the activities of *yamabushi* representing the Shugendō tradition of the Kumano 熊野 area in the Kii Peninsula, Gorai Shigeru 五来重 believes that the *jōdo-iri* ritual shows the influence of the Shugendō associated with the mountain Hakusan 白山 on the border of modern Ishikawa and Gifu Prefectures. He bases this assertion on the existence of a similar ritual at nearby Tateyama 立山, the so-called *nunobashi daikanjō* 布橋大灌頂. In this ritual, which was performed primarily for women, strips of white cotton cloth were laid out on a route starting from the Enmadō 閻魔堂 of Ashikuraji 芦峯寺, across a bridge, and ending at a hall known as the Ubadō 姥堂. Participants in the ritual, who were also dressed in white funeral attire, were led by a priest along the path and then entered the Ubadō, the doors of which were closed to produce a pitch black interior, representing a kind of hell. When the doors were reopened at the end of the ritual the participants were thus symbolically reborn in the Pure Land. Gorai says of this kind of ritual, which he refers to as a “ceremony of feigned death and rebirth” (*gishi saisei girei* 擬死再生儀礼), that it has its basis in Shugendō but reveals the later influence of Pure Land belief (GORAI 1977, 162). Believing this to be only one example of a more widely-practiced ritual, he attempts on the one hand to trace its origins back to Hakusan and the activities of Hakusan Shugendō, and on the other to argue that the *jōdo-iri* of the Okumikawa *ōkagura* is of the same lineage.

Gorai’s study of the *Nunobashi daikanjō* makes an important contribution to the understanding of the *jōdo-iri*. The similarities between the two rituals are hard to deny, and there is also the obvious connection between the name for the enclosure used in the *jōdo-iri*, the *shirayama*, and Hakusan itself, both of which are written with the same characters (白山).

Gorai is also no doubt correct in seeing both the *jōdo-iri* and the *nunobashi daikanjō* as Shugendō rituals influenced by Pure Land beliefs. Not all scholars are convinced that the origins of the Okumikawa *jōdo-iri* lie in Hakusan Shugendō, however. Yamamoto, for example, believes there are two major weaknesses in Gorai’s argument. The first is that the image of hell is not as prominent in the Okumikawa *jōdo-iri* as it is in the *nunobashi daikanjō*. The second is that the *saimon* of the Okumikawa *jōdo-iri* bear little relation to Hakusan Shugendō (YAMAMOTO 1990, 53–54). In contrast, Yamamoto finds a much stronger resemblance in language and religious outlook between the *saimon* and the rituals and services of Kumano Shugendō. The *Shime no honkai saimon* that has been referred to several times, in fact, makes a direct reference to Kumano, specifically to the *kagura* of the Hongū 本宮 shrine, the *kangen* 管絃 or *gagaku* 雅楽 music of Shingū 新宮, and the *senbō* 懺法 of Nachi 那智 (ss, 240).⁹ YAMAMOTO argues that these three services (*kagura*, *kangen*, and *senbō*) were the equivalent of the three

9. *Senbō*, the service held for pilgrims to Nachi, was a ceremony of *zange* 懺悔 (confession or repentance).

stages of purification mentioned in the *saimon* (1990, 73–74). This attempt to make a connection between the *jōdo-iri* and the Kumano pilgrimage is supported by the well-attested fact that from the late Heian period onward Kumano, which had long been considered sacred or otherworldly, came to be associated with the Pure Land(s).¹⁰ The *honji* 本地 or corresponding Buddhist deity of the kami of the Hongū shrine, for example, was interpreted to be Amida Buddha, that of Shingū as Yakushi Nyorai, and that of Nachi as the bodhisattva Kannon (MIYAKE 1996, 124). All three Buddhists deities, moreover, are associated with their own Pure Lands, those of the West, East, and South respectively. In this sense, the pilgrimage to Kumano was also a journey to the Pure Land. Not surprisingly, medieval paintings such as the *Nachi sankei mandara* 那智参詣曼荼羅 (Nachi Pilgrimage Mandala), show that pilgrims, like the participants of the *jōdo-iri*, dressed in white funeral attire.¹¹

As Yamamoto notes, the boiling water or *yudate* ritual was also performed at Kumano (YAMAMOTO 1990, 73). It is thus possible to consider Kumano as the source of that aspect of the Okumikawa *ōkagura* as well. If this is so, then the *ōkagura* can be seen as a kind of re-creation of the Kumano pilgrimage for those unable to make the journey itself. While guiding pilgrims to Kumano was one of the major activities of Kumano *yamabushi*, they also served the local population in other ways. The carrying out of the *ōkagura* of Okumikawa was one of these services, but one on a grand scale meant to serve a large number of people. As stated earlier, the *jōdo-iri* ritual was performed in particular for the benefit of those who had passed the age of sixty. Records show that there were other parts of the festival meant specifically for other age groups, namely the newborn and youths. When the *jōdo-iri* is added to this list, it becomes clear that the festival was a vehicle for looking after the religious needs of the local population quite literally from the cradle to the grave.¹²

From Edo-Period Ōkagura to the Hanamatsuri of Today

As mentioned above, the *ōkagura* did not survive into the modern period, although its shorter relative, the *hanamatsuri*, did. Why the one survived while the other did not no doubt has something to do with the nature of the two different versions of the festival and their appeal to the local community. As I have tried to show, the *ōkagura* was primarily a religious ceremony, and one of its

10. Gorai himself makes the point that the explosion of interest in Kumano beginning in the late Heian period, at which time several retired emperors made multiple pilgrimages to the shrines, is directly connected to the growth of Pure Land belief (GORAI 2004, 24)

11. For the *Nachi sankei mandara*, see TEN GROTENHUIS 1999, plate 18. For an interpretation of the journey to Kumano as a funereal pilgrimage, see MOERMAN 2005, 117–34.

12. The ritual for the newborn was known as *umareko* 生まれ子 and that for youths as *kiyomari* 清まり. Hayakawa claimed that their was a fourth ritual, the so-called *ōgigasa* 扇笠 for adults, but Yamamoto disputes this, claiming that a careful analysis of the available material shows that there were only three steps (HAYAKAWA 1972, 2: 57–58; YAMAMOTO 1997, 877: 134).

central elements was the *jōdo-iri* ritual. In contrast, the *hanamatsuri*, at least in its present form, is centered on the dances. The *hanamatsuri* is also a festival that clearly engages the members of the community and works to reinforce community identity and belonging. This is most obvious in the distribution of roles. Elders of the community function as ritualists (*myōdo* 宮人 or *negi* 禰宜), one of them assuming the role of chief ritualist or *hanadayū*. They also often act as musicians and perform some of the slower, more stylized dances such as the *gaku no mai* 楽の舞. Most of the dances, however, are assigned to younger community members. The *hana no mai* 花の舞, for example, is performed by groups of three (in some locations four) young children of pre-school or elementary-school age. In the past this dance was reserved for boys, but recently young girls have also been allowed to participate. The *mitsu mai* 三つ舞 is performed by slightly older boys, ranging in age from about ten to fifteen, while the *yotsu mai* 四つ舞 is for boys or young men of high school age or older. Most of the other roles are also taken by young men, but one of the highlights of the festival, the *yubayashi* 湯ばやし, is again reserved for teenage boys. It begins with the four teenagers holding whisks of bundled straw and dancing around the cauldron (see FIGURE 4). As they dance, the excitement grows, because the spectators know that at a certain point the boys will suddenly stop dancing and use their whisks to splash the water in the cauldron around the dance area, drenching everyone present in a purifying shower. The splashing often leads to complete mayhem, with the dancers abandoning their whisks and using buckets instead as they chase down and soak their friends and other community members. Despite the prospect of getting soaked, for the community this is one of the most popular parts of the festival. Many of those who had returned home to rest come back (often in raincoats) for this climax. It is a liminal moment, a temporary suspension of the social order in which the boys are free to soak their elders and anyone else—including foreign visitors taking pictures! For the boys themselves, taking on the responsibility for this important part of the festival is a rite of passage marking the end of their childhood and their entry into the ranks of responsible adult community members.

In the final analysis, then, the most important difference between the *ōkagura* and the *hanamatsuri* is not simply that the latter has been shortened by the elimination of lengthy steps such as the *jōdo-iri*, but that the former was primarily a service for the community, while the latter is a performance by the community. As mentioned, the *hanamatsuri* still retains some ritualistic elements. It also includes opportunities for members of the community to gain religious benefits through such acts as sponsoring a dance or presenting a paper ornament known as a *byakke* 白蓋 as an offering to the kami who have assembled.¹³ The festival's major function, however, has clearly become more social

13. For this aspect of the *hanamatsuri*, see HOSAKA 1984, 71–72.



FIGURE 4. *Yubayashi*, Nakanzeki, Tōei-chō. (Photo by author)

than religious: it is an assertion of community spirit and identity as well as an opportunity for individuals to define their position in that community through the discharging of assigned responsibilities. But “community” here means local community, one’s own hamlet. In this sense, the survival of the *hanamatsuri* represents the prioritizing of the local community over attempts to maintain the more complicated multi-hamlet network necessary for the staging of the longer and more costly *ōkagura*.

Yet the *hanamatsuri* should not be seen as a modern festival; it is, in fact, almost as old as the *ōkagura* itself. According to Takei, the *ōkagura* had its golden age at the very beginning of the Edo period, while the *hanamatsuri* developed a few decades later, attaining a more or less standard form about 1670 (TAKEI 1977, 197). This would appear to be borne out by the surviving *saimon* connected specifically with the *hanamatsuri*, many of the oldest of which date from the late seventeenth century (YAMAMOTO 1997b, 118). Exactly how and why the new festival developed is not exactly clear, but it is likely that it had something to do with social and political changes on the local level. Takei believes that the formalization in the early Edo period of the system of village autonomy made the large-scale, multi-hamlet festivals difficult to organize and less appealing (TAKEI 1977, 197). Fujita Yoshihisa, on the other hand, sees as the catalyst for the new festival the opening up of new villages in the late Muromachi and early Edo periods. He argues that, since the pioneer inhabitants of these villages had various and conflicting ties to different ancestral villages, they could not simply reproduce the *kagura* they were familiar with and thus sought help from local *yamabushi* in creating their own, shorter, independent festivals (FUJITA 1997,

168–72). An interesting alternative explanation is offered by Yamamoto, who focuses less on social or political factors and more on the religious needs of the community. The problem with the *ōkagura*, she argues, is not only that it was complicated and expensive, but that it was for that reason held too infrequently, and as a result many people would have died before having an opportunity to take part in the *jōdo-iri*. The solution to this problem was a smaller-scale annual festival that still somehow managed to speak to people's hope for rebirth in the Pure Land (YAMAMOTO 1997a, 154–56). Whatever the exact circumstances behind its creation, it is certain that this new, shorter festival, the *hanamatsuri*, was popular, and it spread both to villages that did not have a *kagura* tradition and to those which had been part of an existing *ōkagura* network. As a result, in many places the two festivals coexisted right up until the time of the last *ōkagura* in 1856.

The Meaning of the “Hana” of Hanamatsuri

While the shorter, more compact *hanamatsuri* undoubtedly had certain advantages over the *ōkagura* in terms of manageability, it is questionable whether at the time of its development it actually represented a radical change. Takei, for example, argues that the two cannot be seen as separate traditions (TAKEI 1977, 194). Yamamoto makes a similar point, claiming that the essence of the *ōkagura* was distilled and transmitted by the *hanamatsuri* (YAMAMOTO 1997b, 117). In order to make this point, however, she has to deal with the fact that what I have here focused on as a major part of the *ōkagura*, the *jōdo-iri*, is not included in the *hanamatsuri*. She does this by showing that the *jōdo-iri* was transformed into a new ritual, *hanasodate* 花育て, which can be found in the *hanamatsuri* but not in the *ōkagura*. As she had done in her reconstruction of the *jōdo-iri*, again Yamamoto uses early accounts and surviving *saimon* to painstakingly piece together the original *hanasodate* ritual (YAMAMOTO 1997a, 146–54). The *hanasodate* is unusual in that, unlike most other steps in the *hanamatsuri*, here the ritualists (the *hanadayū* and *myōdo*) and members of the community participate together. The ritual begins with the distribution of flower-like paper decorations to the participants. Some of these were affixed to poles, while others were worn on the head (see FIGURE 5). The group then forms a procession and circles the cauldron several times, led by the *hanadayū*, who recites the words of a special *hanasodate saimon*. The paper decorations used recall the multi-petalled flowers participants in the *ōkagura* offered as proof of their worthiness to take part in the *jōdo-iri*. The other key element tying the two rituals together is the *saimon*, which will be discussed below. Using evidence such as this, Yamamoto makes the case that the *hanasodate* was a creative reworking of the *jōdo-iri* on a smaller scale, resulting in a “mini-*jōdo-iri*” (YAMAMOTO 1997b, 117).

While the link between the two festivals is convincingly argued by Yamamoto, it is not immediately apparent. This is largely due to the fact that the transformed *jōdo-iri*, the *hanasodate*, has been dropped from or abbreviated in most of the surviving *hanamatsuri*. Today something like the original *hanasodate* is performed only in Yamauchi and in Shimokurokawa. In other locations it survives only as a trace, such as in Tsuki 月, where the *hanasodate* has been combined with another ritual step, the *miya watari* 宮渡り, and takes the form of a procession in which the participants do not carry the usual poles but are instead bound together by a long white cotton cloth (see FIGURE 6). The cloth is reminiscent of that used in the *nunobashi daikanjō* studied by Gorai and can perhaps be construed as an allusion to the *shirayama* of the *jōdo-iri*. The connection, however, has become obscured to the say the least.

Indeed, the decline/transformation of the *hanasodate* can be seen as one of the principal sources of the confusion surrounding the origin and original function of the *hanamatsuri*, a confusion that extends even to the name of the festival itself. Compounding the misunderstanding has been the immense stature enjoyed by one of the first intellectuals to weigh in on the question in the modern period, the literary critic and folklorist Orikuchi Shinobu. In the epilogue he wrote for Hayakawa's study of the *hanamatsuri*, Orikuchi put forth the argument that the *hana* in the name stands for the rice plant and by implication that the major function of the festival was to pray for or celebrate in advance the rice crop of the coming agriculture season (ORIKUCHI 1976, 342–43).¹⁴ This theory draws some credence from the ritual implements used in the *hanasodate*. The poles to which are attached the flower-like decorations, after all, could be interpreted as representing rice plants. The older *saimon* accompanying the *hanasodate*, however, make it abundantly clear that the *hana* in *hanasodate* is

FIGURE 5: HAYAKAWA's illustration of *hanasodate* ritual (1972, 1: 150). (Courtesy Miraisha).



14. For other theories about the meaning of the term *hana*, see TAKEI 1977, 204–208. Takei's own position is the one taken here (see below), namely that *hana* stands for the Pure Land.



FIGURE 6. *Hanasodate*, Tsuki, Tōei-chō. (Photo by author).

the Pure Land. The following passage is from the *Hanasodate saimon* of Komadate and is dated 1702:

In the east the Pure Land of Yakushi, mountain of the flower,
This Pure Land a mountain of the flower.
In the south the Pure Land of Kannon, mountain of the flower,
This Pure Land a mountain of the flower.
In the west the Pure Land of Amida, mountain of the flower,
This Pure Land a mountain of the flower.
In the north the Pure Land of Shakyamuni, mountain of the flower,
This Pure Land a mountain of the flower.
In the center the Pure Land of Dainichi, mountain of the flower.

東方や薬師の浄土で花の山
これの浄土で花の山
南方や観音の浄土で花の山
これの浄土で花の山
西方や阿彌陀の浄土で花の山
これの浄土で花の山
北方や釈迦の浄土で花の山
これの浄土で花の山
中央や大日浄土で花の山 (TANIGAWA 1972, 378)

In a manner typical of the sacred geography of Shugendō, the Pure Lands are here equated with mountains. That they are referred to as mountains of “flowers” is almost certainly an allusion to the belief that those reborn in the Pure

Land are born in individual lotus flowers. It may also be a reference to the lotus flower of the Womb Mandala, which, as we have seen, was most likely the object of worship in the *jōdo-iri*. *Hanasodate* or “cultivating the flower,” in other words, refers to the process or procedures leading to the devotee’s rebirth in the Pure Land. As we have seen, the *jōdo-iri* ritual represents the climax of this process in the *ōkagura*, but it could be argued that all aspects of the festival were an integral part of the process. In this sense, it is entirely appropriate that the *hanamatsuri*, which includes many of the same elements as well as a reworking of the key *jōdo-iri* ritual, should also have been given a name referring to the Pure Land.

If the formula *hana* equals Pure Land reflects the origins of the *hanamatsuri*, however, it does not reflect what the festival has become. That the Pure Land connection is today lost on many observers and even participants is not solely the result of the confusion mentioned above or even of the deliberate attempts made in the Meiji era to cleanse the festival of Buddhist elements.¹⁵ It is also a reflection of the general secularization of Japanese society that has occurred in the modern period. Reaching even into remote mountainous areas such as Okumikawa, this secularization has transformed what had been a concern with rebirth in another world into a concern with the needs of the individual, family, and community in this world. Moreover, rather than bemoan the *hanamatsuri*’s loss of its religious function, we should probably be thankful for it, for it is likely that nothing resembling the lively, community-oriented festival that the *hanamatsuri* is today would exist had the focus remained on the religious rituals. Now the *hanamatsuri*, like many of Japan’s other surviving folk arts, is facing a new challenge: rural depopulation. We can only hope that those who now carry on the tradition can respond as well to this challenge of the twenty-first century as their predecessors did to the challenge of secularization in the twentieth.

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15. As an illustration of this attempt, Yamamoto cites a *hanasodate saimon* of 1878, in which the reference to the Pure Land, such as in the *saimon* quoted above, has been replaced by a reference to a Shinto shrine: *Kore no yashiro no hana no yama* 是の屋城 [社]の花の山 (YAMAMOTO 1997b, 119).

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