

National treasure

***Dadaiko* (Large Festival Drums)**

This pair of taiko drums was played at the annual Kasuga Wakamiya On-Matsuri Festival as accompaniment to *bugaku*, a form of traditional court dance. The drums were made in 1200 and used until 1976. Today, recreations are used instead.

Bugaku is performed in pairs of “left” and “right” dances. Dances of the left (*samai*) originate from China, and dances of the right (*umai*) are associated with the Korean Peninsula. Accordingly, this pair of drums also has a “left” and “right,” and each type of dance was accompanied by its corresponding drum.

The distinction between left and right is mirrored in the carvings and other decorations of the drums, which include yin-yang symbology. Following the pair of oppositional forces, the right drum’s phoenix and moon represent

the passive and feminine yin, and the left drum's dragon and sun represent the active and masculine yang.

The drums are roughly 6.5 meters in height, including their large sun- and moon-shaped finials. Illustrated records of Kasugataisha Shrine show the drums once had a much taller set of finials, which were destroyed by fire in 1886.