The Community of Classical Japanese Music Transmission: The Preservation Imperative and the Production of Change in *Nō*

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Abstract

A puzzling situation defines the contemporary transmission of *nō* theater. On one hand, the genre's community of practice is governed by strict orders to preserve musical sound through repeated imitation and to avoid change at all costs. On the other hand, the community discourages explicit dialogue between teachers and learners concerning what exactly constitutes those ideal musical sounds as well as the extent to which those sonic ideals are being faithfully maintained across performances. With a focus on the transmission of *hiranori* vocal rhythms, Fujita explores the ambivalent strategies with which participants navigate this conundrum and discovers a paradoxical process by which *nō* theater's so-called "preservation imperative" actually encourages musical change.

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藤田隆則 1995 年「古典音楽伝承の共同体—能における保存命令と変化の創出」福島真人編『身体の構築学』: 357-413

Takanori Fujita is an ethnomusicologist who specializes in the history and contemporary practice of traditional Japanese performing arts. Fujita received his PhD from Osaka University in 1996, and has held positions at Kyoto University, the University of Michigan, Osaka International University, and Kyoto City University of Arts, where he has taught as a professor in the Research Centre for Japanese Traditional Music since 2005. His research primarily focuses

on voice-based genres of performance and ritual in Japan, including *nō* theater, Buddhist chant (*shōmyō*), and Heike *biwa* narrative. Fujita's first book, *The Large Ensemble Chorus in Nō* (*Nō no taninzū gasshō*, 2000), is based on his doctoral dissertation and examines the historical process by which singing in *nō* theater transformed from an element originally performed solo by an individual into one sung by a group chorus. Across his research career, Fujita has focused most deeply on rhythm and its related technical vocabularies, and these concerns form the basis of his 2010 book *Nori and Jibyōshi in Nō: The Ethnomusicology of Rhythm* (*Nō no nori to jibyōshi: rizumu no minzoku ongakugaku*). As an extension of these interests, Fujita also pursues practical research aimed at helping transmit traditional Japanese music to future generations. A team research project he led with these goals resulted in the coauthored volume *The Value of Transmitting Japan's Traditional Music* (*Nihon no dentō ongaku wo tsutaeru kachi*, 2008). His most recent work includes an online multimedia analysis of two *nō* plays produced in collaboration with researchers at Stanford University (*Noh as Intermedia*, 2020), and "Elasticity in rhythm of Noh song: Taking "komi" and its social background," in *Thought and Play in Musical Rhythm: Asian, African and Euro-American Perspectives* (2019, ed. Richard K. Wolf, Stephen Blum, and Christopher Hasty). Fujita was born in southwestern Japan's Yamaguchi Prefecture, and currently resides in Kyoto.

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Manuscript Editor's Introduction—Michael Kushell

This publication is not the first from Takanori Fujita's rich bibliography to reach English-language readers. Many will be familiar with the leading Japanese ethnomusicologist's contributions to *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* (2002) and *The Ashgate Research Companion to Japanese Music* (2008), if not one of the handful of his shorter essays published in English throughout recent decades (1986, 1990, 2010bc). More so than any of these previous publications, however, this new translation offers the most substantial and representative example of Fujita's research available in English to date. It introduces a number of key themes found in his work, such as the relationship between ideal models and actual performance, discourses of continuity and authenticity, and the sometimes-frustrating ambiguities of self-consciously "traditional" arts. Likewise, the article also demonstrates Fujita's characteristic methodological approach: combining close musical analysis with perspectives gained from extensive ethnographic experience, and using critical historical insights to complicate his own ethnographic observations and challenge common scholarly assumptions.

"The Community of Classical Japanese Music Transmission" originally appeared within the edited collection *Architectonics of the Body: Body Techniques as a Process of Social Learning* (Fukushima 1995). That volume aimed to offer a new ethnographic approach to Japanese

performing arts and rituals, which placed education scholar Ikuta Kumiko's influential theories of embodied transmission in Japanese arts (1987; see also 1990) in dialogue with Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's more community-oriented research on "situated learning" (1991). These specific references remain largely in the background here. But by exploring the complex relationship between the actions of individual practitioners and the prescripts of their broader "communities of practice" (ibid.), Fujita's argument unfolds at the same intersection between the personal and the collective targeted by those prior theoretical frameworks. More importantly, Fujita suggests how this intersection itself articulates with others—between the present and the historical, the ideal and the real.

In his own editor's introduction to that original collection, anthropologist Fukushima Masato suggested that Fujita's analysis "demonstrates beautifully how the various elements of group organization, methods of teaching and learning, preservation ideologies, and novel forms of media continue to form new configurations" (Fukushima 1995:60-61). Just as these configurations and their constituent elements continue to shift nearly twenty-five years after its initial publication, Fujita's article continues to prove relevant for scholars interested in traditional Japanese performing arts—as a definitive analysis, as an ethnographic document, and as a methodological guidepost. Moreover, his case study holds significant comparative potential for musical researchers regardless of regional specialization. Fujita's insights regarding the politics of preservation in particular should prove relevant for scholars of "classical" or "traditional" genres from across the globe.

Finally, a note regarding the accompanying audio example. Much of Fujita's musical analysis here refers to a specific performance that was commercially available on cassette at the time of the volume's initial publication (as King Record Co. CNT-1020), but which now proves quite difficult to track down. In order to save readers the trouble of searching, as well as to avoid licensing issues, Professor Fujita kindly produced a new recording for this occasion that maintains the relevant musical characteristics of that performance. Readers will find that in modeling this new musical example upon that previous recording as well as his own transcriptions, Fujita's act itself is rich with implications relevant to the argument it serves.

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Translator’s Introduction—Edgar W. Pope

Professor Fujita’s article offers an insightful analysis of the complex relationship between the concepts and practices of Japan’s *nō* community and its overarching imperative of preservation. I have tried to convey the nuances of the author’s thoughts, as well as at least some aspects of his engaging style, while making the compromises that one must make when translating between languages as different as Japanese and English.

As the author mentions in the first paragraph of the article, the *nō* community is structured through the *iemoto* 家元 (“family origin”) system, a system of transmission and lineage/school organization used in many genres of traditional Japanese performing arts, as well as in tea-ceremony, flower-arrangement, and other art forms. The head of a school (*ryūha*), known as the *iemoto*, transmits knowledge and techniques to disciples through face-to-face lessons. Disciples who become qualified to teach (by receiving a license to do so from the *iemoto*) are expected to transmit the style of the school faithfully to their own disciples, without adding personal innovations. Hierarchical relations are maintained between senior and junior disciples, and one disciple (in many cases a child of the *iemoto*) is selected to be the *iemoto*’s successor. Students pay their teacher for lessons, for licenses and certificates, and also for the privilege of performing

in public. Occasionally a disciple may break away and become established as the *iemoto* of a new school, a process that over time may produce a diversity of schools within a given art form.

One key term in the original article is *dōitsusei* 同一性, which I translate as “identity,” in the sense of “sameness” or “the quality of being identical.” (In my translation the word “identity” occurs only in this sense.) Identity relates to some of the author’s fundamental questions about preservation and practice: What exactly is it that community members aim to preserve, i.e. what is expected to remain identical as the art is passed from teacher to student? In what realm is identity to be maintained—that of sound or that of spirit? How do actual transmission practices and the realities of change interact with conceptions of identity?

A related topic is the graphical representation of rhythmic structure, in particular the relationship of graphical representations to actual practice and their use (or rather non-use) in the transmission process. I translate *zushiki* 図式 as “graphic form,” “graphical representation,” or “schema,” depending mainly on stylistic concerns; these terms can be taken as synonymous. I have reproduced as closely as possible the graphical figures in the original essay, replacing Japanese text with romanization.

A final note concerns the term *moji* 文字, which literally means “written character” (including both Chinese ideograms and kana characters that signify the mora of the Japanese language), but can also refer to a mora of spoken or sung Japanese. I translate *moji* as “mora” in contexts where it refers to a sung syllable, and as “character” in contexts where it refers to a written character. Where the author uses the English loan word *shiraburu*, I use “syllable.”

Romanization of Japanese terms follows the modified Hepburn system. Japanese terms I have left untranslated appear in italics; those that appear in quotation marks in the original text are here placed in italics and quotation marks. Parentheses are used where they appear in the original, while square brackets are used for my annotations.

The Community of Classical Japanese Music Transmission: The Preservation Imperative and the Production of Change in *Nō*

This article concerns the activities (or practices) of a community formed for the purpose of faithfully transmitting classical Japanese music. Classical music is like an antique, in the sense that as times change it does not necessarily adapt itself to the changing tastes of its audience. In order to transmit this antique from generation to generation, the community itself has taken on a certain distinct form. That form is the so-called *iemoto* system, in which the *iemoto* and their branch families are at the apex, and beneath those, in the form of a tree, are positioned their disciples and the disciples of disciples [see “Translator’s Introduction”].

Within this kind of community, the production and reception of successive performances as carried out between performers and audiences is not necessarily central to musical activity. Indeed, these form only a small part of the musical activities. As the sociologist Shimazaki Minoru has stated, in classical [Japanese] performing arts “there is no separate, specialized genre of engagement that can be called ‘appreciation’ in the strict sense” (Shimazaki 1958:36). The center of activity, rather, is the acquisition by low-level members (disciples) of the techniques held by high-level members (teachers).

That activity is the focus of this essay. By shining light on the details of this activity we can also expect to illuminate the nature of the community, along with the nature of the classical music that is the object of transmission. Let us begin the discussion by considering what sort of relationship exists between the “performing arts,” including music, and the goal of preservation.

1. The Preservation Imperative and Practice

Performing arts in general are built upon a relationship with an audience of spectators (or of critics) who form a continuum from regular spectators to one-time spectators. In facing these spectators, performing artists must be sensitive to the changing demands of changing times: if they always construct their performances on the basis of unchanging prescriptions, it is likely that audiences will eventually grow tired of them, and the art itself will become extinct.

This certainly imposes a powerful constraint upon the performing arts. In presentation, the ways a performing art changes and undergoes interpretive variationⁱ are related to its very survival. For this reason researchers often emphasize the “one-timeness” of performing arts when identifying their general characteristics. For example, performing arts historian Moriya Takeshi implies the importance of distinctiveness in every single performance: “From the

ⁱ Translator's note: In this section I use “variation,” “interpretive variation” or “the creation of distinctiveness in each performance” to translate *saika* 差異化, which can be defined generally as “the production of difference” or “the process of making something stand out as different from other, similar things.” *Saika* is commonly used, for example, as a marketing term equivalent to “product differentiation” or simply “differentiation.” Here it refers to the process of making a performance, or even a moment of performance, stand out as different from similar past performances.

standpoint of ‘performing arts,’ each and every performed action constitutes a new work of art” (Moriya 1981:37).

The performance theory of scholars such as social linguist Dell Hymes and folklorist Richard Bauman, who were active in the 1970s, has dealt thoroughly with this aspect and brought it to the forefront of performing arts research.¹ They focused attention on the moment of performance, which had until then been unfairly neglected, and strongly asserted its importance as a locus of creative process. What especially attracted attention to this research was the fact that until then, talk of creativity tended to evoke the image of an individual artist taking refuge in a room alone, finding temporary isolation from the miscellaneous people known as spectators. In contrast, these scholars asserted that the place of performance was the one and only place of creation in performing arts. Moriya’s statement that each and every performed action is a work of art is of course a metaphor, but behind it lies the influence of American performing arts researchers.

Since then, performing arts research has developed around the idea that variations in performance are actively produced on the basis of clear intentions (or unconscious intentions?). But when one actually looks around at the real world, one finds that some performing arts cannot be adequately accounted for by this kind of explanation.

Let’s think about it. According to the theorists cited above, the place of performance is precisely where creativity happens. But in reality, do the spectators gathered in that place of performance always expect creativity or novelty from the performing art? At each and every performance, do they always focus their attention on how much creativity is being exhibited? One cannot necessarily say so.² Depending on time and circumstance, many spectators are likely to expect not something new, but rather a past performance repeated in the same way, here and now. A performance that makes use of bodily movement and sound occurs only once, and then immediately vanishes. The desire to try repeating it again the next day often arises; but can we say conclusively that creative processes and interpretive variation exist there as well?

Performers are, for example, often compelled to respond to requests. No doubt many performers are annoyed by the demand to take requests from the audience. To put it cynically, for the sake of their livelihoods, they have to respond to such expectations with a smile. If there is not a fragment of creative process in such cases, neither is there much effort at creating variation. To the audience, of course, the discovery of variation is not a goal: the point of interest is simply repetition. I do not feel that I want to go so far as to recognize interpretive variation and creative processes at such sites of live performance. On the other hand, is my reluctance to recognize those things simply due to insufficient observation on my part?

Allow me to me clarify my position. I wish to distinguish impartially between two types of performing arts: those that make the creation of distinctiveness in each performance the main point, and those that do not. And what draws my interest is the latter type, which has thus far contributed little to the general theoretical portrayal of performing arts.

Let us resume the previous discussion. When the performer is actually present, the audience’s orientation toward requests will compel the performer to comply. But there may be situations in which the performer ceases to appear for performances and, as a result, audience expectations remain unfulfilled. Ordinarily in such situations the performer would soon be forgotten and replaced by another who would, in turn, bring new repertoire to the scene. It is possible, however, that this new performer might have a good idea: to preserve by some means or other the actual performance techniques of that previous performer. The situation will vary depending upon whether or not voices strongly encourage such an idea. If these voices exist and

are sufficiently loud, they will tend to promote the theme of preservation in the community. Every kind of record-keeping facility will be introduced, reconstructions will be carried out, and the art of the late master will become a kind of Platonic *idea* for the community.³

The foregoing discussion, while not related directly to the examples in this essay, suggests that preservation has an unexpectedly close relationship to the performing arts, and that is what I wish to emphasize. The term “preservation,” in general, has the nuance of something driven by a clear goal “outside” of the performing arts; and for this reason it is often seen as something fundamentally unrelated to the performing arts. The reason should be clear. Whenever one sets out to explain why preservation is necessary, almost invariably that explanation must take the form of saying that the performing art makes a contribution to something seen as external to itself. Researchers of performing arts history write, for example, that “since [performing arts] constitute *data on history and culture*, the greatest possible effort should be put forth for their preservation” (Hayashiya 1981:11; emphasis added). Because our ways of talking about the goals of preservation unavoidably take this kind of form, preservation itself comes to be seen as having, originally, no relationship whatsoever to performing arts practice.

Explanations regarding the goals of preservation, no matter how they are worded, are only directed toward the outside. Within the community itself, in most cases, no one seeks to explain what preservation is for. If the community at large shares an interest in audience requests, there is almost no room for asking about the purpose of repetition. Even if someone were to try to explain it, they probably would not waste words on the matter beyond “we preserve it because there is a desire to see repeated performances.” In the end, this way of talking suggests nothing other than autotelic preservation, or preservation for the sake of preservation, and as an explanation it would have no power to appeal to (i.e., no power to convince) those on the outside.

In the example that I will deal with in this essay, however, members of the community do not share an interest in catering to audience requests. With regard to that point it is evidently different from the community whose image I have been depicting in the general discussion thus far. In the absence of any orientation toward audience demands, explanations that assert “pleasure” as the reason for preservation, such as “it’s enjoyable to see repeated performances, so we want to preserve them,” lack validity. Nonetheless, preservation has become the supreme imperative in the community. Community members maintain a certain kind of Platonic *idea*, exactly as in cases where an orientation toward requests lead the way. This high-pressure imperative takes the form: “Even if it’s boring, don’t ask why—just preserve!”

Readers may perhaps doubt whether performing arts communities that maintain themselves in this way really exist, but they most certainly do. Suppose, hypothetically, that you were to find yourself a member of such a community. You yourself have no clue as to what the purpose of preservation might be. And yet you are compelled to participate in preservation. You think to yourself “What’s the use of this? It’s boring. I want to quit!” But you are unable to defy the preservation imperative, and as your participation immerses you completely in the various mutually contradictory rules of practice that fall under the preservation imperative, you experience, at some times and in some cases, a joy in the very practice of preservation itself. Once you have had this sort of experience a number of times, you reach a state where you suddenly think to yourself “I’m glad I’m doing this.” Even though you are repeating (or being made to repeat) over and over again things that have been determined in advance, one day a feeling even comes over you that some realm of freedom is finding expression here—a world in which you feel that a kind of richness that surpasses the merely technical has been secured. The

community that provides this strange experience is the community of classical music transmission in Japan.

The preservation imperative within the classical music community was originally, no doubt, one based on the kind of tendency to cater to audience requests discussed above; but even after that tendency was lost, the imperative to preserve continued to rule with great power. How, then, is this to be explained? Space does not allow me to go into detail, but suffice it to say that in place of an interest in audience demands, community members drew on Confucian rules of daily life as a basis for the preservation imperative. These rules were followed by the warrior-class families who ruled throughout the Edo Period [1603-1868]. When questions arose as to why preservation was necessary, the ready explanation was “so that the community and each of its individual members can master the [Confucian] Way.”

What we have today can be thought of as the vestiges of that way of thinking. The Edo Period and the subsequent Meiji Period [1868-1912] (when Edo Period rules of daily life continued to be transmitted and adhered to in their fundamental aspects) have by now receded into the distance; but even today, the preservation imperative continues to reign. Buddhist music researcher Sawada Atsuko points out that it was characteristic of the Buddhist music community to “place importance on transmitting, as is, that which has been received,” using as an example the following text, which was recorded in the Edo Period: “No innovation is permitted outside of the received tradition. This is the first thing that must be learned” (Sawada 1988:48). This strict emphasis on accurate rote transmission continues within the community today. Similarly, Maeda Akio, a researcher of *Heikyoku* [Heike biwa], states that the community of Japanese music transmission is “a world in which individual innovation is suppressed, while realization of the traditional stylistic feeling of the school (the community) is elevated” (Maeda 1989:62). Another researcher of biwa-accompanied narrative music, Hyōdō Hiromi, states that it is taboo to point out to performers that they played the same piece differently on two occasions (Hyōdō 1993:351). From the point of view of the tradition bearer, to readily acknowledge a difference between the two performances would be to defy the preservation imperative, which is, to the community, absolutely sacrosanct; we could therefore say that it is quite a natural attitude to resist such an assertion. This is true not only of Buddhist chant and biwa music. In the world of *nō* music that I will deal with here, tradition bearers, in evaluating their own acting, frequently say “I’m doing it exactly the way I learned it from my teacher” or “I’m not adding one single thing to what I learned from my teacher.”⁴

In looking at all this, we would like to know what kind of subjective experience-world people have reached under the preservation imperative, and what is the content of their experiences. We might attempt a description based on the words of transmission bearers themselves; but that would be a futile endeavor. I suggest rather that the best approach, if we wish to guarantee ourselves a rich narrative, is to identify the community’s norms of practice, which form a latticework under the supreme rule of the preservation imperative; and to depict the kinds of survival tactics that the mutual relationships among those norms make necessary for individuals who participate in the community.

This challenging imperative—which seeks to preserve something that by definition has not adapted to the currents of time—demands various kinds of trial-and-error efforts on the part of transmission bearers. By looking one by one at the detailed rules that can only be followed by trial and error, we can discover a kind of consistency in the ambivalent attitude of transmission bearers. This ambivalence lies in transmission bearers’ verbal emphasis on doing things exactly as they were taught, while being fully aware of change (and prepared to talk about it).⁵

In order to show this consistency within the community, beginning in the next section I will discuss the codependent relationship between the sound preservation imperative and change in actual performance, as seen in the practices of the classical music community. Previous performing arts researchers have sought to avoid a contradiction by seeing these two as an “unchangeable part” and a “changeable part” that exist in parallel within the consciousness of performers, or within the piece to be performed. But if we are to deal with the actual practice of classical music, that perspective is completely inadequate. Through the examples that follow, I will attempt to present in detail the nature of a paradoxical relationship that can be called “preservation as change.” But before going into those examples, I would like to introduce a simple model case that illustrates the nature of that relationship.

First, I would like to point out that excessive fidelity and painstaking replication have the paradoxical tendency to generate new details. Say, for example, that we have here a predetermined movement of sound (a sonic pattern). Let us suppose that this sonic pattern appears in a song in a variety of positions. This movement of sound, then, will display subtle differences depending upon the context of the various positions to which it is adapted. Suppose that at some point a faithful replicator has faithfully traced this sound-movement, whose length changes slightly according to the context in different parts of the song. Then suppose that for the sake of convenience in teaching, that individual has assigned a different name to the sound-movement in each of the different positions where it appears. Perhaps the goal of that naming was indeed to make possible a more faithful reproduction of details. But the end result would be that each and every detail (i.e., the sound pattern in its various contextual forms/lengths) becomes standardized, and that as a result the details themselves are reshaped. Even if the person in question had no such intention, the categories would become clearly standardized through repeated imitation in the process of serial succession.

Even if the same music is preserved, the music later recreated in performance will present completely different aspects depending on whether standardization is done in detail or only at a general level. Here we can easily imagine a situation in which the community, while maintaining the preservation of identical sound as its paramount theme, will in actuality have no choice but to open the way to change.

Second, I must touch on the tendency of the community, for the sake of preservation of sonic forms, to give greater importance to kinds of identity [see “Translator’s Introduction”] that are extrinsic to the actual sonic forms. When this occurs, in some cases it can even have the result that identity in the realm of sonic form itself is treated as a matter of little importance.

Let us move away from music for a moment. One type of practice in the world of calligraphy is to copy a sample exactly as it is. This is called *rinsho*. As is generally known, *rinsho* consists of three levels: *keirin*, *irin*, and *hairin*. *Keirin* is said “to imitate faithfully the shape of the characters,” while *irin* is said “to understand and express the spirit (*kokoro*) of the sample” (Tsunoi 1985: 760). *Hairin*, finally, means literally to distance oneself from the sample and then write. Interestingly, in order to reproduce an identical form, one must create identity in terms of physical form and within the realm of the mind (or spirit). Personally I have almost no experience in the practice of calligraphy, but I imagine that terms referring to the mental state of the artist, such as *iki* [“breath”] and *kokyū* [“respiration”], are relevant to the notion of identity here.

In the case of music, similarly, the realm of the performer’s spirit is designated through such terms as *kiai* [“focusing of the spirit”] and *kokyū*. And as with *rinsho*, identity within the spiritual

realm is frequently adopted as an important standard, even more so than other kinds of identity that are more amenable to physical measurement.

In this essay I will of course not venture into those inner places of the spirit (or of the world of subjective experience). I do not deny the existence of an identity of spirit that transcends identity of physical form; but the designation of its content often makes use of non-analytical language, including so-called *waza gengo* [“craft language”],⁶ and to appropriately record from that language the identity of mental states would be an utterly impossible undertaking. But we can say at least that the activity of preservation gives rise to a realm of *kokoro* [heart/mind], and we need to clarify the reasons for which the actors involved feel compelled to emphasize the identity of mental states (see Section 4).

2. Standards of practice regarding *nō* rhythm – with a critique of forms of explanation

In the classical music known as *nō*, what kind of practice standards has the preservation imperative generated? I will address this question in a musicological context, and will critique the form of previous explanations of rhythm in *nō* music. The main points of this critique are as follows:

Rhythm, in general, is structured in the form of a repetition of fixed units. For example, in the 4/4 meter music that we learned about in elementary school, a period of four quarter notes is treated as one unit, and musical time as a whole is organized through repetition of this unit. If we want to manifest this principle through actual sound, we can more or less achieve this by means of a tool such as a metronome. In actual performance, however, there is also a subtle elasticity in each beat, without which real music cannot be achieved.

We tend to explain this phenomenon by saying that in the study of musical rhythm one must first understand the basic structure, and then note that each individual performer adds something extra. The basic structure can often be shown graphically, so we will call this the graphic form. In the *nō* community, however, such a graphic form is not clearly presented as a starting point for learning. Consequently, the form of explanation must also be adjusted to fit the object.

In the past, graphical representations were considered an impediment to learning and were apparently kept hidden.⁷ In modern times such extreme concealment is not carried out very forcefully, perhaps because it has come to be considered old-fashioned. Even today, however, schemas are not actively shown to students. And even if students are given opportunities to see such representations, other aspects are emphasized and standardized in practice. As a result, graphic forms have never come to be used as standards.

In what follows I will first describe these graphic forms or schemas. Next, recognizing that these schemas are nevertheless extremely useful for objective writing, I will make use of them in presenting the forms of actual sound, which deviate greatly from the schemas. Furthermore, I will explain the standards of practice that have led to this kind of sound, i.e., the standards that continue to be emphasized in learning. Finally, at the end of this section, I will discuss the possibility that standards of practice produce changes in sound, and I will once again point out the shortcomings of the form of explanation employed in previous music research.⁸ (Readers who wish to skip the details of this discussion are advised to proceed to the conclusion of this section and begin the following section.)

Nō songs are categorized into three types of rhythm. This discussion will focus on graphical representations of the rhythmic form called *hiranori*, the most common of those three types.⁹ The main structuring principle of graphic representation is of twelve morae [see “Translator’s Introduction”] arranged within a period of eight beats.¹⁰ That is, the position of each mora is determined in relation to an eight-beat framework.

The foundation of *nō* rhythm, whether in song sections or in other sections, is a continuous pulse¹¹ played by percussion instruments. In theory, this continuous pulse is divided by a juncture every eight pulses. In the world of graphical representation, each grouping of eight pulses is conceptualized as one unit. If we were to use terminology from public school music education, we would say that *nō* music is in “eight-beat meter.”

Song rhythms are categorized according to the number of syllables in the words pronounced over this basic eight-beat meter. In many cases, song lyrics are organized by a poetic rhythm in which verses of 7+5=12 syllables are lined up one after another. Atypical verses have more or fewer than 7+5 syllables, but we will set these cases aside for the moment. In the typical case, 7+5=12 syllables are distributed across the eight-beat unit that emerges from the pulse mentioned above, so as to achieve a certain balance. This principle has remained unchanged from the time of Zeami, in the early Muromachi period [1336-1573], up to the present day.¹²

ふ		fu
_____	1	_____
し		shi
— ぎ —	2	— gi —
や		ya
_____	3	_____
い		i
— ま —	4	— ma —
の		no
_____	5	_____
ろ		ro
— う —	6	— u —
じ		ji
— ん —	7	— n —
の		no
_____	8	_____

Figure 1. Graphical representation of the *hiranori* rhythm (Meiji period and later).
[Romanization (right column) added for this translation.]

Figure 2 is my attempt to rewrite this graphical representation in horizontal form. In order to clarify the temporal sustain (length) of each syllable, I have added Western-style notes to Figure 2. I have also shown in parallel several atypical examples with smaller numbers of morae. These are cases in which the first phrase of the 7+5 mora line falls short of the standard 7 morae. Cases such as this are resolved by the placement of an interval in the first half of the line equal to the length of the shortfall. This interval is called *ma*. In Figure 2 *ma* is represented by rests, but in reality the interval is filled with sound by a long extension of the final syllable of the eight-pulse unit preceding the current unit.

Studying this graph can help one understand the basic framework of *nō*-song rhythm; but that does not mean one has acquired a theoretical grasp of the sound itself. The actual sound diverges significantly from the image of the sound presented in the graph.

In explaining the issue of graphical representation, I have used the word “pulse,” ideally signifying a continuing flow of equal time intervals. In standard vertical schemas such as that shown in Figure 1, the intervals between successive horizontal lines are equal, and thus it is appropriate to call the flow of time as represented by these horizontal lines a pulse. But when you listen to the actual sound, as soon as you think you have heard a few such pulses in sequence, the sequence goes off somewhere and vanishes. A stable flow of sound that could appropriately be called a pulse never reaches your ear. You hear a series of terrible arrhythmias, so to speak. As a result, it is generally difficult to perceive an eight-beat meter from the actual sound, that is, to reconstruct the graphical representation from the sound.

Excerpt from “Momijigari” (*kuse* section). Performed by Fujita Takanori (singing), Nagahara Junko (*ko-tsuzumi*), and Takahasi Yōko (*hari-ōgi* beater, substituting for *ō-tsuzumi*). Recorded on October 19, 2017 at Kyoto City University of Arts.

Next, I would like to look in detail at the actual sound.¹³ Here, in order to emphasize the vastness of the gap between graphical representation and actual sound, I have deliberately chosen parts that include exceptionally large variations in tempo. In what follows, in order to show concretely the variations in the tempo of the pulse, I will focus on the use of the percussion instruments (*kotsuzumi* and *ōtsuzumi*) that play an important role in actualizing the pulse.

As shown above, the pulses marked by strokes on percussion instruments are for the most part grouped into units of eight. In between these, however, units of six, four, or two pulses are frequently inserted. These “odd meter” sections, so to speak, were inserted at the stage of composition due to the influence such factors as the number of syllables in the song; but in graphical representation they constitute parts of the sequence of pulses, just like the other sections. The selection presented below consists of three sequential sections of eight, four, and eight pulses, respectively (Figure 3). A unit of eight pulses is known in technical terms as one *kusari*. A unit of four pulses, if we were to give it a special name, would be a “half-*kusari*.” Below, we will refer to the three sections in Figure 3 as the first *kusari*, second *kusari* and third *kusari*.

A word of warning is needed here. In Figure 3, the graphical representation of rhythm that I have been discussing (rewritten in horizontal form) is used for the purpose of transcribing actual sound. But please be careful. In Figure 3, the first eight pulses (first *kusari*) and the next four pulses (second *kusari*) are not a problem, but in the second unit of eight pulses (third *kusari*), the numbers 2 through 4 have been omitted.

Figure 3. Transcription of actual sound.

Note: 'X' indicates any drum sound, with no distinction between different timbres (i.e., playing techniques). For ease of reading each kusari is shown separately, but for our purposes here the ideal would be to show a single horizontal row of pulses. Please read the graph as if it were a single horizontal sequence.

This is because in terms of actual sound, the percussion instruments that are relied upon to express the basic pulse do not perform in the first half of the *kusari*, i.e., on beats 2 through 4. In terms of actual sound, one cannot perceive the existence of a pulse at all. Actually in this section the sequence of song syllables is expressed independently, governed by a different type of pulse (of a different length) which takes those syllables themselves as units. It may sound confusing, but this type of pulse, which we might call a syllabic pulse, is based on a unit completely different from that of the pulse that undergirds the schema we have been discussing, which is produced by the percussion instruments.¹⁴

Referring to Figure 3, then, let us take a look at the actual sound. First, notice where the drums are played. Within the first *kusari*, we can confirm that the *ōtsuzumi* and *kotsuzumi* are both struck together on the fourth, fifth, and sixth beats. On the seventh beat only the *kotsuzumi* is struck, and on the eighth beat the *ōtsuzumi* and *kotsuzumi* are both struck together.

On the first beat of the second *kusari* that follows this pulse, the *ōtsuzumi* alone is struck. Then on the second and third beats only the *kotsuzumi* plays, and on the fourth beat both drums are struck together. In the third *kusari*, the *ōtsuzumi* alone is played in the first beat. Then comes an interval in which no percussion sound is heard, followed by the sound of the *kotsuzumi* on the fifth, seventh, and eighth beats. On the eighth beat, the *ōtsuzumi* is also struck.

From what we have seen so far, please note that these pulses, which when written in a graph appear homogeneous and require numbers to distinguish them from one another, are in actual sound played by one or the other of two different instruments, or else by both instruments simultaneously. Each pulse receives different treatment depending upon its position, and in this sense the pulses are not homogeneous.

Next, let us look at the time intervals between pulses in this sequential stream, and show roughly how different these intervals are from one another. Please refer to the line marked “pulse interval” in Figure 3. Strictly speaking, it is not appropriate to apply the word “pulse” to a sequence whose time intervals differ from one another (what we might call an “arrhythmia”), but in my use of the word “pulse” I will continue to include in its meaning that of the term “beat,” as it occurs in the phrase “an arrhythmic [i.e., non-isochronous] series of beats.”

In the first *kusari*, from the fourth beat through the eighth, the *kotsuzumi* plays on every beat. During this period there is no conspicuous change in the time intervals. In general, some performers have an image that the performance of one *kusari* (of eight pulses) tends to begin slowly and gradually increase in speed. In this example as well, the singer seems to increase slightly the tempo at which he expresses the syllables in the second half. But with regard to the intervals between pulses played by the percussion instruments, no obvious elasticity appears.

On the eighth beat of the first *kusari*, the *ōtsuzumi* is struck softly in conjunction with the sound of the *kotsuzumi*. On the first beat of the second *kusari* the *ōtsuzumi* plays again, this time by itself. As a result, the interval between the eighth beat and the first beat is created by the *ōtsuzumi* player alone. The *ōtsuzumi* player has at this point produced an interval about twice the length of the interval created by the *kotsuzumi* player between the preceding seventh and eighth beats.

Why is it possible for the tempo to be so flexible? To adumbrate my argument, it derives from the fact that the interval between the eighth beat and the first beat is a solo performance by the *ōtsuzumi*. The *kotsuzumi* player is, so to speak, resting at this point, before joining in again on the second beat of the second *kusari*. The singer, meanwhile, is in the process of vocally extending the syllable that began on beat eight in the first *kusari*, and cannot participate in the expression of the drummed pulse.

Let us return to our explanation of the sound. In the second *kusari* the *kotsuzumi* player rests on the first beat, then plays successively on the second, third, and fourth beats. Here I would like to point out that, compared to the interval between beat eight and beat one (crossing from the first *kusari* to the second), the intervals between beats one and two and beats two and three are about half as long. In other words, the intervals have returned to about the same length as those in the first *kusari*. Then between beats three and four the interval grows again, to about one and a half times the previous length. On beat four, after the expanded interval, the *kotsuzumi* and *ōtsuzumi* play together.

In the third *kusari*, the *ōtsuzumi* plays alone on beat one, and as we might guess the interval before this beat, i.e., the interval between beat four of the second *kusari* and beat one of this *kusari*, has grown longer again. It is about two and a half times the length seen in the first *kusari*. This length has been produced by the sound of the *ōtsuzumi*, but notice that the syllables of the song are also greatly elongated in response to the length of the interval. In particular, the syllable “da” in “mi-da---re---” is lengthened considerably. The result is that this long interval is created simultaneously by the singer and the *ōtsuzumi* player.

Since neither the *ōtsuzumi* nor the *kotsuzumi* play for some time after this, the progress of time in the next part is organized exclusively by the sequence of sung syllables; several pulses

that exist in theory, and that should (in theory) be played by the drums, are completely ignored. The pulse is then taken up again and played by the *kotsuzumi*. This is pulse number 5, that is, the fifth pulse of the third *kusari*. From this point the intervals between pulses are about the same as those we saw in the first *kusari*.

My explanation has become overly complicated. The point is that the pulse, which in graphical representation appears at equal intervals, in actual sound can expand its interval size by more than a factor of two in some places. Please bear that in mind. Moreover, this kind of expansion sometimes occurs in two adjacent intervals. For the reader who is unfamiliar with the sound of *nō*, please envision, for example, a scene in which a drunk person is singing a song with a great deal of emotional expression. Large changes in the pulse will often occur. If a sober listener who knows the song well tries to clap along with the performance, it will become clear that there are large expansions and contractions in the intervals between pulses, of the kind we have described here.

Scholars who try to explain the rhythm of *nō* singing usually abandon from the beginning any attempt to explain this phenomenon of elasticity of the aural pulse. Many of them, when explaining rhythm, begin by introducing a graphical representation (such as Figure 1) that shows twelve syllables arranged over eight beats. After that they add some such commentary as the following:

In transcription it appears as shown above, but in actual performance the rhythm is transformed, through various techniques, to the point that this basic meter can barely be perceived. When watching *nō*, the parts where one cannot follow the beat in relation to the performance on stage are mostly these *hiranori* parts, which are constructed through an extremely complex and subtle rhythmic sense. One might call it a rhythm that does not show its rhythmic sense on the surface. (Kanze 1979:196)

This is clearly a declaration that the writer has given up on explanation. But why does he arrive at this kind of impasse? The problem is that with no detailed observation or description of contemporary practice, he has developed an explanation that depends from the outset on graphical representations, which are not actively used as models within the community. We have seen that the rhythm of *nō*, when compared to its graphical representation, involves large tempo changes and is greatly “distorted” in performance. We must not, however, take such “distortion” [*henkei*] to mean literal distortion. The “distortion” of *nō* rhythm is systematic and has been thoroughly drilled into the performer in the course of practice. To that extent, rather than being the result of individual contrivance, it is more accurate to think of it as something that has been habitualized.

Referring to Figure 3, then, let us proceed to identify the set of norms that gives rise to this “distortion.” First, we will briefly introduce how the drummers memorize the sequences to be performed.

As shown in Figure 3, the points at which a sound is made are different in each *kusari*. But these points are not memorized as positions within a given *kusari*, i.e., as laid out within a framework of eight beats. There is no notion of pulse numbers anywhere in the performers’ heads.

In the three *kusari* shown in Figure 3, the sequence of drum strokes within each *kusari* is conceived as a unit. Each different unit has a name. In the case of the *kotsuzumi*, the names are *tsudzuke* in the first *kusari*, *tori* in the second *kusari*, and *mitsuji* in the third *kusari*. These units

are memorized as sequences of syllables (mnemonics), written out in Figure 3 as “tsu-u-po-u-tsu-u-chi-ya-chi-i-po-ha-po-ha-po”, “tsu-u-chi-ya-chi-ha po”, and “tsu-ha-po-u-tsu-ya-chi-ha-po.” The performer memorizes these sequences as whole units, and must be prepared to recite any of them instantly.¹⁵

Figure 4. *Kotsuzumi* in prepared position.

These sequences are made up of syllables that represent the three types of elements from which a performance is composed. First of all, “tsu (-u)” is called *komi*, and expresses the timing of preparation to produce a sound. Next, “chi (-i)” and “po (-u)” represent sounds played on the *kotsuzumi*.¹⁶ A number of different syllables are used to distinguish different timbres (which is to say, different ways of striking the drum). The third type, which includes “ya” and “ha,” are *kakegoe* [drummers’ calls or vocalizations]. Among these types, the one that plays an especially large role in the manipulation of tempo is *komi*. Expressed by the syllable “tsu,” the specific physical movement associated with *komi* (in the case of the *kotsuzumi*) is to squeeze strongly with the left hand (which holds the drum in place) the cords that connect the two heads of the drum. A novice will invariably execute this movement, even during an actual performance on stage, in preparation for the sequence of strokes that is to follow. In the case of the *ōtsuzumi* a performance is similarly treated as a sequence of syllables within each *kusari*, but here we will omit the explanation of those syllables. We will, however, note that in the case of the *ōtsuzumi* the syllable sequences are relatively short, and usually do not reach a length of eight pulses.

Figure 5. Taking *komi*. At this point the performer mentally intones the syllable “tsu.”

In many cases the *komi* of the *kotsuzumi* are coordinated with the sounds of other instruments (the *ōtsuzumi* in the case of *hiranori*) or with specific syllables of the song text. On the first beat of the second *kusari* in Figure 3, for example, the sound of the *ōtsuzumi* is heard, while at the same time the *kotsuzumi* player mentally intones the syllable “tsu” and begins the action of striking the drum. The speed of the drum stroke that follows is determined by how loudly or softly the performer internally voices the *komi* at this point. Often, after taking *komi*, a performer must then express the pulse alone. In the second *kusari*, for example, the sound of the *ōtsuzumi* comes on the first beat, and at the same time the *kotsuzumi* player takes *komi*. Then on the second and third beats, the *kotsuzumi* alone produces sound. During this period one instrument alone is in charge of the pulse, and its speed is left to the independent interpretation of that instrumentalist.

Since the independence of the preceding instrument is guaranteed, it is considered important for each *komi* point to be synchronized precisely to the performance of that instrument. At the time of *komi* one must hear accurately the sound of the other instrument, and after *komi*, while receiving the influence of the preceding instrumentalist, one must reinterpret the flow of the pulse and recreate the flow independently. After *komi*, in some cases, one is even expected to show a clearly oppositional attitude and take action to change the speed of the flow. It follows that one must not be too conscious of *komi* in cases where one must not change the size of the interval between pulses.

Figure 6. Voicing a *kakegoe*.

Another important element in the manipulation of tempo is *kakegoe* (drum call). Almost every *kakegoe* is positioned in the interval between one pulse and the next. Thus the role of *kakegoe* is to substantively fill in with sound the length of the interval between two pulses. By controlling the length of *kakegoe* it is possible to manipulate the intervals between pulses, making them longer or shorter. For example, the interval between the third and fourth beats of the second *kusari* must be made longer through the independent action of the *kotsuzumi* player, who does this by extending the *kakegoe* syllable “ha.” A long *kakegoe* naturally results in a long interval. Conversely, at times when one must rapidly increase the speed of the pulse, one does this by making the *kakegoe* shorter (although in Figure 3 there is no example of this).¹⁷

The fact that the *komi* points are different for the different instruments is especially interesting because this inevitably produces tempo variation (what we might call “distortion”). Let us focus only on the *ōtsuzumi* and *kotsuzumi*: in a particular sequence the *ōtsuzumi* player takes *komi* and then begins to produce sound, and upon hearing a certain sound within that sequence the *kotsuzumi* player takes *komi* and then joins in, and so on. In this way the positions of *komi* taken by the two drummers are displaced. Let me explain by referring to Figure 3. In the first *kusari*, the *kotsuzumi* takes *komi* on the first beat, then strikes the drum on the second beat. In sync with this the *ōtsuzumi* player takes *komi*, then plays on the third beat and on successive beats thereafter. Meanwhile the *kotsuzumi* player listens to the sound of the *ōtsuzumi* while taking *komi* on the third beat, and then from the fourth beat plays together with the sound of the *ōtsuzumi* on successive beats. In this way the *komi* points of the two players are displaced from one another. To summarize, *komi* falls on beats one and three for the *kotsuzumi*, and on beat two

for the *ōtsuzumi*. Although it is not shown in Figure 3, the *ōtsuzumi* also takes *komi* on beat eight of the *kusari* immediately preceding this one. Including that *komi*, we see that here the *komi* alternates between the two instruments on each beat.

In the first *kusari* the *kotsuzumi* plays on consecutive beats from beat five, while the *ōtsuzumi* plays through the sixth beat and then rests. Then on the eighth beat, the *ōtsuzumi* plays a soft sound at the same time as the sound of the *kotsuzumi*. This soft sound is not called *komi*. It is the sound of a gentle stroke on the drumhead. But in the *ōtsuzumi* drum syllable vocabulary this sound is intoned as “tsu,” so one could say that for the *ōtsuzumi* player, this sound has the same function as *komi*. Since this *komi* of the *ōtsuzumi* is synchronized with the sound of the *kotsuzumi*, we can note that on this beat as well the position of the *komi* is displaced.¹⁸

Here we will bring these lengthy observations to a close, and conclude this section. From Figure 3, we have seen a structure in which the performance of a sequence of pulses (beats), i.e., the aural expression of the pulse (beat), is passed back and forth from one performer to the other. The performer who receives it, at the point of receiving it, mentally intones the syllable “tsu.” We have seen that this performance method is thoroughly drilled into each performer. In the process of teaching drumming, *komi* is constantly emphasized. Every mistake is traced back to a failure in how one takes *komi*.

Given this kind of structure and performance method, it is a matter of course that changes in tempo will occur. This is because the syllable “tsu,” through the way in which it is mentally recited, creates an opening to change the interval between sounds. If the next pulse (beat) is left to the discretion of one drummer alone (that is, if the other drummer does not play on this beat), that drummer can create an interval more than twice as long as one would expect from the basic schema, as we see at the start of the second *kusari* in Figure 3.

With this kind of structure in which control over the pulse is passed back and forth, it becomes possible, in principle, to unilaterally slacken the tempo to the point of stopping the flow of performance completely. In practice, however, this sort of thing does not happen. The reason is that the performers share an overall commonsense understanding about the elasticity of the tempo, and this shared understanding serves as a constraint. That is, the community’s preservation imperative reaches the learner above all in the form of the message, “Listen closely to the sound and imitate it just as it is.” Therefore even if one has been told to take *komi* strongly, one cannot just go on mentally extending “tsuuuuu...” as long as one likes, because that would violate the imperative to “imitate the sound.”

Nevertheless, seasoned performers will frequently take liberties with *komi*, taking account of such factors as song-text interpretations and changes of scene. A performer might, for example, interpret a scene as follows (if we were to express it in words): “This is a sad scene, and the words of the next song should really be emphasized, so I’ll slow the tempo somewhat.” Such interpretations are frequently introduced, depending on the performer, within the allowable limits of the shared overall sound-image mentioned earlier. If this were done in only one performance, of course, it would not exert much influence on the overall sound-image. In the long term, however, we can suppose that this will eventually lead to changes in the overall sound-image itself.

It may seem repetitious, but for the sake of musicologists I would like to return to my critique regarding forms of explanation based on graphical representation. One *kusari* is shown in graphical representation as a unit of eight (or four) evenly spaced pulses. But in fact every pulse is substantially different, depending upon which instrument (or instruments) are involved, and how they are involved (by producing sound or by taking *komi*). Elasticity of the tempo or

“distortion” of the pulse arises from an awareness of these differences among pulses, not at all from a straightforward desire to modify the pulse, as might be imagined by a naïve outside listener.

If we recognize the importance of this performance method (or standard of practice), the form of explanation that begins with something like “*nō* rhythm is based on an eight-beat meter,” although not at all incorrect as a historical explanation,¹⁹ turns out to be completely meaningless as a description of current practice. In reality, as we have seen, the lengths of drum syllable sequences used by *ōtsuzumi* and *kotsuzumi* players do not necessarily fill up a span of eight beats; and performance proceeds from a consciousness centered on those drum syllables. During a performance, moreover, many performers have no idea where they are (i.e., which beat they are on) in terms of pulse numbers. In actual practice, this is no longer eight-beat music. It is quite natural, then, that the sound produced by the performers does not sound like eight-beat music.

One problem remains, however. Do performers go through their entire lives completely unaware of the rhythm forms (based on eight beats) recorded in graphical representations? Does practice move in a separate sphere, while graphical representation remains buried in darkness? The actual relationship is, of course, nothing of the kind. Over the course of long practice, performers do arrive at something like those schemas in some form or other. They discover graphical representation for themselves. Since the Meiji period, schemas have been published and circulated within the *nō* community as one kind of written knowledge, and so there have been many opportunities for performers to reflect upon their own practice while comparing it to graphical representations. And even if they have never had any contact with that kind of knowledge, naturally gifted performers are presumably able to discover such schemas through their own ability. Those who study *nō* singing probably discover relatively easily the principle that twelve characters (syllables) of a song are grouped into blocks of 1+3+3+5 syllables. They might also make other piecemeal discoveries for themselves, such as the fact that the *ōtsuzumi* and *kotsuzumi* players’ call of “*ya*” occurs at regular intervals (in fact it occurs every four pulses). Of course, some of those studying drumming probably reach the same point just through practice centered on drum syllables.

This does not mean, however, that they end up reproducing the written schemas. They only perceive some of the principles and regularities that form the basis for those written representations, because that is all they need for purposes of their own performance. By doing so, of course, they reach a point one step away from actually writing down a graphical representation.

But keep in mind that principles discovered by performers for themselves are not used as oral explanations in education. Moreover, graphical representations of those principles have never come to the forefront and circulated as a primary means or as standards for learning. This has been especially true in the study of *nō* singing.

3. Selecting and emphasizing a standard for practice: suppression of graphical representations of rhythm

The standardization of the set of performance methods centered on *komi* is the result of a choice made within the community during a particular period; it is not an ahistorical essence of *nō* music. In this section I discuss the possibility that the emphasis on *komi* is a relatively recent development.

The term “*komi*” appears already in documents passed down from the Edo Period. In this sense, it is not a new term or a new way of thinking. The following is a quote from one of those documents.

To perform *mitsuji*, one first inserts something called *komi* and says “ya,” then inserts another *komi* and says “ha.” “*Komi*” means to take in breath, and it is of the first importance in *nō* and in recitation. As an analogy, when you chase off a bird that is perched by throwing pebbles at it, it does not just suddenly take flight. When it decides to fly it first crouches down for a moment, pulls itself inward and pauses. This is how one follows musical time. It is the drawing in of breath. (National Nō Theater, year unknown).

This passage states that *komi* actually exists as a physical action of the drummer, and gives as an example the *mitsuji* technique of the *kotsuzumi*, which also appeared in the third *kusari* of Figure 3. It also points out the role that *komi* plays, using the example of a bird taking flight.

Thus *komi* is a concept that has existed since long ago. But it seems to be much more recently that it came to be generally emphasized. In order to follow historically the changes in the degree of emphasis on *komi*, we need to compare examples of *nō* musical notation, which have been published and revised continuously since the Meiji period.

As one part of this task, here we will compare some examples of notation drawn from the Ōkura school of *kotsuzumi* playing (Figure 7). Figure 7 shows two examples of notation for the same section of a certain piece. One was published in 1927 (Araki 1927), while the other is a revision of the same notation published in 1931 (Araki 1931). We immediately notice that in the 1931 version the character *tsu* has been added at certain points to the 1927 version. From revisions of written notation such as this, we can infer that the trend was gradually to increase emphasis on the action of *komi*.

	1927 edition		1931 edition	
	8		8	
	Θ		Θ	
	○ 1		○ 1	
	○ 2		○ 2	
	○ 3		○ 3	
	4		4	
	ヤ ya		ヤ ya-a	
	○ 5		○ 5	
→	6		ツ 6 tsu	←
	ハ		ハ	
	ア ha-a		ア ha-a	
	7		7	
→	8		ツ 8 tsu	←
	イ		イ	
	ヤ iya		ヤ iya	
	△ 1		△ 1	

Figure 7. Comparison of (Ōkura school) *Kotsuzumi* Notations (two versions of “Shodan Gōtō no Te”) 「初段合頭ノ手」. From Araki Yoshimitsu 荒木賀光, editor and compiler, *Kaitei Ōkura-ryū kotsuzumi tefu taiei*, v2. 『改訂 大倉流小鼓手附大成』 第二巻.

Note: Here we compare two notations of a pattern known as “Shodan Gōtō no Te.” The symbols ○ Θ ∙ each represent a different drum stroke timbre (playing technique). “Ya” (or “ya-a”), “ha-a” and “iya” are drummers’ calls, and “tsu” represents *komi*. Numbers are pulse numbers. Since the complete pattern takes up more than one *kusari*, I have here added one extra beat before and after the *kusari* (eight pulse unit). [Romanization (right-hand column of each version) added for this translation.]

The technique itself, in which one changes the tempo by holding *komi* strongly in one’s consciousness, may have originated as the personal technique of a single performer. In any case, it became recognized as a standard technique within the community. But in terms of the primary imperative of preserving sound, it is not clear whether this was the best choice to guarantee the objective, physical identity of the sound object.

In fact, it is possible that standardization in the realm of performance technique may have led rather to a gradual expansion of elasticity in *nō* rhythm. That is, we can imagine the possibility of a process of change that resulted in the fast parts getting faster and the slow parts getting slower. *Nō* performance researcher Oda Sachiko has presented evidence that such changes have in fact occurred with regard to *nō* dance movements.²⁰ In the case of sound as well, the same sort of changes may have proceeded surreptitiously under the preservation imperative.

Given the goals of the community, it is no surprise that the community itself does not offer many words on the possibility of such changes. It is another matter, however, when scholars researching this community either fail to notice or make no attempt to explain such changes. When scholars accept without question the ideology of the preservation imperative, thinking that the practices of traditional music transmit the forms of ancient sounds mechanically like a tape recorder, and repeating like parrots the community's assertions that they "do it exactly the way it was taught," it is evident that we have a problem. On the other hand, a standpoint that assumes people in the community are simply lying when they say "we do it exactly the way it was taught," that focuses only on empirically tracking down changes in actual sound and seeking to discover in those the creativity of performers, could be seen as rushing to conclusions and distorting the object of research. What we need, then, is to look carefully at how the ideology actually operates.

With that in mind, let us investigate a little further the suppressive language deployed against the graphical representation of rhythm, which emerged together with standardization in the realm of performance method, forming a set, under the preservation imperative. At the end of the Meiji era, in parallel with an increasing emphasis on the realm of performance method, increasingly severe criticism was directed at ways of singing (or playing) that took rhythm schemas as standards. The criticism was especially concentrated on singing, this being the area in which amateurs were overwhelmingly numerous. Criticisms such as the following were directed at the practice of singing according to standard schemas.

Is *nō* singing, then, something to be sung languidly, as "*fu– shi gi ya– i ma no– ro u ji n no*," to a steady raindrop beat [*amadare hyōshi*]? No, it is not. Elasticity of tempo and intonation give it movement, and morae must be straightforwardly drawn out, as "*fu–, ya–*." Otherwise you will end up singing with only the extended morae being integrated with the preceding and succeeding ones. This is the flavorful point of *nō* singing, the point where the rhythm becomes interesting. If it merely conforms to a pulse like dripping rain, mechanically, incessantly, there is nothing interesting in it, and it requires no training. (Kō 1905:38)

The implication is that even for a novice amateur, a "languid" way of singing is absolutely unacceptable. Here there is no suggestion whatsoever that singing by schema might be acceptable even as one stage in a beginner's development. In the following episode, we see a typical example of what might happen if a teacher found out that a student was using rhythm schemas (which by that time had come into circulation for informational purposes) as a basis for singing.

One time, five or six students were singing together as usual. They were all fairly accomplished people, but the astute old man [the teacher] noticed that one of them was tapping out the beat while sitting in *seiza*.ⁱⁱ

“Hey, you. Are you trying to count the beat with your toes?”

The student was aghast, and suddenly turned pale. The old man, now enraged, continued.

“After I’ve told you not to sing by meter, what do you think you’re doing counting beats in secret like that? If you want to sing while counting beats, go take lessons in something else, some light entertainment genre. There are plenty of interesting ones.” (Yumeno 1992:305)

Learning programs (or curricula) that begin with an understanding of the rhythm framework and proceed to its “distortion” are thus utterly demolished. This situation continues to have lasting effects today.

In the case of the drums, which were the center of discussion in Section 2, the realm of performance method came to be emphasized as a standard; but with regard to singing practice, sound itself is excessively emphasized. Everyone in the community is expected to imitate faithfully the sound of *nō* singing. From the beginning, they must not rely on schemas that serve as frameworks. They must not look at graphical representations. They must not have any interest in theory. This sort of thing is hammered into their heads. And finally, even beginners themselves end up saying such things as appear in the passage below. The word *jibyōshi* in this passage means to make a layout of morae within a schema of eight beats; it is the rule governing the positions of syllables in the layout. Thus in this passage the words *jibyōshi* and *hyōshi* (meter) can be treated as interchangeable with the word “schema.”

At first there is no need to think about the logic of *jibyōshi* [the eight beat meter]. One simply has to *swallow as a whole the actual way of singing with the meter*, and pound it into one’s memory until it becomes a habit. Regardless of any theory about meter, its actual use is nothing other than a focusing of the spirit [*kiai*], and so the best way to give life to the meter is to grasp the focusing of spirit that appears in your teacher’s singing. *In short, the fundamental problem must be to build a foundation from which you can sing more or less together with the meter, even if you don’t know how to keep the meter.* You can try to study meter on the basis of *nō* singing, with its uncertain pulse, but all you will get is a logical understanding, which you will not necessarily be able to use in the actual practice of singing. Even worse, you may well end up with meter for the sake of meter, not meter for the sake of singing. (Hoshino 1943:198-9; emphasis added)

I will omit a detailed explanation of technical terms, but the gist is that any singing method whose standard is a basic framework that can be expressed as a schema, such as those shown in Figures 1 to 3 of this article, is no good, and that one must memorize the sound as is, with all the elasticity of tempo one’s teacher gives to it. The author of the passage above continues his criticism as follows: “If beginners study *jibyōshi* they will become subtly fixated on it, and will want to show off their knowledge by inserting meter into their own singing and that of other people; but generally this is meaningless” (Hoshino 1943:200). Furthermore, if one completely

ⁱⁱ Translator’s note: *Seiza* (“proper sitting”) is a formal Japanese style of upright sitting in which the person kneels, placing the tops of the feet flat against the floor, and rests the buttocks on the heels.

avoids studying schemas and the principles from which they are formed, but continues practice in the form of “swallowing whole,” it seems that one finally arrives at the following state of mind:

Meter, then, is thought of formally as something that can be translated into measurements and time intervals, but its actual, practical use must be based on an extremely intuitive focusing of the spirit. In other words, *the meter that one naturally falls into by focusing the spirit* is the true, living meter itself; whereas keeping the meter (consciously) is nothing more than playing with a formal concept. (Hoshino 1943:201; emphasis added)

The author states that simply through practice in copying the sound as is, with no schematic understanding of rhythm, ensemble performance with drums becomes possible. How is he able to assert this with such self-confidence? Normally we all believe strongly that in order for an ensemble to cohere, there must first be a single standard (in this case a rhythm schema) that all the members share and follow. From this point of view, the state of mind described above is incomprehensible and inexplicable. Speaking quite freely and selfishly, it even makes me feel like denouncing the writer.

However, we must not go in that direction and allow ourselves to simply express discomfort with what has just been said. There must be another way of reading it. Let us suppose that a singer copies the sound of *nō* singing, brings it up to a certain level of achievement, and presents it with self-confidence. What then? If it is presented in this way, the drummers in the ensemble will have no choice but to follow the singer, taking *komi* and playing their instruments in accordance with the sound of the song. They will be compelled, one could say, to insert their percussion sounds into the intervals of the sound as it is sung. If we think in this way, we can to some extent understand why singers are able to feel that they “naturally fall into the meter by focusing the spirit.”

Of course, the singer’s memory of the sound is not perfect. The singer, furthermore, has no understanding of the schema. It is therefore entirely possible that discrepancies will arise between the singer and the drummers in some places. For example, it must frequently happen that a singer starts one pulse too early, or one pulse too late. Those who do so are instructed to practice that part over and over, and as a result of this repeated practice acquire a feeling of “falling into the meter,” even in that part.

To outside observers such as ourselves, the very fact that repetition itself produces this kind of progress is rather mysterious, and seems like a phenomenon that is beyond the power of explanation. But the reason for this progress is in fact quite clear. It is because in the process of repeated practice, an individual person comes up with many original innovations. Those original innovations are never mentioned by anyone, for the simple reason that they are not public innovations. But in reality, during this process, individuals adapt in their own independent ways, through their own personal innovations.

Let us give a concrete explanation, taking as an example the first *kusari* and second *kusari* in Figure 3. The singer will probably take some pains in deciding how long to extend the syllable “ni” of the text “moro tomo ni.” Since the singer is given absolutely no visual information, such as a schema showing the distribution of syllables, it is natural that this would be a source of trouble. At this point the singer makes up a device for reproducing the length by adding three supplemental syllables to “ni” (counting while singing), as in “moro tomoo ni-i-i-i mida.” Through further repetition, moreover, the singer realizes that the interval between the sound “ni”

and the first supplemental syllable “-i” needs to be expanded considerably. By taking this discovery into account the singer becomes able to sing the first syllable “mi” of “midare,” without having any image whatsoever of a schematic layout that would say “it comes three and a half beats into the second *kusari*.” Just by grasping how long to actually continue holding the syllable “ni,” the singer becomes able to sing this section well.

Other original innovations may be added to this one. In the same place, when extending the voice in the manner just described and thinking “right about now,” the singer may discover that the *ōtsuzumi* player’s *kakegoe* “ha” can always be heard at a certain point (note in Figure 3 that this occurs at the two-and-a-half beat position in the second *kusari*). Of course this discovery is possible only through the repeated experience of participating, together with one’s teacher, in an ensemble that includes the drums. In any case, the novice learns to use the sound “ha” as a reference point at which to end the preceding vocalization, take a breath and begin singing “midare.” In this way the singer finds that listening for the drummer’s call “ha” allows one to measure the timing well, and comes to use this call as a signal to cut off the sustained vocalization “ni-i-i-i.” We can clearly say that this innovation does not proceed from a schematic understanding, but rather is a personal innovation made by the singer to avoid getting off track.

If we accept that there is value in promoting personal innovations such as this, then we can understand the positive significance of treating rhythm schemas as things that students should avoid looking at very much, if not as esoteric knowledge.

There is one more significant point in the avoidance of schemas as references. In general, *ōtsuzumi* and *kotsuzumi* players are often pressured to take on the role of camouflaging or smoothing over the mistakes of novice singers, in order to encourage novices as much as possible. This reflects the fact that singers continue to enjoy higher status than instrumentalists in terms of popularity (and in economic terms as well).

This situation, however, is subject to change. When novice singers have reached the level at which they can grasp the principle of starting the next syllable after hearing the drummer’s call “ha” (as just described), the performance attitude of the *ōtsuzumi* and *kotsuzumi* players toward the singers changes: the two drummers shift their attention to mutually and comprehensively realizing the sonic ideas prescribed by the performance techniques of each instrument.

Specifically, during the several pulses when the singer’s voice is sustained (beats one, two and three of the second *kusari*), the drummers vary the tempo as prescribed by each instrument’s performance methods. To borrow the words of performers themselves, this is a performance attitude in which the drummers “throw” [*hōrinageru*] their sounds to each other “without worrying about the singer.” In simple terms, it is a full-scale development of the performance standard described in Section 3 above, in which the performers take *komi* and produce sudden changes of tempo.

As we have just seen, *nō* music places value on an ensemble form in which each player, through minute assertions of their own instrument, “throws” sound at the other player. As a result of this, an actual objective phenomenon has arisen: an enlargement of elasticity in tempo. Given this value, we understand clearly the additional significance of the community distancing itself from schematic representations: a written schema, by suggesting equality of pulse intervals through the visual domain, risks producing the same kind of equality in the aural domain as well.

4. The mysticization of identity: the realm of *kokoro* [heart/mind]

We stated in the previous section that in the process of learning *nō* singing, the identity of sound itself is given excessive importance, and that as a result of this it has not become standard practice to grasp *nō* rhythm in schematic form. Earlier, in Section 2, we focused on the learning of drums and showed that in fact schemas are not treated as standards, but identity in the realm of performance method is seen as important. In place of the phrase “realm of performance method” we could substitute “realm of articulation,” using the term “articulation” to mean the process of performance leading up to the production of sound. While the term “performance method” [*ensō-hō*] carries a nuance of being limited to instrumental performance, the term “articulation” includes not only instrumental but vocal performance as well, and it is a convenient term to indicate the realm of the process of producing sound.²¹ But is discussion about identity, under the community’s preservation imperative, confined to these two realms only?

Apparently not. In fact, as one part of the realm of articulation, or as something present at a deeper level, a realm of *kokoro* [heart/mind] is posited, and I am inclined to think that identity in that realm is also discussed at times. Let us first investigate whether we can really say that that sort of realm exists (or has been posited).

In the following episode, a teacher of *nō* singing critiques the flute-playing of one of his students. Unlike the drums discussed in Section 2, the flute is an instrument with a low degree of structure in the realm of articulation, and in that sense we could say that it is similar to vocal performance. On one occasion, a flute performance was critiqued in the following way.

Kaneuchi Yoshihira was the youngest *nō* flute player during the time my teacher was alive, and he also had a weak physical constitution. One time when he was playing flute for the *otokomai* dance in “Atsumori” he noticed that his teacher was looking at him; apparently he froze, and the sound of his flute abruptly stopped. Nevertheless out of fear of his teacher he tried even harder to play, while taking *kurai*, but finally he lost his composure and was unable to produce a sound. He continued on like a madman, puffing away at his flute without making a sound, until the piece ended. He then went back to the musicians’ room, cringing at the thought of the scolding he would get. But he found his teacher to be in an extremely good mood.

“It was fine, it was fine. Your *iki* [spirit] and your *kuraidori* [taking *kurai*] were very good today.”

Kaneuchi spoke of how happy he was when he heard those words of praise, and said that for the first time he felt self-confidence in his flute playing. (Yumeno 1992:320)

Here, the *iki* that the teacher praises refers to a mental condition of the performer. *Kuraidori* is also used frequently in the *nō* community. *Kurai* refers to a tempo or atmosphere that is suitably adapted to the diversity of places and musical patterns, and to each part of a piece of music. Inasmuch as it relates to tempo, it is seen as more concretely understandable in connection to sound than *iki*. In fact, there are cases in which its use is limited to that realm. In many cases, however, it is used with regard to atmosphere and other intangible notions. *Kuraidori* is the categorization and understanding of atmospheres; to a novice it is often an ambiguous and mystical concept, as it delves into areas of the mind that cannot be grasped in realistic terms.

In the episode quoted above, a teacher gives his seal of approval to a student with regard to *iki*, which clearly belongs to the mental realm, and *kurai*, a realm that cannot necessarily be limited to sound. Thus in a dimension that cannot be identified as concrete sound, the correctness and faithfulness (that is, the identity) of transmission is affirmed and praised. The student himself probably has no idea what he is being praised for.

We need to think carefully about why this seal of approval was given. In the realm of sound itself the student was unable to carry out the community's preservation imperative, and his terror reflected this. His desperate condition was no doubt apparent to his teacher. And that condition was a gratifying thing to see. The student was not fulfilling the imperative to preserve sound, but he was showing an acceptable attitude in his way of relating to the community.

In fact, it was more than just gratifying: somehow it was a deeply impressive sight to behold. In the process of putting that deep impression into words, the teacher brought forth the words *iki* and *kurai*, conferring high praise on his novice student.

The standard of criticism was probably quite ambiguous: a haphazard, random emotion of the kind that arises suddenly but frequently in every performing art, whose inevitability cannot be explained. The teacher, it seems, was unexpectedly visited by this kind of emotion. But when he put this into words, the words took on the robes of authority.

"I don't really understand it, but it moved me" is the sort of thing that simply isn't said. It is a forbidden utterance, because to say it would be to ignore the community's preservation imperative. So the search begins for words of evaluation. First, in the realm of sound. But here there are no suitable words, because in this realm there has already been a departure from the standard of identity, exposed for all to see. Next, the search for words moves to the realm of articulation. It would be fine if some words could be found here. In the case of the *ōtsuzumi* or *kotsuzumi*, for example, it would be good to say something like "you took *komi* in just the right way." But then one might feel that the emotion had not really been expressed appropriately. And in the case of the flute or of singing, the realm of articulation is simply not approached analytically. At this point, a mystical realm of *kokoro* is posited in the depths beyond the realm of articulation.

In the *nō* community, specialized terms such as *ma* [space], *kokyū* [breath], *nori* [groove], *chōshi* [tone or mood], and *kurai* [atmosphere or tempo, as explained above] are commonly used to evaluate the kind of emotion that arises by chance from the anarchy so characteristic of performing arts. All of these terms can also be said to relate to the realm of articulation, but as in the case of *iki*, they are probably used more frequently to refer to states in the realm of mind. In cases where they are limited to the realm of articulation, they have fairly clear (if imperfect) relationships to actual sound, as shown above in Section 2, and can be explained objectively. But although *ma*, *kokyū*, *nori*, *chōshi*, *kurai*, and other similar terms can be discussed analytically in some cases, depending on usage, in many cases there is no systematic order whatsoever to their semantic content.

This is also clear from my own experience of participant observation. In the case of a certain solo flute piece, for example, what was drilled into me as an important technique was the appropriate way of taking time (i.e., inserting a period of silence) between the end of one passage and the beginning of the next. (This technique, described earlier, is called "taking *komi*.") Objectively speaking, one must leave a soundless space of about twenty-five seconds between the two passages, but there is nothing the slightest bit analytical in the way this space is configured. Even among my teacher's performances, it might be twenty seconds at some times and thirty seconds at other times. How in the world should I construct this kind of space? And

yet after being made to practice it repeatedly, over and over again, suddenly one day I was praised by my teacher, who said that the way I took the space that day was good. What in the world was good about it? What was correct? I had no clue. In any case the praise was given through language, in the form “your breathing [*kokyū*] was good” or “your *kurai* was good,” in addition to “you took *komi* correctly.” But what were the good points? Even after I had finished learning the piece, I still did not understand the reasons why my performance had been good.

But being a mischievous student who is trying to do research on performing arts, I seized every opportunity to ask about those reasons. I came to understand that one’s way of taking space is considered good or not good according to the degree of its conformity with the way one’s teacher takes space. My teacher said: “As long as we match one another in our breathing, it’s okay if the actual length is a little different.” Just as this could be said about teacher and student, it could also be said about performer and audience, according to my teacher.

This assertion shows, straightforwardly and conclusively, that an enjoyment born from random processes unfolding at the site of performance actually exists (my teacher would have a fit if he heard me talk like this!), even in a community strictly ruled by the preservation imperative. (Whether or not one is able to feel that enjoyment depends, no doubt, on one’s aesthetic sense in relation to this art form.) In many cases, however, this random enjoyment is verbalized as correctness of transmission in the realm of *kokoro*, and is endowed with authority.

Within the community of classical Japanese music transmission, in the background behind the absoluteness of the preservation imperative, emerges another tendency: an irresistible turning toward the enjoyment of unrepeatable immediacy. Because of this, it becomes necessary to postulate a strange, mystical, non-analytical realm called the realm of mind. We could perhaps go so far as to say that this is a kind of trick. But it is only from my point of view as a writer that I call it a trick; I am not saying that individual people in the community consciously search for words to represent the realm of mind with deceptive intent.

From fragments of the community’s own discourse, then, we have shown that there is indeed such a tendency within the community, in spite of the preservation imperative. To close this section, I would like to point to a thoughtful dichotomy that has emerged in the form of a dialogue between the community itself and scholarly writers outside the community. This is the dichotomy between *katachi* and *kata* used by education theorist Ikuta Kumiko.ⁱⁱⁱ Ikuta points out that in communities that transmit traditional techniques, the goal of acquisition is “to learn ‘*kata*’ that transcend ‘*katachi*’” (Ikuta 1987:104), and she furthermore explains that with regard to

ⁱⁱⁱManuscript editor’s note: The terms *kata* and *katachi* often appear within English-language ethnomusicology, but it is important to note that like most Japanese authors, Ikuta Kumiko uses both with particular (if occasionally elusive) meanings that are specific to her theoretical project. In the book Fujita references here, *Learning from Skill* (‘*Waza kara shiru*, 1987), Ikuta uses the term *katachi* to refer to physical forms of action within traditional Japanese dance (*nihon-buyō*) that learners observe and imitate; gestures that can be broken down into constitutive movements, or combined into longer sequences that form complete compositions. Whereas *katachi* represent a kind of concrete starting point for processes of embodied learning within Japanese arts (as Ikuta theorizes them), *kata* represent their more abstract end goals—they are *katachi* that learners have embodied and made their own. Throughout her work, Ikuta defines *kata* via Marcell Mauss’s notion of *habitus*, as *katachi* that learners have, in her terminology, “habitusized”—not only through imitation and repetition of those physical forms, but through a process of metaphorical dialogue during lessons that aims to provoke and achieve an embodied understanding of the movements’ underlying meanings. For an English language adaptation of a single chapter from Ikuta’s book, see Kumiko Ikuta, “The Role of ‘Craft Language’ in Learning ‘Waza,’” *AI & SOCIETY: The Journal of Human-Centred Systems* 4, no.2 (1990): 137-146.

learning form, identity of “*i*” [intention] (what we have referred to here as the realm of *kokoro*) is often seen as an issue.²²

Let me explain a little about the dialogic process by which the dichotomy of *katachi* and *kata* is generated. Within this community, of course, the preservation imperative reigns supreme. Suppose now that a certain performer has performed the same thing twice. To me, an outsider, the two performances appear completely different in their details. I, an outsider, report this to the teacher or their followers. The immediate response is “No, those two performances were the same.” Then I, an outsider, point out that specifically this detail and that detail were different between the two. Of course I give a thorough explanation, making use of a tape recorder or other recording equipment. At first, the point does not get across at all to the performers themselves. But the situation changes little by little. The first ones to respond to my point are not those qualified as teachers in the community, but rather their followers or those in the community who are near-beginners. They come to recognize the differences that I have pointed out between the two performances. But they continue to maintain, over to one side, another self that goes on saying “they are the same” in obedience to the verbal custom of the community. Caught between these two selves, they end up falling into a panic. At this point I send out a rescue boat, with the following words: “Even if each *katachi* is different, the *kata* is the same.” This way of talking works well to save people in the community who have momentarily fallen into a panic and gotten stuck there. It *has the function* of helping these people. Compared to *katachi*, the realm signified by *kata* is exceedingly vast. In the world of *nō* music, as already pointed out, identity is commented upon in three realms: the realms of sound itself, of articulation, and of *kokoro* (which includes *kiai*, the focusing of the spirit, for example). Among those, we can say that *katachi* is limited to the realm of sound itself, but *kata* can point to any other of the vast realms that cannot be grasped in material terms.

With that vastness as background, expressions such as “identity of *kata*,” like the standards in the realm of articulation discussed in Section 2, in many cases indicate something for which objective explanations do not succeed (setting aside those cases in which such identity can be explained objectively to some extent). If they do indicate that sort of something, it follows that the very expression “identity of *kata*” (or anything of the kind) is actually an ingenious way of preparing an escape from the preservation imperative. The word *kata* is, after all, simply used as a trick to confer authority upon change.

Inasmuch as the goal of the community is preservation and the object of preservation is a performing art, is it not natural to talk about identity in a realm of *kokoro* that can only be seen as mystical, and to simply accept such assertions as “*kata* is more important than *katachi*”? Those words do not describe anything. Rather, they are words that *bear the function* of providing a lubricant for the community’s only way of surviving, its only way of carrying on its practices, in the face of the preservation imperative.

5. Conclusions and comments on the present state of the community

The preservation imperative forces people to accept the command—“don’t question, just preserve!” In extreme terms, it urges music-learning through repetition and performance through repetition with absolutely no novelty or variation. One might think this is a world without pleasure, without dreams. In fact, in this community, almost no dialog is established between teacher and student to promote step-by-step advancement in the art. That is, no one ever

thought much about creating a flow of artistic development through the mediation of a communication cycle, in which students request the teacher to clarify points and receive answers they can understand. To many modern people accustomed to education mediated by dialog, this is already an unbearable world.

What we have shown, however, is the paradox of the preservation imperative, which ultimately leads to the creation of sonic change. The preservation imperative itself—the very absence of dialogue within this community—has actually enabled the generation of change. If, hypothetically, people had continuously and objectively investigated through dialog whether the preservation of sound had actually been achieved, the manner of generating change would likely differ significantly from that described here.

In fact in the world of *nō* music, over a long period of time, there has been no change in the eight-beat framework of the rhythm schema (as mentioned in Section 2). However, the positions of the twelve syllables distributed within the schema have, over time, shifted little by little (see Figure 8).²³

Figure 8. Historical changes in the schema: shifts in the placement of morae.

This phenomenon could not occur in a community of musical transmission that values and embodies this kind of schematic representation of rhythm as the primary standard for musical performance. In such a community, even if the standardized positions of sounds do not appear directly in sonic expression during performances, for that very reason they are certain to continue to be preserved as schema, without change.

In the *nō* community, if this kind of schema were learned in the form of something designated as a standard for practice (or in embodied form), the kind of change in the schema itself that we see in Figure 8 would have been absolutely impossible. As we saw in Section 3, schemas are never actively presented within the community as fundamental. In the processes of learning and performance, however, community members collect heuristic devices for imitating faithfully the form of sound—as a substitute, we might say, for the hidden schemas. A variety of personal devices are accumulated, which appear in no manual. Among these there is room, of course, for arbitrary devices to emerge (which may at the same time be excellent interpretations). Devices of this kind may be the driving forces that gradually move the hidden rhythmic schemas. But investigating this in detail requires more time for observation.

Having come to this point, we find ourselves wanting to say that in the practices of a community such as that of *nō*, in spite of its rigid, closed, and conservative appearance, there actually do exist “free” and “creative” processes. We immediately feel a desire to liberate the community by using the words “free” and “creative.” But if we fall back on words such as those, we risk diluting the paradoxical state of affairs that we have expended so much paper in explaining. What we must do now is find words we could use in place of “free” and “creative” that would convey clearly the nature of the community’s practices. But are there any such words? At this point I am unable to find any.

I would like to conclude with an on-the-scene report about how the image of practice itself that the community once held is currently being shaken by a new situation and new recording equipment.

First of all, a new way of thinking favors changing the lesson to a dialog-centered form, so that beginners will gladly pay money, i.e., for the sake of the community’s financial support. Supporters of this idea think it would perhaps be better after all to present as clear standards the rhythm schemas that have thus far been suppressed. This way of thinking was strongly promoted by scholars at one point in the late Meiji Period, but was immediately and thoroughly crushed.²⁴ Now, however, it is making its influence felt again, little by little. As already mentioned, if those schemas were to be pushed strongly as standards, the cycle of creation of change that we have described here would in all likelihood be permanently broken. The members of the community also understand this deeply, and are extremely cautious about reforms to the education system. Although they understand the reformist way of thinking, they are in a situation where they cannot change the present reality to align with it.

Secondly, there is the problem of the general diffusion and penetration of audio tape and video. I have already stated that the prime imperative in the traditional music community appears in the form “preserve the sound itself.” In the past this was, after all, an unreasonable demand; but now revolutionary media technologies that can fulfill that demand, namely tape and video, have appeared on the scene. At first the community regarded their appearance with some bewilderment, but it finally settled on a single judgment: that to rely on tape and video would be heresy. Accepting that judgment, the community kept these media at a respectful distance. That very attitude of keeping them at a distance shows us that in the performing arts community, what we have called the preservation imperative is by no means a straightforward matter.

At present, however, the situation is in the process of changing. Tape recording is gradually gaining acceptance. No longer does anybody make denunciations such as “study using tape recording is harmful” or “it cannot convey *kokoro*.” In fact, even in lesson studios, the use of tape recorders is coming to be taken for granted. In this kind of situation, it can be expected that what we have called the realm of *kokoro*—the place for secret maneuvering—will be pressed into an increasingly narrow space.

Furthermore, with the presence of a lasting audio record, changes in sound that have thus far been produced in the community unwittingly, unnoticed, in the name of preservation, are now coming to be clearly identified as “change,” pointed out, and brought into consciousness. In response to this, an understanding has begun to emerge that the preservation imperative applies not to the *entirety* of sound, but only to a *part* of it. The object of the preservation imperative is in the process being compressed (or restricted) to a minimal size. That is, preservers are delimiting a range within which learners can perform freely. This sort of interpretation is one that is consistent, we could say, with the viewpoint of scholars and others who have sought to ascertain within a single performing art an unchangeable part and a changeable part. As this understanding gradually spreads, the community’s preservation practices themselves are gradually changing and moving further away from the form described in this paper.

Notes

¹ See Bauman (1977) for details regarding trends and literature in performing arts research (performance theory) of the 1970s.

² For example, the musicologist Nakagawa Shin, in discussing the question of what “performance” is, begins by asserting its special quality while quoting Bauman and Hymes, using words such as *sokkyōsei* [spontaneity], *ikkaisei* [unrepeatability, “one-time-ness”], *yojōsei* [“surplus-ness,” departure from standards], and *sōzōsei* [creativity]. But Nakagawa also gives attention to types of performance that display other aspects: “Often in ritual, we encounter texts or performance contexts in which it is forbidden to change even one word or one phrase. In those cases creative innovation is removed, and a performance identical to previous ones is sought, not differing in the slightest” (Nakagawa 1987:6).

³ “Community” [*kyōdōtai*] is used here to mean the entire group of people who are interested in and seek to study a certain object, or who are compelled to study it. Therefore it should not be taken with the nuance that these people live in close proximity to one another. My use of the term *idea* [in the Platonic sense] was inspired by Yanai Tadashi’s discussion, which depicts the paradox of trying to recreate something traditional in a contemporary context (Yanai 1993).

⁴ At present, tradition bearers who would repeatedly make this kind of assertion are perhaps on the verge of extinction. This kind of assertion is found frequently in the pages of the magazine *Nōgaku*, first published in Meiji 35 (1902). In this period *nō* tradition bearers began for the first time to explain to a general audience their attitudes toward their own art.

⁵ As one interviews tradition bearers over a long period of time, and one’s relations with them become more intimate, the topic invariably turns toward the details of the art. When this happens, aspects of change come to be mentioned more frequently than assertions of identity. Or rather, discussion about this gradually comes to be encouraged. This is probably something that has been experienced by many researchers of traditional performing arts.

⁶ Regarding *waza gengo*, see Fukushima (1995) [the introductory chapter to the volume in which this essay originally appeared]. *Waza gengo*, especially when it relates to technology and technique, in many cases expresses these in the form of metaphor; and whether or not one can understand that language often becomes an index of the correctness of one's condition in the mental realm.

⁷ Even though we say “hidden,” this seems to be different from what is known as “esoteric teaching” [*hidden*]. Esoteric teaching is systematized hiddenness; when its content is presented, a bombastic document is transmitted with the words *tami muyō* [“there is no need to look at anything else”] written at the end. In the case at hand, however, the hiddenness is rather of the following sort: in the past there was assumed preliminary knowledge that did not need to be taught through schemas; but even later, when that preliminary knowledge could no longer be assumed, it remained unmentioned as before. Strictly speaking, then, we should distinguish this case from esoteric teaching, which is a systematized and active form of secret teaching. However, as it continues to be absolutely unmentioned even as one era gives way to the next, it comes to perform the same function as esoteric teaching. Regarding the active effects of the hiding of schemas, see the last part of this section, as well as Section 3.

⁸ The description of the example in Section 2 is an extensively revised and expanded version of one from a previous publication (Fujita 1993). I would like to express my gratitude to Takakuwa Izumi of the National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Tokyo, for many helpful opinions and critical comments regarding the earlier paper. I have done my best to take those comments into account in this paper.

⁹ The term *hiranori* originated around the late Edo Period. Until that time, no particular term for this rhythm form was in general use (although names were given to it in exceptional cases in scholarly literature). It seems that no distinct name was felt to be needed, since this rhythm is used in such a large proportion of *nō* singing.

¹⁰ Here the term meter [*hyōshi*] refers to a set of beats divided into groups. This is “meter” as defined by Cooper and Meyer (1960). It can be considered equivalent to the term *hyōshi* as used in Japanese public school music education.

¹¹ “Pulse” is originally a term defined and employed by Cooper and Meyer (1960) for the analytical notation of rhythm, and refers to each of a sequence of percussive sounds, prior to any grouping. When those percussive sounds are perceived as occurring in groups of two or three, and when those groups are distinguished according to accent patterns (such as strong-weak for a two-beat group, or strong-weak-weak for a three-beat group), then each sound is referred to as a “beat” [*haku*]. Thus in analyzing music, it is perhaps reasonable to refer to each sound as a “beat” from the outset. This is especially true in the case of modern Western music. There is a reason, however, why I use the word “pulse” here instead. It is because the phrase “raindrop beat” [*amadare hyōshi*] occurs in the terminology of Japanese traditional music. “Raindrop beat” refers to an entire stream of evenly spaced sounds, or to each one of those sounds. This term indicates evenly spaced units, but it does not contain the nuance that the evenly spaced units are necessarily divided into groups. Considering this point, it seems more appropriate to call each sound of a “raindrop beat” a “pulse” rather than a “beat.”

¹² What has remained unchanged since Zeami's time is only the “eight beat” framework. Its content, i.e. the distribution of morae, has changed in the course of history, as shown in Figure 8.

¹³ The actual sound that I used for this transcription is the cassette tape *Kanzeryū Maibayashi 20: Momijigari* (CNT-1020, available from Toei Sound Family, recorded by King Record Co., Ltd.). The singing is *Kanze-ryū* [*Kanze* school], the *ōtsuzumi* is *Kadono-ryū*, and the *kotsuzumi* is

Ōkura-ryū.

¹⁴ I have distinguished these two types of pulse by naming them “metrical beat” [*hyōshi no haku*] and “word beat” [*kotoba no haku*] respectively (Fujita 1988). Yokomichi Mario calls them “musical beat” [*gaku haku*] and “verbal beat” [*gohaku*] (Yokomichi 1985).

¹⁵ *Kuchi shōga* [mnemonics for instrumental sounds] is a term invented by scholars. Within the *nō* community, the terms *shōka* (or *shōga*) and *tonae* are used.

¹⁶ A given type of action or sound within a passage may occupy the length of half a pulse in some cases and twice that length in other cases. That is, from the point where a certain action or sound occurs, there are cases where the next action or sound comes half a pulse later and cases where it comes a full pulse later. In the latter case, compared to the former, the action itself is conceived as having some temporal breathing space [*yoyū*], and when expressed orally it tends to be chanted this way as well. Syllables, accordingly, are thought of as being lengthened. In such cases, extra vowel symbols (i, o, u) have been added to those syllables in the transcription.

¹⁷ One Ōkura-ryū *kotsuzumi* student I know sometimes speaks enviously of the performance methods of other schools (especially the Kō-ryū). In Ōkura-ryū drumming, *kakegoe* [drummers’ calls] are used less frequently than in other schools. Because of this, even in places where it would otherwise be possible to manipulate the tempo by controlling the length of *kakegoe*, in the Ōkura-ryū tempo manipulation has to be carried out through percussive sound itself. Such places are quite common. With regard to this point, my acquaintance finds the other schools more attractive.

¹⁸ In *nō* there are several schools of *kotsuzumi* and several schools of *ōtsuzumi*, and when they perform together, there are said to be some combinations that have good “mutual relations” [*oriai*] and others that have bad mutual relations. In combinations with good mutual relations, it seems that structures in which the positions of *komi* are displaced between the two drummers, as shown here, become prominent. Regarding good and bad “mutual relations” between schools of drumming, see Takakuwa 1982.

¹⁹ If we consider the problem of the reality of long-term historical change, the changes in schemas based on the “fundamental” eight-beat framework that we see in Figure 8 must be thought of as real changes. As will be stated in Section 5, change has occurred in the form of gradual displacement in relation to the schemas of preceding periods. As a broad historical trend, we are compelled to say that a form of evolution has occurred in which changes have been made to a basic schema. We are compelled to say, in other words, that in the community as a whole, over a long time span, a transformative intent has existed. Explanation, therefore, surely cannot avoid taking this form.

²⁰ We tend to think that during the Edo Period the trend in *nō* as a whole was to become heavier and slower, but this was not necessarily true overall. Even in dance and other stage movement, in certain parts of certain pieces performance became speedier than before. A part of this reality is introduced by Oda Sachiko (1993).

²¹ This term has been used by Tibetan Buddhist music scholar Ter Ellingson to divide the denotative content of music notation into two types. As one criterion for categorizing notation systems, Ellingson proposes asking whether the object of notation is the sound produced (as in Western staff notation, for example) or instructions regarding the process leading up to the production of sound (as in tablature notations). Ellingson describes the former as acoustic notation, and the latter as articulatory notation (Ellingson 1992). Here I will borrow his categorization method and terminology, and use the word “articulation.”

²² Religious studies scholar Kobayashi Masayoshi has pointed out that performing arts

communities “on the one hand enforce an adherence to *katachi*, but on the other hand say that *katachi* doesn’t matter,” and has raised the question of why those communities do not think of this as a contradiction (Kobayashi 1991:136). “*Katachi* doesn’t matter” is a statement that absolutely does not exist in the *nō* community. But should we take it literally in the case of the folk performing arts that are Kobayashi’s focus? Kobayashi does not take it in this way. He points out that these words are said only when one has observed identity in some other realm, higher than *katachi* (Kobayashi 1991:116-138).

²³ The “old style” shown in Figure 8 is not yet publicly recognized in the academic world, but is only what I have hypothesized. I apologize for presenting here only the result without the supporting evidence. For the detailed argument, see Fujita (1995).

²⁴ In the late Meiji period the acoustics researcher Tanaka Shōhei, newly returned from the West, criticized *nō* music, asserting that it contains no discernible rhythmic framework, that singers and drummers just perform as they please, and that as a result it is uninteresting as music from a listener’s point of view (Tanaka 1905). As a response from the performers’ side, schemas were presented for the first time in order to show that an underlying logic does in fact exist. Thereafter the schemas were partially revised so as to match the actual aural situation of the time, and came to circulate more widely. These are the schemas I have used here. What Tanaka was looking for was standards for practice; but as I have stated here, schemas were never used as primary standards of the sort that would have met Tanaka’s expectations. The situation is, however, in the process of changing. In instrumental education (setting aside education in *nō* singing for the moment), a form of music notation that clearly shows an eight-beat framework [*hachiwarifu*] spread widely from an early period, and has already become indispensable for education. Through the use of this notation, a knowledge that one is doing “eight-beat music” is becoming dominant among learners receiving such education. Students who are presently learning instruments actually all possess this sort of knowledge as a matter of course. On the other hand, this is not necessarily true about learners of *nō* singing.

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