



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Case study: the Matsuri as sonic event

Giolai, A.; Rambelli, F.; Baffelli, E.; Castiglioni, A.

Citation

Giolai, A. (2021). Case study: the Matsuri as sonic event. In F. Rambelli, E. Baffelli, & A. Castiglioni (Eds.), *Bloomsbury Handbooks* (pp. 217-219). London: Bloomsbury Academic. doi:10.5040/9781350043763-014

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licensed under Article 25fa Copyright Act/Law \(Amendment Taverne\)](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3220726>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

THE BLOOMSBURY HANDBOOK OF JAPANESE RELIGIONS

Edited by
Erica Baffelli, Andrea Castiglioni, and
Fabio Rambelli

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC
LONDON • NEW YORK • OXFORD • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

BLOOMSBURY, BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC and the Diana logo are trademarks of
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in Great Britain 2021

Copyright © Erica Baffelli, Andrea Castiglioni, Fabio Rambelli, and contributors, 2021

Erica Baffelli, Andrea Castiglioni, and Fabio Rambelli have asserted their right under the
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Editor of this work.

For legal purposes the Acknowledgments on p. ix constitute an extension
of this copyright page.

Cover image © DigiPub/Getty Images

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted
in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying,
recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission
in writing from the publishers.

Bloomsbury Publishing Plc does not have any control over, or responsibility for, any
third-party websites referred to or in this book. All internet addresses given in this
book were correct at the time of going to press. The author and publisher regret any
inconvenience caused if addresses have changed or sites have ceased to exist, but can
accept no responsibility for any such changes.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Baffelli, Erica, 1976– editor. | Rambelli, Fabio, editor. | Castiglio, Andrea, editor.

Title: The Bloomsbury handbook of Japanese religions /
edited by Erica Baffelli and Fabio Rambelli with Andrea Castiglio.

Description: London ; New York : Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020052961 (print) | LCCN 2020052962 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781350043732 (hardback) | ISBN 9781350043749 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781350043756 (pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: Japan–Religion. | Japan–Religious life and customs.

Classification: LCC BL2202.3 .B59 2021 (print) | LCC BL2202.3 (ebook) |

DDC 200.952–dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020052961>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020052962>

ISBN: HB: 978-1-3500-4373-2

ePDF: 978-1-3500-4375-6

eBook: 978-1-3500-4374-9

Series: Bloomsbury Handbooks

Typeset by Newgen KnowledgeWorks Pvt. Ltd., Chennai, India

To find out more about our authors and books visit www.bloomsbury.com
and sign up for our newsletters

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|------|
| LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS | viii |
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS | ix |
| NOTES FOR THE READER | x |
| | |
| 1 Introduction | 1 |
| <i>Erica Baffelli, Andrea Castiglioni, and Fabio Rambelli</i> | |
| 2 Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care | 13 |
| <i>Kasai Kenta</i> | |
| 3 Cultural Heritage | 19 |
| <i>Lindsey E. DeWitt</i> | |
| 4 Disasters | 27 |
| <i>Levi McLaughlin</i> | |
| 5 Economy and Spirituality | 35 |
| <i>Ioannis Gaitanidis</i> | |
| 6 Economy of Buddhism | 43 |
| <i>Jørn Borup</i> | |
| Case Study: Buddhist Temples of the Future | 51 |
| <i>Paulina K. Kolata</i> | |
| 7 Empire and Colonialism | 55 |
| <i>Emily Anderson</i> | |
| Case Study: Aesthetics of Buddhist Modernism | 61 |
| <i>Paride Stortini</i> | |
| 8 Environmentalism | 65 |
| <i>Aike P. Rots</i> | |
| Case Study: Grassroots Environmental Activities in Risshō Kōseikai | 73 |
| <i>Aura di Febo</i> | |
| 9 Food Offerings | 77 |
| <i>Allan G. Grapard</i> | |
| 10 Folk Performing Arts | 85 |
| <i>Suzuki Masataka</i> | |

| | |
|---|-----|
| 11 Gender | 93 |
| <i>Kawahashi Noriko</i> | |
| 12 Globalization | 99 |
| <i>Richard K. Payne</i> | |
| Case Study: Diaspora Buddhism | 107 |
| <i>Jørn Borup</i> | |
| 13 Islam | 111 |
| <i>Komura Akiko</i> | |
| 14 Law | 117 |
| <i>Mark R. Mullins</i> | |
| 15 Materiality | 129 |
| <i>Halle O'Neal</i> | |
| 16 Media and Technology | 137 |
| <i>Kaitlyn Ugoretz and Erica Baffelli</i> | |
| Case Study: World-Wide Shinto: The Globalization of "Japanese" Religion | 145 |
| <i>Kaitlyn Ugoretz</i> | |
| Case Study: Robots | 149 |
| <i>Kimura Takeshi</i> | |
| 17 Medicine | 151 |
| <i>Katja Triplett</i> | |
| 18 Minorities | 157 |
| <i>Takahashi Norihito</i> | |
| Case Study: <i>Daijō Islam</i> (Mahayāna Islam) | 165 |
| <i>Komura Akiko</i> | |
| 19 "New Religions" | 167 |
| <i>Kato Masato</i> | |
| 20 Pilgrimages and "Sacred" Geography | 175 |
| <i>Ian Reader</i> | |
| 21 Politics | 185 |
| <i>Ōmi Toshihiro</i> | |
| Case Study: Religion, Socialism, and Secularization | 189 |
| <i>James Mark Shields</i> | |
| 22 Premodern Traditions | 193 |
| <i>Hayashi Makoto</i> | |

| | |
|---|-----|
| CONTENTS | vii |
| 23 Sexuality <i>Or Porath</i> | 201 |
| 24 Sound <i>Ōuchi Fumi</i> | 209 |
| Case Study: The <i>Matsuri</i> as Sonic Event <i>Andrea Giolai</i> | 217 |
| 25 Space <i>Tatsuma Padoan</i> | 221 |
| 26 Spiritualism and Occultism <i>Yoshinaga Shin'ichi</i> | 229 |
| 27 Spirituality <i>Horie Norichika</i> | 241 |
| 28 Tourism <i>Yamanaka Hiroshi</i> | 251 |
| 29 Women <i>Emily B. Simpson</i> | 257 |
| Case Study: Mountain Worship and Women <i>Kobayashi Naoko</i> | 267 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 271 |
| NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS | 319 |
| INDEX | 331 |

CASE STUDY

The *Matsuri* as Sonic Event

Andrea GIOLAI

Local *matsuri* are ubiquitous and diverse. Despite differences in size and duration, they tend to be rich in experience, in part because they represent increasingly rare moments in which communities can gather and celebrate. Numerous visual features set shrine festivals apart from everyday life, including the presence of children dressed in ceremonial costumes, colorful processions with banners and golden portable shrines (*mikoshi*), and the temporary repurposing of portions of public space. Just as different combinations of visual elements distinguish a *matsuri* from other gatherings, unique sonic practices participate in the articulation of its religious contents. For this reason, lending an ear to the aural dimension of a shrine festival can help us understand not only how ritual participation unfolds across multiple sensory modes but also how ritual actors conceptualize sound and hearing in relation to the immersive experience of being in the *matsuri*. With ethnographic examples from a section of Nara's Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri 春日若宮おん祭 (hereafter, Onmatsuri), what follows is a brief "acoustemological" exploration of a Japanese local festival (Feld 2015), in line with recent attempts to establish a "sound-based approach" to the study of religion (Hackett 2016).

The rituals that make up Onmatsuri begin in July and gradually become more frequent, reaching a peak in the twenty-four hours between December 16 and December 17 (Ishii 1987; Amino and Niunoya 1991; Hatakama and Tsuguo 2016). At noon, a colorful procession in period attire unfolds throughout the streets of Nara, reaching a temporary shrine (*otabisho* お旅所) in the forest between Kasuga Grand Shrine and Kōfukuji temple two hours later. Here, sacred food and drinks are presented to Wakamiya jinja's kami, identified as the child of two of the kami enshrined at Kasuga. Between 2:30 p.m. and midnight, traditional performing arts are offered on a simple lawn stage in front of the temporary shrine, following the common three-part structure of many *matsuri*: "welcoming the gods, entertaining them, then seeing them off" (Terauchi 2016: 18). This exceptional display of medieval performing arts—some rarely performed elsewhere in Japan—is the hallmark of the Onmatsuri. The performances include reconstructed shrine dances and songs by female priestesses (*miko kagura*), as well as agrarian performances (*dengaku*) and local dances (*azuma asobi*, *yamato mai*), a mysteriously simple act with (now mostly ornamental) flutes and drums (*seinō*), a reconstructed example of early Nō theater (*sarugaku Nō*) and numerous items from the "elegant" or "courtly" repertoires (*gagaku* and *bugaku*). This portion of the *matsuri* is known as the Otabishosai お旅所祭.

Onmatsuri's size and complexity defy attempts to isolate basic units of analysis. Even a single section, such as the Otabishosai, offers a dazzling amount of auditory information, given the internal diversity of each performance, the sheer duration of the event, and the

composite nature of the overall auditory field. Thus, conceiving the “soundscape” of the *matsuri* as an independent phenomenological aspect of a person’s participation in the event would inevitably lead to a form of the so-called audiovisual litany, “a set of reductive binary oppositions between the visual and the auditory, positing the former as analytical and the latter as emotional” (Eisenberg 2015: 195; see Sterne 2003). Rather than treating Onmatsuri’s music and sound individually, therefore, it is more productive to show how selected sonic practices fulfill specific functions within the phenomenological totality of ritual experience.

First and foremost, Onmatsuri’s sonic practices exhibit a remarkable degree of “affective capacity” (Slaby and Mühlhoff 2019: 30–3): establishing vibrational relations, they connect representational and nonrepresentational elements of the *matsuri*, anchoring sensory perceptions in shared religious-semiotic meanings. At the most immediate level, sounds contribute to the transformation of bare spaces into sacralized places. When the body of the kami is brought down from the forest to Wakamiya jinja, for example, the crowd gathered in front of the *otabisho* intones a low, droning sound called *keihitsu* 警蹕, operating on the surrounding atmosphere by marking the space as sacred. In this instance, “sonic practices territorialize by virtue of combining physical vibration with bodily sensation and culturally conditioned meaning” (Eisenberg 2015: 199). Belief in the power of sound to draw away evil spirits is perhaps less important than the creation of a shared quality of perception. Thus, the grounds of the *matsuri* constitute “simultaneously a physical environment and a way of perceiving that environment” (Thompson 2002: 1, quoted in Eisenberg 2015: 198).

Nature is a central component of Onmatsuri, ostensibly because an important portion of the ritual takes place in the middle of an ancient forest. Consequently, Onmatsuri’s “sonic environment” (*otokankyō*) (Terauchi 2011: 90) is characterized by the integration of voices, instrumental music, and the sounds/noises of the surroundings: the low hum of conversations, wind between the trees, birds’ calls, the sound of streaming water, and the crackling of fire. In this peculiar sonic ambiance, the sound of footsteps on the gravel is a particularly important acoustic marker, because it signals the arrival of the procession carrying the body of the kami (*senkō no gi* 遷幸の儀).

Conversely, shortly after the last *bugaku* performance, the *shintai*, the object considered to house the kami, is carefully removed from the temporary shrine and the surrounding priests quickly form a new procession (*kankō no gi* 還幸の儀). As the procession disappears into the forest, leaving the human world behind, the sounds of the accompanying *gagaku* music gradually fade out. The process of seeing off the deity (*kamiagari*) is experienced not as a visual spectacle but by hearing it unfold (Terauchi 2011: 95). The intensity of these processions to and from the Wakamiya jinja cannot be overemphasized: because all of the lights are out, hearing becomes the preferred sensory channel. In this way, “experience through hearing” is indirectly acknowledged as a fundamental aspect of ritual participation (Terauchi 2011: 94).

However, attention to Onmatsuri’s sonic environment should not be limited to natural sounds: immediately available to auditory awareness are also more deliberately “humanly organized sounds” (Blacking 1974) such as prayers (*norito*), brief explanations of each phase of the ritual broadcasted over loudspeakers, noise from the dining hall backstage, and above all, the music and singing performed onstage—all elements that do not require attentive listening but nonetheless convey relevant information about their sources.

In these examples, the distinction between musical and nonmusical sounds is far from self-evident. When asked to comment upon the artistic value of *gagaku* and *bugaku* in

Onmatsuri, members of the amateur group Nanto Gakuso 南都楽所 often downplay, contest, or even refute the idea that what they do should be considered “music.” Instead, they emphasize the material effect of their sonic contributions, insisting that *gagaku* simply helps “support the *matsuri*” (*matsuri o sasaeru*). Another view shared by many members of the group is that the primary function of *gagaku* and *bugaku* is to “adorn and exalt” (*shōgon suru*) the kami—a concept with deep Buddhist roots. As these examples demonstrate, even when it is clearly distinct from other kinds of sonic experience, the “music” we encounter during a *matsuri* can have more complex functions than being aesthetically pleasing.

From the point of view of the participants in a *matsuri*, sonic practices “charge an entire place or situation with sonorous intensity” (Riedel 2019: 91), conjuring up an almost tangible “atmosphere of the past” defined in opposition to the contemporary urban soundscape. These evocations of the sonic past often bring about politically charged feelings of nostalgia. Therefore, any study of religious sonic practices should also consider the ideological discourses conveyed or enabled by sound. At the same time, because they are complex auditory experiences, *matsuri* can stimulate contrasting “ways of hearing” (*oto o kikoekata*) (Terauchi 2011: 94): at times, these “listening practices” (Sterne 2003: 90–5) can even challenge the centrality of human actors. During the Otabishosai, for example, all of the performances take place facing the temporary shrine, not the audience: this suggests that the kami themselves might be listening, with their own idiosyncratic preferences and dispositions toward sound. Indeed, how the kami’s agency is construed and to what extent it is perceived by the performers and the audience are ideal subjects of careful ethnographic investigations.

As these short examples from Nara’s Onmatsuri demonstrate, the study of *matsuri* as multilayered sonic events is a promising research area of immediate interest not only to ethnomusicologists and anthropologists but also to specialists of Japanese religions. The centrality of sonic practices in most, if not all, Japanese religious experiences invites us to lend an ear: what will be heard might surprise us.