

An Analysis of the Institutionalized Transmission Process of Chinese and Japanese Traditional Performing Arts through the Lens of Authoritative Knowledge

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Brief autobiographical note on the authors: Takuya Shimizu is a cultural anthropologist specializing in educational research on how Qin opera trains performers and has conducted two decades of fieldwork on the subject. Kumiko Nishio is a management scholar specializing in career development with over 20 years of fieldwork experience in Japanese hospitality and performing arts.

ABSTRACT

This study explores the transmission and transformation of "tradition" in performing arts education by examining the institutionalization process in two contrasting case studies: China's Qin opera and Japan's Noh Theater. Using the anthropological concept of "authoritative knowledge," primarily applied in medical studies by Brigitte Jordan, this research aims to demonstrate its relevance in performing arts. This approach highlights the specific challenges in preserving these traditional art forms, contributing new insights into their educational transmission. The comparison between Qin opera, a popular traditional theater in northwestern China, and Japan's Noh Theater, with their distinct historical backgrounds, offers a novel perspective on how traditional performing arts are passed down and evolved, broadening the application of "authoritative knowledge" beyond its original medical context.

Keywords: Authoritative knowledge, Transmission of tradition, Institutionalization, Education of Traditional performing arts, Management of preservation.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study aims to make a novel contribution to the universal question of how "tradition" is transmitted and transformed, by re-examining the institutionalization process of transmission of traditional performing arts from an educational perspective to elucidate the specific issues that need attention to preserve valuable traditional performing arts better. In this context, we employ the anthropological concept of "authoritative knowledge" to compare the traditional performing arts of two societies with starkly contrasting histories: China's Qin opera (a traditional theater popular in the northwestern regions) and Japan's Noh Theater. While many researchers have examined the transmission and transformation of "tradition" from various angles, studies utilizing the concept of "authoritative

knowledge" have been confined mainly to the medical field, partly because Brigitte Jordan, who proposed this concept, conducted her midwifery research. Given this background, this study also aims to expand the concept based on these two contrasting case studies, demonstrating its applicability to the field of performing arts education.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This essay begins by surveying research on the transmission and transformation of "tradition." The term "tradition" is defined by the Oxford Dictionary of English as "beliefs, customs, systems, ideas, scholarship, and arts cultivated and transmitted through the long history of a nation, society, or group, particularly their core spiritual nature" (Oxford Languages, 2010:1384). Here, "tradition" is perceived as something with a long history. However, in studies of "tradition," there has been a longstanding debate between essentialism, which assumes the existence of an intrinsic and unchanging 'true' traditional culture within a group, and constructivism, which argues that what has been considered natural and essential culture is created under specific contexts. At least in cultural anthropology, many researchers have shifted their perspective from essentialism to constructivism.

In this context, numerous studies on "tradition" have been conducted, among which E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger's (1992) discussion on "invented tradition" is frequently referenced. They argue that "tradition" includes relatively newly created elements, citing examples like tartan kilts in the Scottish Highlands and soccer among the British working class, indicating that "tradition" is not necessarily cultural or ideological practices handed down from ancient times but can be created or invented in the modern era. Their study is particularly interesting in that it suggests new "traditions" were created to resolve contradictions between old "traditions" and the realities of rapidly modernizing societies. They argue that "tradition" and "modernity," often seen as opposites, are intertwined, with "tradition" often emerging as a result of modernization. Moreover, their concept of "invented tradition" emphasizes that "tradition" is often created for political purposes, such as nation-building and establishing national identities, providing insights for many political studies (Anderson, 1997; Wilcox, 2018).

On the other hand, based on the discussion of "invented tradition," some studies are focusing more on the interrelationship between "tradition" and individuals. For example, L.S. Gibbs and colleagues propose the concept of "traditionalization" (Gibbs et al., 2020), delving into how the existing collective framework of "tradition" is recreated and becomes a new "tradition" through a dynamic interplay with the creative activities of individual practitioners. "Traditionalization" refers to the process whereby culturally created practices through such relationships are socially recognized and influence subsequent practitioners as new "traditions." This can be seen in the processes of staging and producing song contests, anthologies, CD albums, etc. (Gibbs et al., 2020:1-11). They focus on the reconstitution of "tradition" through the interaction between individuals and "tradition," avoiding the problem of neglecting the interdependence between the two, a common issue in traditional research that often focuses solely on either the individual or "tradition."

While various studies exist on the transmission and transformation of "tradition," there is a general

lack of research from an educational perspective. This study applies the concept of "authoritative knowledge" in educational anthropology. In short, "authoritative knowledge" is defined as certain knowledge that, regardless of its correctness, becomes socially recognized, accepted naturally, and considered legitimate over others due to its association with the ownership or use of artifacts, as proposed by Brigitte Jordan in her international comparison of midwifery practices (Jordan, 2001:182). This concept allows us to reinterpret the transmission process of traditional performing arts as the formation of "authoritative knowledge" by dominant forces and the response of those in subordinate positions. This means viewing the transmission process not simply as the passing down of "tradition," but as a more concrete struggle between "authoritative knowledge" and the people involved.

For instance, Iida's (2006) study on Thai massage using this concept is insightful. According to Iida, the "authoritative knowledge" of Thai massage was formed based on medical texts of court physicians from the late 17th to early 20th centuries, amidst the increasing influence of Western modern medicine and the Thai government's institutionalization of a new medical system called "Thai-style medicine" since the 1990s, following a traditional medicine revival movement led by modern medical practitioners since the mid-70s (Iida, 2006:299). However, in local village community massage practices, this "authoritative knowledge" is selectively adopted, considering familiar body techniques, traditional theories of disease causation, and social relations. For example, unfamiliar stretching positions in Thai massage are omitted, and massage is used only when the cause of bodily pain is judged to be abnormalities in Sen (energy lines in the body) rather than spirits or poisons.

Thus, the transmission of "tradition" involves some form of "authoritative knowledge" imposed by dominant forces, but a contention exists at both micro and macro levels. Focusing on the concept of "authoritative knowledge" enables us to view the transmission of "tradition" as a process that includes specific actions about who generates such knowledge, how they establish and maintain it as the "tradition" of that field or industry, and how people deviate from this knowledge.

3. INTRODUCING THE CASE STUDIES AND METHODOLOGY

This study is a comparative analysis of China's Qin opera and Japan's Noh Theater. In what follows, the basic characteristics of these two traditional performing arts and research methodology will be explained.

Qin opera is a traditional regional theater of Northwestern China that has existed since the middle of the Ming Dynasty (i.e., the end of the 16th century). Noh is a Japanese theater that originated in Sangaku (a form of ancient Chinese entertainment similar to a circus) that came from China during the Nara period (i.e., the 8th century).

Qin opera became a national intangible cultural heritage in 2006. It uses the Shaanxi dialect in its songs and speeches. The opera is often called "the performing arts of performers" due to the central and creative roles played. They must convey different times and places and create various figures (whether historical or literary). They rely almost solely on their bodies, using the *sigongwufa* (traditional patterns of acting) and the *hangdang* (the traditional role categories for performers) since

there are very few props (usually just a table and a few chairs) used in many of the traditional programs.

Noh is Japan's oldest form of theater, and its history dates back to the 8th century. Noh was registered as an intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO in 2008. Performers of Noh are generally called Nohgakushi (or professional Noh players) and are comprised of Tachi-kata (actors) and Hayashi-kata (musicians). The former are performers, which consist of three roles (i.e., Shite-kata, Waki-kata (supporting actors), Kyogen-kata), and ten Ryugi schools. Shite-kata is the main protagonist who covers their face with special masks. It also plays the role of chorus part, and it is in charge of such backstage chores as selling tickets, handling stage properties, and lending a hand to theater management. Hayashi-kata is responsible for playing musical instruments. It has four roles and 14 Ryugi schools.

As for methodology, we have conducted comprehensive fieldwork spanning extensive durations, collecting primary data pertinent to the theme. Shimizu undertook anthropological fieldwork for approximately 20 years in Xi'an, China, where Qin opera thrives most prominently. To grasp the true nature of "authoritative knowledge" in this context, he interviewed around 30 actors and theatrical personnel and engaged in participatory observations, such as attending rehearsals at Qin opera schools and watching troupe performances. On the other hand, Nishio conducted her fieldwork over a decade in Kyoto, Osaka, and Tokyo, Japan, where the leading figures of Noh's lineages and principal family lineages (iemoto) reside. Approaching from a managerial studies perspective, she interviewed more than ten Noh performers. To better understand their relationship with "authoritative knowledge", she attended most of the significant performances and events. She also researched the training system and organizational structure of each school of Noh.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE TWO CASES THROUGH THE LENS OF AUTHORITATIVE KNOWLEDGE

From the perspective of the concept of "authoritative knowledge", the following characteristics emerge when analyzing the examples of Qin opera and Noh:

Looking back at the history of Qin opera, we can see that the "authoritative knowledge" imposed by the government has undergone numerous changes (Shimizu, 2021:43-55). For instance, after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, theatrical reforms encompassing actors' political thoughts and situations, company management and operation methods, and the content of the plays, led to the fading of feudal elements and their transformation into a socialist mold. At this time, Qin opera was distinctly positioned as a propaganda art for transmitting political ideology to the people. Plays with superstitious content (involving ghosts or spirits), which were performed before the founding, became prohibited. Qin opera actors also started attending specialized drama schools to acquire appropriate political ideology and acting skills for their role in propaganda art.

The Cultural Revolution, starting in 1966, can be seen as an era that intensified these propaganda art characteristics of Qin opera. Led by Jiang Qing (Mao Zedong's wife) and the Gang of Four, traditional plays like "Romance of the Three Kingdoms" and "Water Margin" were all banned, with only

revolutionary model plays allowed for performance. Furthermore, many Qin opera playwrights, directors, and actors began to be treated as counter-revolutionary elements, and drama schools, seen as symbols of the old society (the feudal era before the founding), were mostly closed as they were viewed with hostility. However, after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1978, Qin opera, which had been a target for elimination and destruction, was promoted as an important traditional culture, and the performance of traditional plays that were banned during the Cultural Revolution resumed. At the same time, the political hue of Qin opera as propaganda art faded, and opportunities to perform it as entertainment for the public increased.

On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, Qin opera was designated as a national intangible cultural heritage in 2006 to protect it from decline due to damages from events like the Cultural Revolution and dwindling audience numbers amidst the diversification of entertainment such as TV and the internet. Consequently, in May 2009, the government began encouraging Qin opera transmission activities by appointing inheritors of styles based on their achievements and performance history. In September of the same year, a museum exhibiting Qin opera-related cultural artifacts, funded by the government, opened in Xi'an. In various drama schools and companies, appointed inheritors started offering special courses for transmitting acting techniques and staging plays they starred in.

Throughout the history of Qin opera, the "authoritative knowledge" of what Qin opera should be and which acting techniques and knowledge related to it are legitimate, has been repeatedly shaped and altered by the government. Against this backdrop, the following situation can be observed in practice. For example, in actor education, the acquisition of "standard acting techniques" is emphasized. These "standard techniques" include acting forms and skills, but particularly prioritized are the skills of singing methods in chanting, which are central to actors. More specifically, the primitive chanting singing methods of Qin opera practiced before the founding of the country without considering the throat's condition, are no longer encouraged. Nowadays, it is desirable to follow vocal training techniques for voice production and breathing, and dietary guidance to avoid throat damage, taught by specialized teachers as "authoritative knowledge" in drama schools (Shimizu, 2021: 201-214).

In a drama school in Xi'an, which Shimizu surveyed, since the start of the Reform and Opening-Up policy in 1978, under the leadership of a principal with acting experience and an emphasis on chanting singing methods, teachers trained in vocal music at music schools were specially hired to enthusiastically teach the "standard" singing methods. As a result, the number of students who damaged their throats during puberty and were barred from an acting career drastically decreased. However, initially, many older teachers unfamiliar with vocal music knowledge viewed such singing methods skeptically, seeing them as a waste of time unrelated to acting skills. Even as its effectiveness became widely recognized socially, non-state-run drama schools not blessed with educational conditions still faced economic constraints in fully teaching these "standard" singing methods (Shimizu, 2017).

On the other hand, looking back at the history of Noh Theater we see that the writings of Zeami¹ have become the source of "authoritative knowledge." For example, in his famous book "Fushi Kaden," Zeami describes "Nenrai Keiko Jōjō" (the lifelong learning process in Noh), a section on skill development. Here, Zeami divides the path of those involved in Noh into seven stages, from around the age of seven to over fifty, summarizing points to be noted by both trainers and trainees at each stage. Modern Noh practitioners' career management is categorized into five stages (Nishio, 2023:52-55). The early stages of their careers, though differing due to formal education, are similarly crucial from mid-teens to mid-twenties, consistent with Zeami's descriptions, transcending time as shared "authoritative knowledge."

In contemporary Noh talent development, texts established by each school and profession are used both in general practice and in the training of professionals under the apprenticeship system. For instance, there are five schools for the Shite role, specializing in dance and chant, with different texts for the same music depending on the school. The head of each school takes responsibility for revising and publishing these texts. While all schools respect Zeami's writings as "authoritative knowledge," they differ in style, and each school's head represents the "authoritative knowledge" of their respective school.

In today's world, where diverse cultural content is easily accessible, the number of people inheriting Noh skills and the audience enjoying Noh are both decreasing. With the opening of the National Noh Theatre in 1984, training programs for young talents were introduced. Additionally, training associations, study groups, and courses have been established in regions and universities, transcending the barriers of schools and apprenticeship systems, to nurture young talent.

In Nishio's research of the training associations set up in regions like Kyoto and Osaka, she found that these talent development systems are operated by organizations to which Noh practitioners belong. The Noh practitioners who perform on stage are responsible for guiding the young talents, and there are no staff specialized in teaching Noh. Moreover, in training settings involving different schools, the content, and methods of skill development are deliberated and managed through a collective decision-making process by multiple instructing Noh practitioners.

This collaborative training of successors by Noh practitioners themselves is possible for two reasons. First, there exists a common "authoritative knowledge" among Noh practitioners that transcends the barriers of schools and professions, with shared challenges in terms of pieces to be performed and skills required at each stage of training over the years. Second, many Noh pieces are common across different schools, and research findings and expert knowledge on the literary and social backgrounds necessary for interpreting these pieces are shared among Noh practitioners. When historical facts are unearthed and reinterpreted as "authoritative knowledge," this is easily shared. However, the economic foundation necessary to implement these new initiatives in Noh talent development is not well established. The current situation is sustained by the Noh practitioners' initiative and their sense of

¹ The framework of Noh as we know it today dates back about 600 years to the father and son playwrights Kanami and Zeami (1363-1443 ?) .

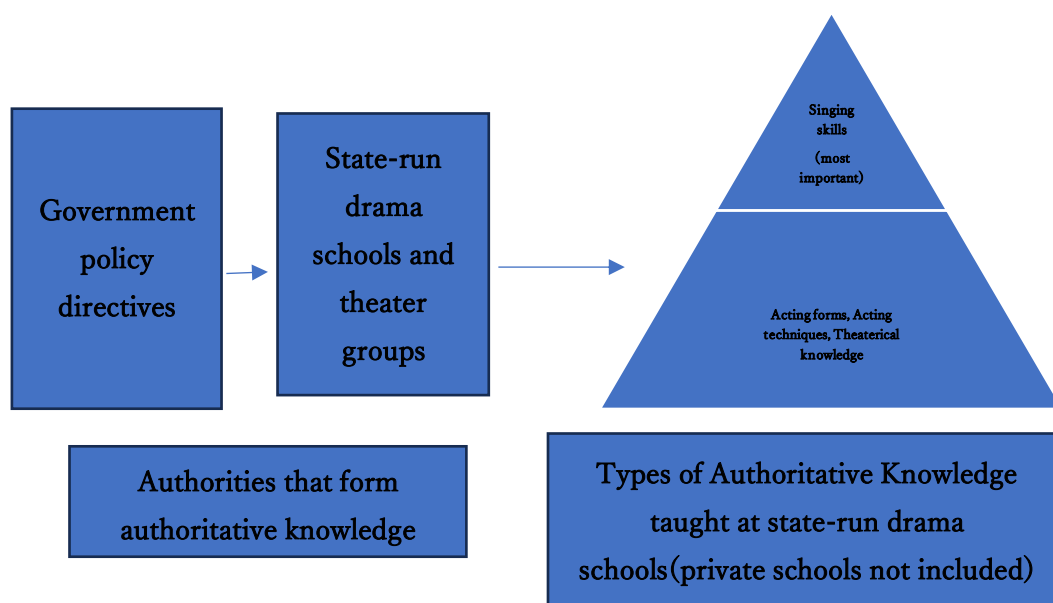
urgency regarding skill transmission, supported by voluntary actions without seeking monetary returns.

5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

So, what features of "authoritative knowledge" can be discerned from the cases of China and Japan? To put it succinctly, many characteristics different from those pointed out by Jordan (2001) and Iida (2006) have emerged.

In the Qin opera theatre world, the "authoritative knowledge" of Qin opera has undergone several transitions over time. This knowledge is subdivided into skills such as chanting, acting forms, and techniques, with the previously mentioned chanting singing method skill, a core competency, being most emphasized. Additionally, its dissemination is not solely top-down based on government policy directives; state-run drama schools and theatrical companies are also deeply involved in its formation (See Figure 1). Unlike Jordan's example of midwifery practices, which are advanced and highly

Figure 1 Relationship diagram surrounding authoritative knowledge of Qin opera



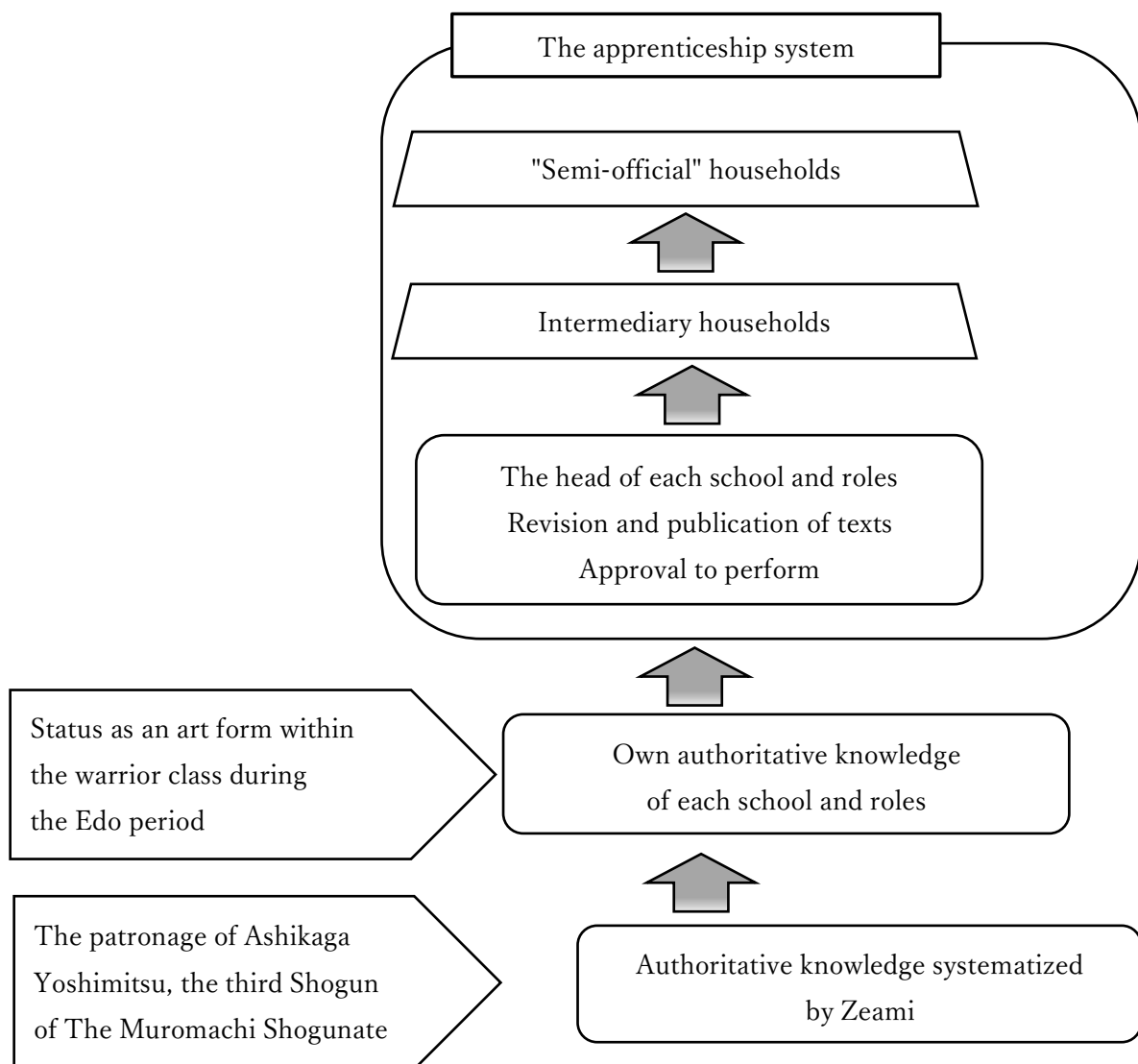
specialized medical acts without consensus among practitioners, there is little dissent regarding the "authoritative knowledge" related to Qin opera (Gehratt, 2012:31). However, in privately run drama schools, which lack educational resources, they are unable to teach the "standard" singing methods adequately due to economic disparities with state-run schools. Therefore, in the Qin opera theatre world, the situation surrounding "authoritative knowledge" is far more complex than the binary opposition between medical knowledge and instinctive knowledge of pregnant women demonstrated in Jordan's research.

In the world of Noh theater, the "authoritative knowledge" of Noh, originating from Zeami, has evolved with the establishment of multiple schools and professions, leading to the formation of distinct "authoritative knowledge" for each school and profession. Texts divided by each professional school,

authored or supervised by the head families, are treated as legitimate, forming a consensus among the head families, Noh practitioners, and industry publishers.

Additionally, each school has a set order of learning pieces according to the stage of training and performing pieces considered gateways to higher levels require permission from the head family. This permission is communicated through the professional families to the head family. There is also a hierarchy where Noh practitioners belonging to sub-professional families cannot become professional families. The "authoritative knowledge" of modern Noh is managed and controlled by the upper echelons of the Noh hierarchy (See Figure 2). The transmission of Noh's "tradition" necessitates "authoritative knowledge." The collaboration of Noh practitioners from different schools in nurturing young talent is possible because they share the "authoritative knowledge" based on the treatises written by Zeami, and there is a consensus among those responsible for training on how to transmit these skills.

Figure 2 Relationship diagram surrounding authoritative knowledge of Noh



On the other hand, the audience who watch Noh performances and amateur students who learn

from Noh practitioners form the foundation supporting the tradition's inheritance. To engage and gain support from these audiences (consumers), Noh practitioners must also undertake new initiatives. Collaborations among Noh practitioners across schools and professions include performing new pieces, reviving old ones, and collaborating with other traditional arts. These new initiatives are not officially sanctioned by the head families but are implicitly acknowledged by the community based on the audience-pulling ability and skill level of the practitioners. Thus, there is a contention between innovative efforts connected to the inheritance of Noh and the stakeholders symbolizing "authoritative knowledge."

6. IMPLICATIONS SUGGESTED BY THE RESEARCH RESULTS

From this comparative analysis, several insightful observations have been made regarding the protection of traditional performing arts, which have not been highlighted in previous research on traditional performing arts.

In the case of the Qin opera, as mentioned in the case analysis, the disparity in the dissemination of "authoritative knowledge" due to educational and economic differences is prominent. Therefore, addressing these disparities is necessary to prevent biased transmission of "tradition". Additionally, in the Qin opera theater world, given its tumultuous history and the frequent rewriting of "authoritative knowledge," it's crucial to examine the specific impacts on Qin opera for future protection as an intangible cultural heritage. For instance, during the Cultural Revolution, the staging of traditional performances was prohibited for a decade. As a result, after the revolution, numerous actors, regardless of age, revisited drama schools to relearn the basic patterns and movements of traditional performances, having been dispatched from their respective theater troupes. This underscores how performance skills, primarily acquired through physical transmission, can be vulnerable to rapid changes in "authoritative knowledge". Consequently, there might be a pressing need to focus on protecting such vulnerable facets of the art form.

In the world of Noh, professionals and scholars share "authoritative knowledge" originating from Zeami. However, over time, what was initially shared knowledge has evolved into distinct skill sets in chanting, dance, and playing, defined by school and profession, and documented in texts for talent development. For about 150 years, the market-driven approach of increasing Noh viewers has solidified the existence and sharing of "authoritative knowledge," granting Noh a certain authority as a culture and contributing to its status as an intangible cultural heritage. In addition, the institutionalization of human resource development in Noh is based on traditional apprentice relationships. Whether it is the national or the local fostering association, it is operated based on the relationship with the school, and the system cannot be established in isolation from the traditional authoritative knowledge represented by the school. On the other hand, as described in this paper, its limitations are becoming apparent today. There are two limitations: the limitation of a training system based on authoritative knowledge in the transmission of skills, and the limitation of institutionalization based on authoritative knowledge regarding the implementation of a new approach as a performing art. The hierarchical structure represented by head

families and professional families remains strong, creating a situation where Noh practitioners engaged in innovative activities to maintain and develop intangible cultural heritage struggle to reconcile with those who represent "authoritative knowledge" despite sharing it.

7. CONCLUSION

In this study, we expanded the concept of "authoritative knowledge," primarily used in midwifery research, to the non-medical field to reinterpret the transmission process of traditional performing arts. Focusing on this concept enabled us to clarify who generates the "authoritative knowledge" that intervenes in the transmission process of traditional arts, how it's established and maintained as "tradition," how people respond to it, and the changes it brings about.

Compared to tangible culture such as historical buildings, intangible culture like traditional performing arts, physically transmitted through people, is extremely fragile. Thus, careful attention is needed in protecting and managing the changes of such heritage. This is especially true for intangible cultural heritage. The concept of "authoritative knowledge," as mentioned in the previous section, highlights specific issues that should be focused on. Furthermore, it provides a more concrete view of the mechanisms and social relations in the process traditionally referred to as the transmission of "tradition" in performing arts education research (cf. Shimizu, 2021:16-25), making it easier to grasp its reality. Additionally, the concept of "authoritative knowledge" brings valuable insights from educational anthropology to the traditional studies on the transmission and transformation of "tradition."

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