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# Collaboration and Organizational Knowledge Transmission - A Study on Improvisation and Handing Down of Skills in Noh Theatre -

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In recent years, there have been many studies on improvisation in the field of organization theory. However, its theoretical implication has not been explored enough, and the necessity for a comparative study in other fields is pointed out.

Then, this research aims to show an improvisation mechanism and handing down of skills on the Noh play, that is one of the traditional entertainments of Japan.

As for the characteristics of the organization of a Noh play, followings are mentioned.

## 1 . Division-of-work system

People who perform a Noh play are called *Noh-gakushi*. They are classified into seven roles, called *Yakuseki*: *Shite-kata*; a main actor, *Waki-kata*; a supporting actor, *Fue-kata*; a flute player, *Kotudumi-kata*; a small hand drum player, *Ootudumi-kata*; a large hard drum player, *Taiko-kata*; a drum player, and *Kyogen-kata*; a comic actor. Each *Yakuseki* does not invade each other's role, and constitutes the stage from perfect division-of-work organization.

## 2 . Existence of various schools

Each *Yakuseki* is divided into two to five schools. Each school holds original skills. A *Yakuseki* on one stage consists of one school. However, there is no restriction on the combination of *Yakuseki*, and hence, there could be 3600 combinations on theory for one stage. Although the combination can differ each time, players hold a rehearsal (called *Moushiawase*) only once before they give public performance.

### 3 . Longtime tradition

It is said that the tradition of Noh play is an old one, its root dating back to the Muromachi era. Then, it was one of the entertainments that has grown by obtaining the protection from Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines, or samurai class, and was especially protected as a formal entertainment (called *Shikigaku*) at the Edo period. The Noh experienced several crises such as Meiji Restoration that almost ruined the tradition. However, Noh adapted itself to the time by changing its organization, and skills have been handed down till present.

On the Noh theatre with the above features, this study investigated how improvisatorial actions are performed and how skills are transferred, using the techniques of reference investigation, interviews, and observations.

First, the study found that there are two kinds of improvisational actions in Noh play; actions for the self-expression by individuals and actions to coordinate the stage.

Improvisation for self-expression means to deviate from operation that specified by *Kata*, patterns of motion. This is supposed to be an unconscious act from an interpretation of the music and aesthetic sense of players who mastered *Kata*.

Improvisation to coordinate the stage appears in how to take a rhythm and tempo. The musical element in a Noh play is based on eight-count rhythm called *Yatsu-byoushi*. It plays the similar role as musical score in classical music, but it is different in the sense that speed and the interval of rhythm is not fixed. One of the reasons is that Noh is played according to players' action rather than strictly timed rhythm. Therefore, when one player wants to understand a count in performance, he needs to grasp another player's action. However, it is very difficult to grasp action of all the members in the stage because of the differences in schools. Noh performers make it possible by communication with limited number of partners. Although *Shite* takes the lead as in general, there are several patterns of interaction. Players improvisatorially adjust rhythm with changing leadership on the spot to hold *Yatsu-byoushi*.

Next, in order to find how the aforesaid skill for improvisation is handed down,

investigation about trainings was conducted.

Training in Noh play is based on face-to-face and oral communication. In the case *Shite-kata*, players general receive trainings in songs (called *Utai*) and partial Noh dance (called *Shimai*) from their infancy, and the difficulties in trainings increase as they become more experienced.

Moreover, from an actual observation, it became clear that instructions change according to several steps; from learning *Kata*, adding meanings to *Kata*, to considering image of music. Furthermore, the way to instruction also changes gradually into presentation of models from guidance using language.

However, these characteristics can be found not only in Noh but also in other entertainments and accomplishments.

The characteristic of the tradition in Noh is redundancy in skill acquisition. Although a division-of-work system is mentioned as one of the features of a Noh play, it is about the players' roles on stage. Actually, it is general for present *Noh-gakushi* to learn several skills. For example, *Shite-kata* have learned some instruments, *Waki-kata* have learned *Utai* all of *Shite-kata* schools, *Kotudumi-kata* have learned *Utai* of all *Shite-kata* schools and other instruments, etc.

Thus, though specialization of skill is performed by the division-of-work system, they have traditional construction to understand each other smoothly on the Noh stage by learning the skills of other *Yakuseki*, and it makes flexible collaboration in a Noh stage possible.

The managerial implication of this study is that an organization can use improvisatorial actions with flexible leadership to cope with diversity. For that purpose, a certain amount of knowledge needs to be shared. However, it is to communicate smoothly and the specialty of each skill should be respected mutually.