

Public Stage Performances of Folk Performing Arts (*Minzoku Geinō*) in Japan: History, Meaning and Significance¹

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Author's Statement

After entering the aughts, Japanese society's declining birthrate and aging population became pronounced. Furthermore, urbanization in Tokyo and other major urban areas, as well as population decline in provincial cities and rural villages, progressed. As a result of these demographic changes, it has become difficult to pass on the traditional folk performing arts that have been nurtured through long historical processes. This is especially true in areas experiencing falling birthrates, aging populations, and declining populations. Under these social conditions, folk performing arts, which are normally performed at their local festivals, were held for the public in theaters and halls in provincial and major cities. Such activities, which seek to draw attention to these performing arts, as well as increase bearers' motivation to carry on their traditions by exposing them to new audiences, flourished more than ever before. One aim in these still ongoing activities is to secure and cultivate future generations that will carry on folk performing arts, and, in some cases, to attract tourists.

In light of this situation, this paper aims to clarify how folk performing arts have been presented on the stages of theaters in cities from the past to the present, as well as the intention in doing so, thereby providing material for examining the future of folk performing arts public stage performances and ways to sustain and pass on such local practices.

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Introduction

Looking at culture research and cultural events throughout Japan today, folk performing arts (*minzoku geinō* 民俗芸能)² are receiving unprecedented attention. This is because the opportunities, examples of which I will provide below, for public performances outside of their localities—such as Tokyo, Osaka, and provincial cities—are increasing.

It is difficult for one individual to acquire a complete understanding of such performances throughout Japan and examine their meaning, significance, and associated issues. Organized research is necessary. However, it is clear that folk performing arts were often performed outside of their communities even from the mid-1920s to around 1940 (also at the time referred to as *minzoku geijutsu* 民俗芸術 or “folk art”). During these decades, stage performances of folk performing arts took place around Japan in a similar form as today.

Of course, these were different times, and the characteristics and content of these performances cannot be simplistically compared. However, it is the case that public stage performances of folk performing arts flourished also in the decades leading up to the middle of the twentieth century.

What are the historical circumstances in the background to such performances in places like Tokyo? To answer this question, I will first provide an overview of the historical circumstances of folk performing arts’ stage performances, as well as their meaning, significance, and issues.

1. The History of Folk Performing Arts’ Stage Performances: Meiji, Taishō, and Early Shōwa

With Japan greeting modernity, in the early Meiji period (1868–1912), the so-called “civilization and enlightenment” (*bunmei kaika* 文明開化) project began. While technology, thought, and institutions entered the country from Europe and the United States, it appears that the modernization of people’s daily lives did not go so well during these early years. However, from the late 1880s to late 1890s, this project would manifest itself concretely and take root in people’s daily lives. Amidst such Westernization, Japanese increasingly looked to “hometowns” (*kyōdo* 郷土), and the new cultural research perspective of “folk art” or “folk performing art” appeared. Allow me first to provide an overview of such developments.

² Also referred to as “hometown performing arts” (*kyōdo geinō* 郷土芸能).

Hometown Education and Local Studies: The Meiji Period

One manifestation of the attention paid to local cultures amidst the civilization and enlightenment project was the “hometown education” (*kyōdo kyōiku* 郷土教育) at elementary schools that began around the turn of the twentieth century. It was an effort to pay attention to the economic structures and economic power of the various cultures and societies throughout Japan. Based on the idea that local history should be studied before Japanese history, and that one’s local geography should be studied before world geography, hometown education was incorporated into school curriculums. This involved many actors and hometown education would gradually grow and become institutionalized. Even today, students receive assignments to look into the daily lives of the past in their communities. The study of one’s hometown is alive in school education.

After hometown education began, in response to historical research that entirely focused on the central government, Nitobe Inazō 新渡戸稲造 (1862–1933) proposed “ruriology” (*jikata-gaku* 地方学;³ lit. “regional/local studies”). This field advocated thinking about Japan as a whole after taking into account the details of local communities’ lifestyles and histories. Nitobe created the “Hometown Society” (*Kyōdo-kai* 郷土会) at his home, and, under his leadership, figures from a variety of fields came together, seeking to understand the histories of and daily lives in local communities throughout Japan. They included Yanagita Kunio 柳田國男 (1875–1962), the anthropogeographer Odauchi Michitoshi 小田内通敏 (1875–1954), as well as the agriculture/forestry bureaucrat and then Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Ishiguro Tadaatsu 石黒忠篤 (1884–1960). In other words, from around this time, people’s gazes would come to focus not only on the history of the “center” but also concrete aspects of local communities’ histories, economics, and daily lives.

The Hometown Gaze: Taishō

In 1913, along with Takagi Toshio 高木敏雄 (1876–1922), Yanagita Kunio published the inaugural issue of the journal *Kyōdo kenkyū* 郷土研究 (Hometown Research). It elucidated people’s daily lives in communities throughout Japan, primarily focusing on folklore. People from around the country contributed to this journal, which was distributed in great numbers.

Amidst such developments, public stage performances began to be held of folk performing arts. This had its beginnings in the building of the Japan Youth Hall (*Nippon Seinenkan* 日本青年館; completed in 1925), a result of youth organizations throughout Japan coming to Yoyogi (today, Harajuku) to offer their labor to build the shrine Meiji

³ The word *jikata* is still used in the study of Japan’s early modern period (for example, in the term “local documents” or *jikata bunsbo* 地方文書).

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Jingū 明治神宮 (kami enshrined in 1920) and the subsequent heightening of the youth group movement. With youth in communities throughout Japan engaging in a variety of performing arts, the first “Hometown Dance and Folk Song Festival” (Kyōdo Buyō to Min’yō no Kai 郷土舞踊と民謡の会) was held at the just-completed Nippon Seinenkan in October 1925, and then again in 1926. This means that public stage performances of folk performing arts in Tokyo began ninety-three years ago.

In this way, with the term/concept of *kyōdo* 郷土 or “hometown” being used in phrases such as *kyōdo kyōiku* (hometown education), Kyōdo-kai (Hometown Society), *Kyōdo kenkyū* (Hometown Research), and *kyōdo buyō* (hometown dance) from the end of the Meiji period, a gaze towards the “local” took a quite clear form. We should also note that in this context, scholars began to talk about folk performing arts.

The Folk Art Society’s Launch and the First Folk Art Photography Exhibition: Early Shōwa

Upon entering the Shōwa period (1926–1989), the term *minzoku geijutsu* (folk art) began to be used in place of *kyōdo buyō* (folk dance). In 1927, the Folk Art Society (Minzoku Geijutsu no Kai 民俗藝術の会) was launched. Involved were the folklorists Yanagita Kunio, Hayakawa Kōtarō 早川孝太郎 (1889–1956), Nagata Kōkichi 永田衡吉 (1893–1990), and Kodera Yūkichi 小寺融吉 (1895–1945); as well as the songwriter Nakayama Shinpei 中山晋平 (1887–1952) and the Yoyogi resident, writer of the lyrics to the song *Haru no Ogawa* 春の小川, and Japanese literature scholar Takano Tatsuyuki 高野辰之 (1876–1947). The society launched its journal *Minzoku geijutsu* in January 1928.

In the same month, the society held its first folk art photography exhibition (Minzoku Geijutsu Shashin Tenrankai 民俗藝術写真展覧会) at the Mitsukoshi store in Nihonbashi. Department stores in Japan often serve as venues for cultural activities such as exhibitions, and Mitsukoshi has put the most effort into such work. This can be seen by its Mitsukoshi Theater. The fact that the Nihonbashi Mitsukoshi store was the sight of a photography exhibition of folk art (hometown dance, folk performing art) from around Japan reflects the movement from the beginning of the Shōwa period to capture cultural phenomena in photographs and present them in exhibitions. While war photography exhibitions had been held at the time of the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), photography exhibitions related to folk culture gradually began to appear around 1930. Also, at the exhibition, approximately one hundred different cabinet-size photographs of performing arts from around Japan, such as Sada *shinnō* 佐陀神能 (the Noh theater of Sada Shrine in Shimane Prefecture’s Matsue City), were sold. This was the beginning of folk performing arts as photographic subjects. Today, one finds many photographers at festivals and folk performing art performances in Japan today, and their genealogy stretches back to this time.

Folk Performing Arts: Early Shōwa

The November 1935 issue of *Nihon minzoku* 日本民俗 (Japanese Folklore; no. 4) included an announcement for the first Folk Performing Arts Convention (Minzoku Geinō Taikai 第一回民俗芸能大会). This convention was held at the Hibiya Public Hall (Hibiya Kōkaidō 日比谷公会堂), and featured performances of Nekko *bangaku* 根子番楽 (from the Nekko area in Akita Prefecture’s town of Ani) and Kanasa *dengaku* 金砂田楽 (from the Kami-miyakawauchi area in what was Ibaraki Prefecture’s Kanasa Village [today, Hitachiōta City], as well as the Kanasa area in what was Ibaraki Prefecture’s Kegano Village [today, Hitachiōta City]). In *Nihon minzoku*’s August 1937 issue (vol. 2, no. 12), there was a special feature on Nanbu kagura 南部神楽 (Hachinohe City, Aomori Prefecture). Orikuchi Shinobu 折口信夫 led the activities of the Folklore Society of Japan (Nihon Minzoku Kyōkai 日本民俗協會), which published *Nihon minzoku* (ed. Kitano Hiromi 北野博美). Nanbu kagura was publicly performed in 1937 at the Kokugakuin University auditorium. The Japanese phrase *minzoku geinō*, or “folk performing arts,” had its beginnings in this convention’s name.

While today *minzoku geinō* is an official term—it is listed as a kind of “folk cultural property” (*minzoku bunkazai* 民俗文化財) in Japan’s Act for the Protection of Cultural Properties (Bunkazai hogohō 文化財保護法)—this phrase was also used in prewar times. During the Taishō period (1912–1926), it was called *kyōdo buyō* (hometown dance), and then *minzoku geijutsu* (folk art) also came into use. Amidst such terminological changes, interest heightened in the performing arts passed down in local communities.

The Era of Min

The term *minzoku geijutsu* appeared with the launch of the Folk Art Society in 1927, and subsequently *minzoku geinō* began to be used in 1935. Both include the term *minzoku*, which in this context means “folk” or “folklore.” One finds many terms that start with *min* 民 (the people) in the early Shōwa period: *minkan denshō* 民間伝承 (folklore), *mindan* 民譚 / *minwa* 民話 (folktale), *minka* 民家 (traditional-style house of non-rulers), *min’yō* 民謡 (folk song), *mingu* 民具 (traditional everyday or ceremonial implements used by ordinary people), *mingei* 民芸 (folk craft), and so on.

As I stated, in 1925 the “Hometown Dance and Folk Song [Min’yō] Festival” was held, and subsequently the term *min’yō* (folk song) would come into use. After this early example, we find *minwa*, *minka*, *mingu*, and *mingei*. Academic terms then appeared around 1935, with Yanagi Muneyoshi 柳宗悦 coining the term *mingei* and Shibusawa Keizō 渋沢敬三 the term *mingu*.

The fact that so many of these terms began to be used at the beginning of the Shōwa period means that a strong interest developed in “ordinary people.” It is important to historically contextualize this pronounced focus on “the people” instead of “rulers” (*kan* 官)

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as Japan began moving towards wartime footing around 1929/30.

2. Public Stage Performances of Folk Performing Arts Today

The Great East Japan Earthquake and Folk Performing Arts

As I have stated, today there is an increased interest in folk performing arts, and those from throughout Japan are being staged around Tokyo. A major cause of this is the 11 March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. We learned many things from this disaster. One was that a great number of folk performing arts with long histories were being passed down in the Pacific Ocean coastal areas of the Tōhoku region. When, exhausted, locals sought to resuscitate their daily lives, hearts, and minds, they first sought to revive the folk performing arts that they had been passing down.

For example, in the Ōishi area of Iwate Prefecture's Rikuzentakata City, where 120 of 160 households were affected by the tsunami, on 23 March—approximately two weeks after the earthquake—a tiger dance (*toramai* 虎舞) was performed.⁴ This dance inspired local survivors, giving them the courage to press on. There were other similar cases in the Pacific Ocean coastal area of the Tōhoku region. Folk performing arts became one pillar towards recovery.

In this way, the value of folk performing arts was reconsidered due to the Great East Japan Earthquake, and this can be seen as one factor that led to a heightened interest in these performing arts and the flourishing of their public stage performances.

Public Stage Performances of Folk Performing Arts Around Japan

Today we find many public stage performances of folk performing arts in Tokyo and its environs. I have listed some of the folk performing art stage performances throughout Japan in **Table 1**. In the Greater Tokyo area, there was a public performance of Kuromori 黒森 kagura (Miyako City, Iwate Prefecture) at the temple Kenchōji 建長寺 (Kamakura City, Kanagawa Prefecture) in November 2017, and a public performance of *hōin* 法印 kagura (Tome City, Miyagi Prefecture) at the Japan Education Center (Nihon Kyōikukan 日本教育館) Hitotsubashi Hall in Chiyoda City in February 2018. I myself was involved in the Mukaiyama Hizoe 向山日添 kagura (Shiiba Village, Miyazaki Prefecture) performance at the National Noh Theatre (Kokuritsu Nōgakudō 国立能楽堂) in the Sendagaya area of Shibuya City in October 2017, and the Keichiku 京築 kagura (Kanda Town, Fukuoka Prefecture) and Nishimera 西米良 kagura (Nishimera Village, Miyazaki Prefecture) public performances at Kokugakuin University in the same month. Folk performing arts are

⁴ “Dentō tashika na kizuna” 伝統 確かな絆, *Asahi shinbun* 朝日新聞, 2011.3.26, Tokyo evening edition.

Table 1. Examples of Folk Performing Art Public Stage Performances in the Great Tokyo Area and Provincial Cities

Date	Place	Event Name (Japanese)	Event Name (English Translation)	Performances
October 2017	Kokugakuin University (Shibuya, Tokyo)	Kyūshū no kagura ga kyōbu suru 九州の神楽が響舞する	Kagura in the Kyushu Area in Tokyo	Keichiku kagura (Kanda Town, Fukuoka Prefecture), Nishimera kagura (Nishimera Village, Miyazaki Prefecture)
October 2017	National Noh Theatre	Shiiba kagura yūkyū no mai 椎葉神楽悠久の舞	Shiiba Kagura: Dance of Eternity	Mukaiyama hizoe kagura (Shiiba Village, Miyazaki Prefecture)
November 2017	Kenchōji (Kamakura City, Kanagawa Prefecture)	Iwate kyōdo geinō matsuri 岩手郷土芸能祭	Iwate Hometown Performing Arts Festival	Kuromori kagura (Miyako City, Iwate Prefecture)
November 2017	Yokohama City, Kanagawa Prefecture	Heisei 29 nendo Kanagawa kodomo minzoku geinō fesutibaru 平成29年度かながわこども民俗芸能フェスティバル	2017 Kanagawa Children's Folk Performing Arts Festival	Children's folk performing arts from Kanagawa Prefecture
December 2017	Odawara City, Kanagawa Prefecture	Kōkeisha ikusei happyō-kai 後継者育成発表会	Successor Cultivation Recital	Folk performing arts from Odawara City
February 2018	Japan Education Center Hitotsubashi Hall (Chiyoda City)	Dai 29 kai minzoku geinō to nōson seikatsu o kangaeru kai 第29回民俗芸能と農村生活を考える会	The Twenty-Ninth Meeting for Thinking About Folk Performing Arts and Rural Daily Lives	Kanmachi hōin kagura (Tome City, Miyagi Prefecture)
February 2018	Shizuoka City, Shizuoka Prefecture	Dai kagura sai 2018 大神楽祭2018	Great Kagura Festival 2018	Folk performing arts from mountainous areas in Shizuoka City
February 2018	Miyazaki City, Miyazaki Prefecture	Kyūshū no kagura shinpojiumu 2018 九州の神楽シンポジウム2018	Kyushu's Kagura Symposium 2018	Sada <i>shinnō</i> (Matsue City, Shimane Prefecture), Hirado 平戸 kagura (Hirado City, Nagasaki Prefecture), Ushiodake 潮嶽 kagura (Nichinan City, Miyazaki Prefecture), Haraigawa 祓川 kagura (Takaharu Town, Miyazaki Prefecture)
March 2018	Iida City, Nagano Prefecture	Minami shinshū minzoku geinō keishō fōramu 南信州民俗芸能継承フォーラム	Forum for Passing Down Minami Shinshū Folk Performing Arts	Kuroda <i>ningyō</i> 黒田人形 (Iida City), Niino Snow Festival (Niino no yuki matsuri 新野の雪祭り; Anan Town), Ōshika 大鹿 kabuki (Ōshika Village)
March 2018	Miyazaki City, Miyazaki Prefecture	Takachihogō-Shiibayama chiiki sekai nōgyō isan fōramu 高千穂郷・椎葉山地域世界農業遺産フォーラム	Takachihogō-Shiibayama Site Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems Forum	Shiiba 椎葉 kagura (Shiiba Village, Miyazaki Prefecture), Takachiho 高千穂 kagura (Takachiho Town), Hinokage 日之影 kagura (Hinokage Town)

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being staged not only in the Greater Tokyo Area. In provincial cities as well, performances are being held of surrounding areas' folk performing arts: forums in Miyazaki and Nagano, a festival in Shizuoka, and so on.

Also, in Yokohama City (Kanagawa Prefecture), the Kanagawa Children's Folk Performing Arts Festival was held in November 2017, and the Successor Cultivation Recital was held in Odawara City in December of the same year. In these places, people see intangible performing arts as pillars that will provide vitality and enduring strength for local communities amidst the aging of society and depopulation, and they are therefore dedicating themselves to cultivating these arts' next generations.

Sometimes, the pieces performed are changed for different locations. For example, in the case of Iwami 石見 kagura (Shimane Prefecture) and Aki 安芸 kagura (Hiroshima Prefecture), there are *komai* 古舞 (old dances), *shinmai* 新舞 (newer dances), and *shinshinmai* 新々舞 (recently-created dances). The latter two are performed for tourists and the former for village festivals. While clearly choosing between pieces, an attempt is being made to turn these kagura into tourist attractions, and kagura conventions and regular performances are held in a form close to that of commercial shows.

3. Folk Performing Art Theater Stage Performances

Next, I will consider issues related to today's theme, namely, public theater stage performances of folk performing arts. When inviting a regional folk performing art to come to Tokyo, it is important to make clear the meaning and significance of putting on a stage performance.

There are four issues that require consideration.

(1) The Performers

The first issue is: who are the performers? Folk performing arts having been passed down while maintaining close relationships with local communities. People in a certain village's certain hamlet are the bearers of a performing art. Parents pass it down to their children, who pass it down to their own children. While traditions differ in content, they have all have been passed down in their respective communities. With this in mind, the issue arises of maintaining coherence for stage performances outside of these communities. In other words, there is the issue of how event planners can explain to performers why they should come to Tokyo, or of how event planners can be accepted by performers.

Japan has now constructed a society that is not based on social status. Japanese people have spent considerable time and effort abolishing social statuses and creating a society in which everyone is equal. Orikuchi Shinobu referred to the kabuki actors and other

professional performing artists in social status society as “outcast vagrants” (*gorotsuki* ごろつき). His article “Gorotsuki no hanashi” ごろつきの話⁵ published in 1928 discusses who has shouldered performing arts throughout history.

Out of this scholarship has developed research on the organizations that transmit performing arts, transmission genealogies, the relationship between the maintenance of local communities and performing arts, as well as the relationship between community identity formation and performing arts. However, if one takes into account public theater stage performances, aspects arise that cannot be addressed with such existing academic concerns in mind. It is necessary to adopt a research framework that focuses on the relationship between society and the performing arts.

(2) Performances' Settings and Times

The second issue is that folk performing arts have settings and times intrinsic to them that give their existence meaning. For example, twenty-six types of kagura are passed down in Miyazaki Prefecture's Shiiba Village. Sometimes, a performance will be canceled because the skill-holders are in mourning after a death in the kagura's district. While therefore kagura are not performed yearly in all districts, as a general rule they are in November or December from the evening into the morning. Such rules exist for performing arts around the country.

Another is example is the distinction between “garden performing arts” (*niwa no geinō* 庭の芸能) and “stage performing arts” (*butai no geinō* 舞台の芸能). At the Tanadui 種取 Festival of Taketomi Island (Yaeyama, Okinawa), a stage is erected in front of the sacred place called an *on* 御嶽. After the stage performance finishes, the festival shifts to the garden performance, namely, dances on the *on*'s grounds. This is also found at the Niino Snow Festival (Anan Town, Nagano Prefecture). At the beginning of the festival, in the front shrine building ritual prayer performing arts (*zun* 順 and *chūkei* 中啓 dances, *senmyō* 宣命) are presented and then a garden dance is performed. In other words, there are rules about the places that the performances are to take place.

Ise 伊勢 dance is passed down in the Kisō and Takano areas of Kōchi Prefecture's Tsuno Town. When it appears that someone is going to die, it is performed in the hope that the individual will survive, or, in other cases, pass away without suffering. This is the only time it is performed. There is also a rule that performers cannot practice. This is because it is only performed when people are about to die and not during normal times. Here, the setting and time intrinsic to this performing art that gives it meaning produce a taboo.

Orikuchi Shinobu explained the meaning of the seating stands (*sajiki* 棧敷, *yagura*

⁵ Orikuchi, “Gorotsuki no hanashi.”

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櫓) in Japanese theaters in his lectures on performing arts history from the 1928 to 1930 academic years.⁶ He says that they came from the offering of performing arts to greet kami. However, since normally theater stage performances do not involve meaning-instilled settings and times, there is the issue of creating coherence with regard to these two elements.

One way to address this issue is the purification done at Kokugakuin University's Shinto sanctuary before Omae 尾前 kagura (Shiiba Village, Miyazaki Prefecture) was performed at the university in 2015. Also, when Nanbu kagura (Hachinohe City, Aomori Prefecture) was performed at the university in 1937, a dance was offered at Ōmiya Hikawa 大宮氷川 Shrine, the priesthood of which had been historically assumed by the family of the then-Kokugakuin professor Nishitsunoi Masayoshi 西角井正慶, and then a performance was held at the university's auditorium, thereby maintaining coherence with regard to setting.⁷ As we can see here, the way that performers' feelings of incongruity is addressed is important.

Recently, there have been new developments with regard to performing arts' settings. In 2017, Goya Junko 呉屋淳子, who specializes in educational anthropology, published an ethnography of performing arts at schools.⁸ It describes high school students in Okinawa Prefecture's Yaeyama area, primarily Ishigaki Island, learning Okinawan folk performing arts on their own and working hard to appear as Okinawa's representatives in a national high school cultural festival. In this way, performing arts' settings are now not only places with religious meaning but also schools.

In the case of Kanagawa Prefecture, performers can appear in a national hometown performing arts competition after being selected at Kanagawa's prefecture-level competition. While there are variations in degree, people are actively engaging in such undertakings at schools throughout Japan. In connection with performing arts being divorced from times and spaces assigned specific meanings, we also must consider whether the term "school performing arts" will take root.

(3) Folk Performing Arts and Their Religious Nature

Third, there is the issue of how to handle the religious nature of folk performing arts. Scholars have for many years asserted that folk performing arts have an inherent religious nature. In other words, they have discussed these performing arts' meaning as Shinto performances that include the appeasement of souls and purification. While these

⁶ See "Yagura to kadō" 櫓と花道 (pp. 367–377) and "Sajiki" 棧敷 (pp. 435–442) in Orikuchi Hakushi Kinen Kodai Kenkyūjo, *Orikuchi Shinobu zenshū nōto hen dai 5 kan* "Nihon Geinōshi."

⁷ Nishitsunoi, "Kyōdo kenkyūkai kōkai ni okeru nanbu kagura narabini tamashiki jinja no kagura."

⁸ Goya, *Gakkō geinō no minzokushi*.

discussions are slanted in a sense, it is true that on the ground in these traditions we do often find some sort of religious nature. For example, I once asked a child what they thought of wearing a mask when performing kagura, and they replied that they were no longer themselves when wearing it. In other words, they became like a kami. Also, in the case of Ōshika kabuki (Ōshika Village, Nagano Prefecture), a middle school student said that when they put on their makeup they ceased to be themselves. They primarily thought about becoming their character. With this being the reality, scholarship has sought some sort of religious significance in the origins of performing arts.

Relatedly, various statements are addressed to kami in folk performing arts. These include *senmyō*, *norito* 祝詞, *kamikuchi* 神口, *jushi* 呪詞, *yogoto* 寿詞, and *shōgyō* 唱教. Many scholars, thinking that such statements are these performing arts' "scenarios" (in a theatrical sense), emphasize interpreting their meanings. This is necessary, but if one considers that there is much language in the middle ages' Ise Shinto that was read in alternate ways, interpreting meanings is difficult.

From this kind of perspective, scholars hold that these performing arts have religious meaning, and the issue of how to handle this religious nature in public theater performances arises. As previously described, when Nanbu kagura was going to be performed at Kokugakuin University, performers took the stage in the university's auditorium as an extension of the several pieces offered at Ōmiya Hikawa Shrine. In the case of Omae kagura, purification first took place in front of the university's Shinto sanctuary. This is how organizers handled the religious nature of these performing arts.

On the other hand, sometimes theaters themselves have a religious nature. For example, the National Theatre of Japan (Kokuritsu Gekijō 国立劇場), Kabuki-za 歌舞伎座, and many other famous Japanese theaters enshrine the theater's kami. At the National Theatre of Japan, there is a shrine at the stage door's main entrance. Most theaters enshrine kami for the safety of actors and audience members or successful performances.

In this way, how to connect performers taking the stage with folk performing art's religious nature, or how to ensure coherence in this regard, is an issue that requires consideration. This can be investigated in scholarship that focuses on the relationship between performing arts and religion.

(4) The Relationship Between "Offerers" (Performers) and Audience Members

The fourth issue is the relationship between performers and audience members. If folk performing arts have a highly religious nature, then the purpose of these performing arts is making an offering to kami. In this sense, we could refer to performers as "offerers." The settings of performing arts are shaped by the people who gather at the festival (audience members) and offerers (performers). However, in the case of a theater, the relationship

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between audience members and performers is completely different. While theaters can be seen as celebratory festival spaces, how should we think about their differences from the settings of festivals for kami?

Also, performing on a theater stage gives performers a completely different feeling than when performing at their village's festival. Put positively, we could say that it gives them confidence and pride. The reactions of stage performance audiences certainly make performers feel that what they have been doing is right and has a wonderful meaning in the context of Japanese culture. This also makes for happier and more vibrant local communities.

Let us consider the relationship between performers and audience members in more concrete terms. First, there is performers' pursuit of beauty. Despite amateurs engaging in folk performing arts, they pursue beauty: "I want to dance like that master," or "I want to be able to perform like that person." They also have an attitude that seeks to avoid repeating past mistakes.

Second, there is performers' awareness of the audience's gaze. Aware of its members, they rework their performances. In their own villages, they probably do not pay mind to audience members' gazes. However, it is only natural that when large audiences come out to see them perform in Tokyo, the desire emerges to arrange and dress up their performances.

These two elements give the performing arts two meanings: art of self-pursuit and art that is to be shown and to mesmerize. We can think of this as a traditional theory of performers as individual actors (*wazaogi* 俳優). While critics offer various assessments of professional performances in kabuki and the like, this area has not been touched on much in scholarship on folk performing arts.

(5) The Performers' Perspective: It's More Interesting to Perform Performing Arts

While my position is that of audience member and not performer, I heard some unforgettable things around Japan.

For example, in the Takano area of Kōchi Prefecture's Tsuno Town, there is a revolving stage on which amateur kabuki (*nōson kabuki* 農村歌舞伎) is performed. Also, Tsunoyama old-style kagura is passed down there as well. A local named Kumada-san taught me kagura movements in the sanctuary of Mishima Shrine (where the kagura stage is located), and remarked, "Ogawa-san, the performing arts are not something that you watch. If you do [perform] them, you'll be hooked." As Kumada-san says, performing is much more interesting. I believe that this is very important when thinking about the performing arts.

Conclusion

Above, I presented four issues to consider regarding public stage performances of folk performing arts at theaters. They all have changed throughout history and can be objects of historical research. For example, with regard to traditional performer theory mentioned above, if we trace related ideas through time from the present to the past, we find that there was not always the same situation.

When folk performing arts are performed outside (in cities such as Tokyo) of the intrinsic settings and times that give their existence meaning, one must consider the above four issues. In other words, if public stage performances are held simply because they are popular, performers will be drained, and these performing arts will not connect to the future. We researchers must move forward while considering each of the merits and disadvantages for performers of being invited to Tokyo to perform on stage in front of large numbers of people.

(Translated by Dylan Luers Toda)

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