

The process of oral transmission in Japanese folk performing arts: the teaching of matsuribayashi in Tōkyō

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Abstract

This paper explores the process of oral transmission of matsuribayashi, or Shinto festival music, as it is taught in Tōkyō, Japan. Like many other forms of "folk performing arts" (minzoku geinō) in Japan, musical knowledge of matsuribayashi is primarily transferred orally. The various teaching techniques traditionally used effectively convey the musical characteristics peculiar to that genre. These techniques are now used concurrently with more literacy-oriented techniques developed in recent years and their differing effects on the present day performance of matsuribayashi in Tōkyō are contrasted. (Abstract by author)

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日本の民俗芸能における口頭伝承の過程 — 東京における祭囃子の伝授

要旨

この論文で検討するのは、東京でおこなわれている神道の祭礼音楽、祭囃子の口頭伝承の過程である。日本における他の多くの民俗芸能と同様、祭囃子の音楽的知識は基本的に口頭で伝えられる。伝統的に用いられてきたいくつかの伝授の技術は、このジャンルに特有の音楽的諸特徴を効率よく伝えている。今日これらの技術は、書かれたものにもっと結びついた最近の技術とともに用いられている。そして、それぞれが今日の祭囃子のパフォーマンスに与えている影響の違いを対比させることができる。 (要旨翻訳: 徳丸吉彦)

Many of the local forms of entertainment performed at special, celebratory occasions are labeled "folk performing arts" (minzoku geinō) by the Japanese.¹⁾ These arts include kagura, dengaku, shishi mai (lion's dance) and bon odori, and their musical component is primarily transmitted through oral means, without the use of written symbols. Matsuribayashi (Shintō festival music of Japan), for example, was traditionally transmitted primarily by imitation -- that is, the process by which a teacher produces aurally and visually perceivable phenomena to be copied, which in turn a student perceives, processes intellectually and psychologically and reproduces in a version intended to be as close as possible to the original. While oral transmission (which includes this visual element as well) remains the primary mode of transferring musical knowledge, changes have been made in the techniques used to convey this

knowledge, though still largely avoiding the use of written symbols. This paper will examine the process of oral transmission of this particular form of minzoku geinô, matsuribayashi, as it is learned and performed in the Tôkyô area, contrasting traditional teaching techniques with recently developed techniques. The aim of this examination is to explore how musical knowledge is conveyed through the use of different techniques within the process of oral transmission and what their varying effects are on the musical product.

The first part of the compound term "matsuribayashi", matsuri, means "festival" (in this case referring specifically to the annual celebrations held at local Shinto shrines throughout Japan) and bayashi, a transformation of hayashi, refers to a "musical ensemble". The music and instrumental make-up of matsuribayashi ensembles differ throughout Japan, depending on the local region. In the Tôkyô area, such ensembles are made up of five musicians: one who plays the transverse bamboo flute known as the shinobue, two on the shimedaiko or shirabe, a double-headed, shallow-barreled drum, one playing the ôdaiko, a deep-barreled drum and one on the yosuke, or kane, which is a handheld brass gong.

There are few written records remaining from before the Meiji era concerning the history of matsuribayashi ensembles in Tôkyô, then called Edo. However, there is agreement that such ensembles first appeared in the beginning of the eighteenth century; extant prints of this period show matsuribayashi musicians performing on top of elaborate floats in the presence of the shôgun near the present site of the Imperial Palace (e.g. Kyôson-sei 1898).

For at least the first two hundred years of its existence, matsuribayashi music was performed by amateurs -- originally farmers, but later lower middle-class townspeople who ran their own small businesses. This situation has changed radically since the end of World War II, when trained amateurs were in short supply and professional satokagura²⁾ musicians began learning, performing, and later teaching matsuribayashi. The example presented in this paper, however, involves an amateur troupe which trains other amateurs.

The music of matsuribayashi is closely tied to the various activities of the festival it accompanies. For example, the music played during the parade of portable shrines is coordinated with the movements of the shrines as they are carried past the musicians on the shoulders of dozens of people. When the matsuribayashi ensemble performs on top of a float that is pulled through the streets, performers synchronize their music with the position of the float in the parade and the activities surrounding it. The music of matsuribayashi is supposed to heighten and enhance the festive atmosphere of the matsuri, and the musical content is thus arranged and adapted on the spot to achieve this effect.

A close musical relationship between members of the ensemble allows for such on-the-spot adjustment of musical content to ever-changing performance conditions. Ensemble members give various signals to one another which indicate changes in tempo and melodic and rhythmic content. For example, a certain melodic formula from the flute player may signal the insertion of an additional phrase or the end of a series of repetitions. At the same time, the three drum players must listen carefully to one another's parts so that they can adjust to sudden changes in those parts. As an example, it is considered musically effective to leave out certain drum beats, but if all three drums left out the same beat, the silence is not regarded as desirable. Accordingly, there is

constant guesswork at what the other players will do on a particular occasion. For this reason, even though their musical repertoire is somewhat limited in variety, matsuribayashi musicians claim not to become bored with playing the same music over and over again because of the challenge of playing well as an ensemble and of fitting the events of a particular occasion. While the matsuri had been the sole performance site of matsuribayashi music for most of its history, other types of performance situations have emerged since the end of World War II. For example, newly opened department stores occasionally hire ensembles to perform while strolling from floor to floor. Receptions associated with weddings and other celebratory events are another current venue for matsuribayashi musical performance. In both of these instances, it is clear that the traditional function of matsuribayashi music to create a festive atmosphere is being exploited.

Among the many matsuribayashi ensembles in Tōkyō, there are several "schools" or styles of playing what is basically the same repertoire (Honda 1967 and Shimizu 1973). The school from which examples for this paper were drawn is known as "Wakabayashi".

Until 25 to 30 years ago, the various instrumental parts of matsuribayashi music were taught in the Wakabayashi stylistic school using the following system: the teacher played one phrase (on the flute, for example) three times, the first time for the student to simply listen, the second time for the student to imitate it and the third time for the student to correct any mistakes he made in his imitation. Even if the student did not correctly commit the phrase to memory after the three playings, this was the end of the lesson and he had to wait until the next one to hear the phrase again. At least one teacher of matsuribayashi, to my knowledge, still teaches using this method, which results in short, five to ten minute lessons.

The mnemonic syllables known as shōga or kuchishōga were used when teaching the drum part; as the teacher hit the "drum" (actually an old tire, since the drum was too noisy), he sang out the syllables of the part he was teaching, as well as of other drum parts or the flute part as reference markers. The students listened to both the musical phrase being taught and the mnemonic syllables that accompanied that phrase. In the case of the flute part, a minimum of shōga was used.

Then, as now, a beginner is first taught a basic version of an instrumental part and, once he has learned that, he gradually acquires the ability to appropriately ornament the melodic line of the flute or vary the rhythmic patterns of the drums and gong. An important element of the basic version of any instrumental part is the placement of ma, or structurally significant points which mark the ends of phrases. After mastering the basic version, advanced players of matsuribayashi music learn to vary the rhythmic beat by individually stretching or contracting the beat freely. However, at the points of ma, the players are all expected to join together again. If they do not, the performance has "broken up" and is considered a failure.

According to informants, by as early as the 1960s, the technique of teaching matsuribayashi as described above had changed dramatically. Largely in response to demands from the students themselves, the teachers had begun to repeat phrases several times, not stopping at three times. The teacher also gave detailed verbal instructions in response to specific questions from students. In addition, students were relying more upon the shōga syllables for memorizing and reproducing both drum

and flute patterns; they sometimes requested that the teacher write these syllables down for them and the teacher even produced a mimeographed booklet containing the shôga syllables for each instrument in response to all the requests.

A final new element in the transmission process of matsuribayashi was not condoned by the teachers but initiated by the students -- some students were occasionally using tape recorders to learn the music. Since it was known that taping was not encouraged during lessons, tapes of the music were made during matsuri performances and used for practice in the home of the student without the teacher's knowledge. However, the teacher claimed to be aware of which students were using tape recorders to aid their learning of matsuribayashi because those students, he said, generally forgot up to what point the teacher had taught the previous week, usually continuing farther than they had been actually taught.

According to the teacher of the Wakabayashi school, these changes in his teaching method were linked to changes in the types of students they were teaching. While they had taught mostly neighborhood shopkeepers and small business owners through the 1950s, in following years, two new kinds of students began to come for lessons. One kind was "sarariman" (salaried office workers), both from the local neighborhood and from other parts of Tôkyô, who were becoming a sizeable portion of the work population in Japan's large cities. Also, students from a local music conservatory, trained mainly in Western music but with an interest in Japanese music, also began to take lessons. The teacher of Wakabayashi perceived that these new students were not accustomed to the sort of apprenticeship system common to their "downtown" culture, whereby a business or craft is learned over a long period of time from a respected "teacher". Instead, he felt, these new students treated the lessons as periods of time during which they should receive the most instruction possible. Gradually he gave in to their requests for longer, more detailed instruction and a greater reliance upon the shôga syllables in the teaching process.

From this summary of the teaching techniques used in the transmission of matsuribayashi, certain effects of the use of traditional teaching techniques, which rely heavily upon imitation, become clear. Students who learn the music by imitation -- and under the pressure of only hearing a phrase three times -- develop the ability to listen carefully, to differentiate small changes from one playing to another, and to reproduce many different versions easily. These abilities are considered desirable among matsuribayashi performers because of the need for individual players to constantly monitor the playing of others and adjust their own part to what they hear. Additionally, the necessary skill of musicians to adjust their performance to the activities of the matsuri is also best served by developing these abilities.

The ability to ornament a melodic line or vary a rhythmic line is also best developed through the traditional method of teaching. The teacher states that there is no one "correct" way to ornament or vary a phrase and that each performance should actually differ in how lines are varied. However, there are certain criteria by which individual performances are judged superior or inferior, particularly depending upon how the performance fits in with the rest of the ensemble. In this process, again, the ability to pick up details of others' performances and instantly react to them in one's own playing is essential and is devel-

oped through the traditional method.

Finally, the teacher says that the points of "rest" known as ma which together form the main skeleton of the music can only be learned through careful listening over time. As these ma are learned in the course of hearing the "basic" version of the music, a student who has heard this version over the course of several months or years does not easily forget their correct placement, even after learning to vary his performance like an advanced player. However, students whose lessons are conducted using the newer methods described here learn the basic version quickly and rapidly move on to varying the tempo and rhythmic content, since they are often anxious to appear as "advanced" players. These students tend to forget the correct placement of ma after varying the rhythmic content in different ways with each performance and are subsequently chastised by the teacher to relearn the basic version.

Certain disadvantages can be discerned from the use of the newer teaching techniques of the Wakabayashi teacher. Obviously, the use of verbal instructions clarifies many points of confusion for students. However, the kinds of instructions given were often dictated by the students themselves, not the teachers, since the students often initiated the instructions with their own questions. Therefore, the matters being corrected or discussed through those instructions may or may not be aspects of the music which the teacher himself feels to be important.

Increased dependence by students on shōga syllables was also criticized by the teacher. He said that some rhythmic patterns could simply not be learned if one relied only on these mnemonic syllables. Particular examples include patterns with an irregular beat and sections, such as in a piece called Tama, where the dovetailing of two drum parts is significant -- either the syllables will imitate only one part at a time or will imitate both parts but without differentiating which part plays when. In addition, it is impossible to teach the elaborate and quick ornamentation of the flute part -- which is said to make the flute part truly "stand out" -- through shōga syllables.

As mentioned earlier, tape recordings were used by students to speed up the learning process, over the objections of the teacher. He felt that students who used tape recordings tended to learn only one version (usually of an advanced performer) of the music, avoiding the long-term process of first mastering the basic version and then absorbing the rules which generated appropriate variations. By doing this, the student became unable to vary his own performance on each occasion, as a truly advanced performer is expected to do, or to appropriately fit in with the rest of the ensemble when individual members varied their playing. Another important objection of the teacher was that it was only through observing the physical performance of matsuribayashi that students could learn such things as the correct placement of ma. In the case of ma, there is a strong relationship between the physical act of breathing and where the ma are placed which a tape recorder would not capture or convey to the student.

Finally, the teacher was most disturbed by the social implications of relying upon an electronic machine for the study of his art. To his way of thinking, the use of the tape recorder implies that the human teacher is unnecessary and expendable, an attitude he considered extremely rude. Consequently, his treatment of students who he knew to be using tape recordings was gruff and even cruel.

But these newer learning devices -- verbal instruction, greater de-

pendence on shōga syllables and tape recordings -- also have the undisputed advantage of enabling a student to learn the music of matsuribayashi much faster than in the past. The teacher himself frequently expressed amazement that his recent students picked up the main part of the matsuribayashi repertoire within just three months, a process which he said took on the average three years in the past. Because the learning process took so much time then, many students quit midway; now students were able to perform at a matsuri within a few months after starting lessons. As performance at a real matsuri served as incentive for students to continue, students taught by the newer techniques tended to become more devoted to their lessons from an early stage.

Furthermore, it may be observed that as performance situations expand beyond the matsuri to such sites as wedding receptions and department stores, the need to adjust a particular performance to surrounding events becomes less relevant. In these newer performance contexts, the playing of a set version of matsuribayashi music -- as often becomes the case when these newer techniques are used -- may not be such a liability. On the other hand, playing a limited repertoire exactly the same way on each occasion may also become tedious for these performers.

In other words, the study of matsuribayashi and other folk performing arts as well³⁾ seems to be heading toward the increased use of mnemonic and other learning devices to speed up the learning process and make it easier. Particularly in urban settings, this seems to suit the faster-paced lifestyle of people but the important question arises of how the music itself is affected when the techniques used in the process of oral transmission are changed. In the case of matsuribayashi, the music is affected in significant ways.

Notes

- 1) The concept of minzoku geinō and its relationship to everyday life in Japan is discussed in Misumi 1972.
- 2) Satokagura is a form of mime theatre with either mythic or comedic themes performed to musical accompaniment. Most of its practitioners in Tōkyō, both actor/dancers and musicians, were, and still are, considered "professional" -- that is, their primary source of income is derived from the performance of satokagura.
- 3) This observation is made based on field data gathered in Tōkyō from 1980 to 1982 on the current state of such folk performing arts as shishimai and satokagura.

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Discussion: chaired by Peter Cooke

1. The relationship between visual and auditory cues

Feld: I am interested in the relationships between the visual and auditory in terms of different kinds of cueing in group performance. It seems that there is among musicians a sense of being together and at the same time being apart. It is of great importance in performances where musicians have flexibility in co-articulating phrases according to different ideas, yet must end up together. Interestingly in jazz, for instance, if you listen to the recording of a particular performance, you hear the bass player anticipating, while the drummer stays behind a little in relation to the punctuation and chord changes by the piano player. They say that, in improvisation, the players somehow manage to coordinate with one another in oral ways. Yet if you watch a real performance carefully, you notice that it is fundamentally non-visual cueing which takes place among the players. Yet it is interesting that, when somebody who has learned just from the recording joins in a jam session, then he has a hard time, because the musicians have to be re-socialized in order to swing together. Of course, from the recording you can learn phrasing as well as how to swing. But you still have to learn various kinds of visual cues which have much to do with the ways of holding instruments and your position in relation to the other players. I think this is interesting, and more work must be done on the relationships between different kinds of auditory and visual cues.

Fujie: In the case of matsuribayashi, specific kinds of cues are given. They are not only visual but also physiological cues that are given in terms of beating, eye contact or gestures. It is hard for me to generalize, but it seems to me there is a particular kind of ensemble relationship.

Feld: However, you learn to play within a particular group. Is it, then, a difficult experience to start playing the same kind of music with another group?

Fujie: I think that these days cues are actually learned within each group and differ from one group to another.

Tokumaru: Are these musicians permitted to communicate visually during a performance? In other words, while performing are they positioned so as to be able to watch each other?

Fujie: There are three drum players in front and a gong player and a flute player in the back. So the flute player can watch everyone and look around, whereas the drum players would not turn around and watch what the flute player is doing.

Tokumaru: In other Japanese traditional performing arts, it is a tendency to minimize visual communication during the performance. Supposing I play the shamisen and a chanter or a narrator is sitting at my side, I may not turn my head toward him at all. This is a general tendency in Japanese performances except during lessons. In the case of bunraku, the shamisen players, narrators and puppeteers are to be

independent of one another. If the shamisen player looks at the puppet player or narrator, it means that he obeys them. There is another example of this tendency: When the Julliard Quartet came to Japan, they held a workshop for string quartet. In this workshop, participants tended to minimize visual communication. The members of the Julliard quartet were surprised and advised them on the contrary to look at one another's faces.