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**Players, Performances and Existence of Women's Noh:
Focusing on the Articles Run in the Japanese General Newspapers**

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Introduction

Women had been involved in Noh since its early phase, the days of Kan'ami and Zeami (fourteenth century)⁽¹⁾. But women have not been given fair treatment in the history of Noh, even if there was a profound relationship between Noh and women⁽²⁾. It appears that the contribution of women to Noh in its early stages was somewhat ignored in Noh-history. We can discern seven periods in the history of women Noh performances⁽³⁾: (1) Occurrence of female *Sarugaku*, the origin of Noh (1349-1432), (2) Record of the oldest female Noh and its popularity (1432-1585), (3) Golden age of female Noh (1585-1630), (4) Prohibition of female Noh in the Tokugawa Shogunate (1640-1868), (5) Crisis of traditional Noh, and conflict between relatives in Noh and of women Noh performers (1868-1948), (6) Activities of professional women Noh performances (1948-2004), and (7) Outlook for female Noh performances (2004 -).

In this paper we examine articles on women's Noh performance run in some Japanese general newspapers after the late nineteenth century until now and discuss these articles quantitatively and qualitatively. In this way we will discover and analyse some tendencies or characteristics in discourses about performance depending on the difference in sex, their skill, or their

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status as the Noh performers. But why do we choose general newspapers? Would it not be more appropriate to analyse specialised magazines on Noh? Certainly, these magazines are useful for researching changes in the world of Noh itself. However, the influence of such magazines is limited largely to within the world of Noh. The first Noh approaches was a historical one : Iwakura Tomomi (岩倉具視) ordered the compilation of *Fūzokuū Kabu Genryū Kō* (風俗歌舞源流考) by the historians Shigeno Yasutsugu (重野安禪) and Kume Kunitake (久米邦武). *Kabu Ongaku Ryakushi* (歌舞音楽略史) written by Konakamura Kiyonori (小中村清矩). Then came the artistically approaches: in 1902 Ikenouchi Nobuyoshi (池内信嘉) created the first magazine about Noh called *Nōgaku* (能楽) publised until 1921. On the other hand, readers of general newspapers have greatly varying interests, and editorial policies are influenced by readers' demands. In this sense it is justified to claim that researching opinions held by a wider public is more meaningful than focusing on the views of specialists.

This paper will discuss socially-accepted ideas represented in these articles and clarify that the logic of negative attitudes to Noh performances by women or women Noh players is based on not only the tradition of Noh but also their ability or technique.

The Current Situation of Women's Noh

Lucy Birmingham, an author and photographer, appropriately described the situation of women's Noh in the world of Noh in her article published in *Newsweek* on 15th October 2009.⁽⁴⁾

About 200 women are registered professionals, members of the 30 to 50 patrilineal family troupes that compose the five Noh schools. But unlike

most of their 1,200 male Noh colleagues, who debuted on the stage at about 4, many of these women have trained only since their 30s. Their wider acceptance has corresponded largely to the country's faltering economy, beginning in the early 1990s. Noh theater has been plagued by a decline in students and a lack of patronage, and as young men in Noh families have begun to opt for secure office jobs over family tradition, women have stepped in to fill their roles. The move mirrors Japanese women's entry into other traditionally male fields, including politics and train conducting.

Actually, opportunities for women have followed economic crises and social change throughout the history of Noh. During the Edo period (1600-1868), when Noh flourished with the support of the Tokugawa Shogunate, women were banned from publicly performing Noh as part of a government crackdown on individual freedom and morality. But during the Meiji Restoration in the late 1800s, when Noh actors and masters were stripped of their patronage, women returned to the stage. Because teaching women in the higher class Noh was good income for Noh masters, and once women study with such masters and got to learn Noh, they wanted to perform Noh in front of audiences. Finally, in 1948, just after Japan's defeat in World War II, the country still reeling under pressure from the victorious allies, Japan allowed its first officially recognized professional woman Noh actor, Tsumura Kimiko (津村君子 or 津村紀三子, 1902-1974)⁶⁵.

Women in the Higher Class and Noh-Learning

In the days of the Shogunate regime, it was not permitted to instruct *Yōkyoku* (謡曲, recitation of the classical drama), one of composition

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elements of Noh, to women, arguing that it was impossible for women to master. Since then *Yōkyoku* was far removed from the lives of ordinary women⁽⁶⁾. Such is the case with Noh as a whole. However, after the Meiji Restoration, learning Noh or *Yōkyoku* became fashionable among women of the higher class. For example, the wife of Marquis Yamanouchi, the wife of Viscount Ii, and the wife of Viscount Tōdo were famous women who learnt *Yōkyoku* in the Kanze school, the Hōshō school or the Kita school in the beginning of the twentieth century. And women learnt *Kotsuzumi* (小鼓), a small hand drum, under the instruction of Misu Kingo (三須金吾) and Misu Heiji (三須平司), a prominent *Tsuzumi* master of the Kō school. Table 1 lists the name of women who studied with Misu Kingo and Misu Heiji as of

Table 1 The name of women who studied with Misu Kingo and Misu Heiji (As of 12th December 1906)

Name	Title
Iwakura Osako	The Mother of Viscount Iwakura Tomoaki
Satō Shizuko	The Wife of Doctor Satō, the Surgeon-General
Furukawa Naoko	The Wife of Mr. Furukawa, Auditor of the Board of Audit
Kubo Tomiko	The Wife of Mr. Kubo, former Director of Nippon Railway
Shirai Kurako	The Wife of Mr. Shirai, a company member of Iwaki Colliery Comapy
Haruta Takako	The Wife of Mr. Haruta, a company member of Nisshō Life Insurance Company
Egi Eiko	The Wife of Mr. Egi Makoto, a lawyer
Takeyama Shizuko	The Wife of Mr. Takeyama Manzaburō, a company member of Mitsubishi Joint-Stock Company
Naitō Sabuko	The Wife of Mr. Naitō Hikosuke, a secretary of the Railway Bureau
Noda Tamako	The Daughter of Baron Noda
Shiota Suteko	The Wife of Colonel Shiota

Source: *The Yomiuri Shimbum*, 12th December 1906.

12th December 1906 ⁽⁷⁾. There were ten women, including a peeress and the wife of a soldier of high degree, who studied with father and son Kingo and Heiji.

However, there was a difference between leaning and performing *Yōkyoku*, and it was too hard for female learners to perform *Yōkyoku* on the stage, because there were strong objections by Noh masters. In July 1908, Egi Eiko, the wife of Mr. Egi Tadashi happened to be selected for performing *Yōkyoku* in the *Utai-kai* (謡会, Concert of *Utai*). This *Utai-kai* was held by the *Mainichi Shimbun* and at the Kudan Nohgakudō (九段能楽堂)⁽⁸⁾. But male masters of *Yōkyoku* strongly objected to female performance of *Yōkyoku* and as the result Madam Egi had no other choice but to excuse herself from the opportunity to perform *Yōkyoku* at the Kudan Nohgakudō⁽⁹⁾.

This case was typical example what happened to females when they had a chance to perform *Yōkyoku*: they had to face up to strong opposition from male masters of *Yōkyoku*. After mid-1908, the situation of surrounding women and Noh gradually changed, because the wife of the Emperor Meiji honoured the Kudan Nohgakudō with a visit and appreciated Noh. This imperial visit prompted not a few women to start to learn *Yōkyoku*. The women's association was organised in the Kanze school and the Hōshō school, while the Kita school and the Kongō school instructed women who want to learn Noh. For example, the women's association of the Hōshō school had around twenty members, including the Mother of Count Iwakura and the Wife of Mr. Haruta Naoya. Seki Hideko (関秀子), the daughter of the well known industrialist Seki Muneyoshi (関宗喜), studied with Matsumoto Nagashi (松本長) and Noguchi Masakichi (野口政吉), high ranking masters of the Kanze school. About twenty women learnt in the Kanze school. Egi Eiko was good at *Utai*, *Shimai* (仕舞) and *Tsuzumi*, but

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had been denied to perform *Yōkyoku* at Kudan Nohgakudō ⁽¹⁰⁾.

Noh in the Educational Curriculum

There is another interesting case of Tōyō Kasei Girl's School (東洋家政女学校, now Shibuya Junior & Senior High School). In Tōyō Kasei Girl's School, a course of *Yōkyoku* became a part of the regular curriculum and students learnt *Yōkyoku* for two hours a week from May 1909 ⁽¹¹⁾. An instructor of this course was Yamashina Akiko (山階明子), a daughter of Yamashina Tokujirō—a head of the Yamashina Family. In this course, Yamashina Akiko taught students seven *Yōkyoku* pieces, *Yuya* (熊野), *Shōjō* (猩々), *Yoshinotennin* (吉野天人), *Tsurukame* (鶴亀), *Hagoromo* (羽衣), *Funabenkei* (船弁慶) and *Kōyō* (紅葉), and five *Shimai* pieces, *Tsurukame* (鶴亀), *Yuya* (熊野), *Yoshino* (吉野), *Fujin* (夫人) and *Shōjō* (猩々) ⁽¹²⁾. According to a remark of Yamashina Akiko, Tōyō Kasei Girl's School was the only school which included *Yōkyoku* in the regular curriculum, though there were some schools in where *Yōkyoku* was told ⁽¹³⁾.

The case of Tōyō Kasei Girl's School reflects fundamental attitudes of masters and patrons of Noh. That is to say, learning *Yōkyoku*, *Shimai*, *Tsuzumi* etc. was deemed a good activity or an exquisite leisure for women, including even the private performance of these parts of Noh, but not playing Noh at a public theatre and in front of public audiences. The latter point is illustrated by a performance of *Utai* at *Chinzan-sō* by Egi Eiko. As we mentioned above, her performance at the Kudan Nohgakudō was rejected by the authorities of the world of Noh, but in fact once she performed her *Utai* at the *Chinzan-sō* (椿山莊), the private residence of Duke Yamagata Aritomo (山縣有朋), he was greatly impressed by her performance ⁽¹⁴⁾. Some newspaper articles demonstrate this latter point. For instance, Ikenouchi

Nobuyoshi, a representative Noh researcher active from the Meiji Era to the early Shōwa Era and author of *Nohgaku Seisuiiki*, pointed out that learning and performing *Utai* and *Kotsuzumi* were not only a fashionable pastime for women, but also an accomplished amusement for women. Ikenouchi argued that these activities were suitable since they were appropriate for female character and intelligence. At the same time he stated that performing Noh was improper for women because moving their body softly and mildly was one aspect of Noh performance, and what was essential in Noh was to perform with strong and energetic acting. For this reason, Ikenouchi concluded, it was inadequate for women to perform Noh plays. In addition he wrote that women could master *Utai* or *Kotsudumi* since they were adept in the use of their hands for everything, but it would be hard for them to understand esoteric learning or achieve great success in the field of Noh. For these reason, Ikenouchi concluded Noh was unsuitable for female professionals, but fine as a hobby for women⁽¹⁵⁾.

Why Was Women's Noh Prohibited?

Sōrōshi (滄浪子), an alias of the article ran in *The Asahi Shimbun*, proffered another argument in favour of prohibiting female performance of Noh. Sōrōshi said: opening the door to women's performing Noh seemed liberal and progressive, but it might easily corrupt attitudes, easily backsliding to ideas such as “female performers shall use make-up and not using masks (*Omote* or *Men*, 面, a Noh mask)”, adding that “appearances on the Noh stage are highly symbolic and far from the real life figures”. In the end this might damage the nature and essential philosophy of Noh. Keeping traditional style and form would be best, and the only way to feel and understand the culture of the Higashiyama Age. This opinion might be

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based on the view of age-old traditions dating back to the olden times. In fact the person, who claimed this notion, used the flame of “keeping a tradition” as a proper reason to reject the female Noh which would be performed publicly or become an occupation of women. In short, Sōrōshi’s argument was based on female actors whose performance was a leisure activity, a hobby or for educational purposes.

Sōrōshi held that learning Noh was good way for women to experience and understand the importance of cooperation, and that such activity would be beneficial to develop women’s physique⁽¹⁶⁾. Sōrōshi’s thinking seems to reflect the thinking of feudal rulers bent on maintaining the social order of that period⁽¹⁷⁾. In a sense, the relationship of dominance and submission based on sexual difference had exercised a strong influence on people in favour of prohibiting female Noh.

Noh Performance by Foreign Women

Objections to female Noh performances were strong, but things were slightly different when foreign women performed Noh. When Miss DuPont, a US actress, for example, intended to perform some Noh drama at the private stage of Hashioka Kyūtarō (橋岡久太郎), a Noh master of the Kanze school, on 12th December 1919, it was not reported as a curious or dreadful episode but just as a kind of heart warming topic⁽¹⁸⁾. One may also refer to an article on the Noh-experience of Anna C. Hartshorne, an English teacher of Joshi Eigakujuku (女子英学塾, now Tsudajuku Women’s University), approbated her strong bent for Noh⁽¹⁹⁾.

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Looking at the reasons for such different comments when foreigners were involved in female Noh-performances we should notice that they were beyond the ordinary world of Noh, because these performers were just

temporary guests had come from abroad, and their status in Japan was basically different from that of Japanese women. In addition, evaluation of Noh by foreigners, especially Western ones, might be useful for improving the social status of Noh among Japanese: Noh at that time was facing a crisis of extinction, being one of the symbols of the ancien regime in the Meiji Restoration and the age of cultural enlightenment⁽²⁰⁾. In fact Hartshorne and DuPont acclaimed Noh like “a drama sharing similarity with ancient Greece drama or some Germany drama” (Hartshorne) or “feeling and expressing sublimity” (DuPont). We should see such comments in the light of seeking approval from the West, regarded as a model of civilisation for Japanese modern culture.

Conclusion

It is argued that the new age of modernity began after the Great Kanto Earthquake had struck in 1923. It helped people to overcome the burden of the past. It was “an era when people did not lament a bygone past, but enjoyed a new-born age”⁽²¹⁾. It was a time when many new jobs were created and women embraced new roles as workers⁽²²⁾ in professions such as bus girl, elevator girl, department store girl, cafe waitress, typist or nurse, leading to an increase in their numbers and the social evolution of the female progressed. It was against this background of changes in the social environment that some people in the world of Noh advocated women's Noh-performance.

Sakamoto Setchou (坂元雪鳥), a distinguished Noh critic, often raised the topic of women's Noh performance, and stimulated their activities. In an article of 13th June 1937, Sakamoto reviewed the performance of Tsumura Kimiko and her company and highly valued their spirits increasing the stage

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relying on their own power⁽²³⁾. Sakamoto gave his critical comment on Tsumura in the following words: "true art and performance are precious, and Tsumura's activity is the women's Noh in its true meaning. Thus her remarkable effort deserves respect"⁽²⁴⁾. These articles, of course, were results of continued attempts by relatives of female Noh performers. When such attitudes conformed with changes in social conditions and women's social advancement, evaluations of women's Noh-performance began to metamorphose from rather not positive to rather not negative. These changes in attitudes towards women's Noh, however, were the first step to open up the world of Noh for women. People promoting an increase in the status of women had to wait for some more decades to establish their new position in this traditional society of performing arts.

Note

- (1) Miyanishi, Naoko: A History of Women's Noh – On Its Early Stage – . *The Bulletin of the International Society for Harmony & Combination of Cultures*, 7: 48-65, 2006.
- (2) Ibid.
- (3) Miyanishi, Naoko: A Study of Female Noh in Middle Age. *Nihon University, Graduate School of Social and Cultural Studies*, 6: 279-290, 2005.
- (4) Birmingham, Lucy: Noh Go. *Newsweek*, 15th October 2009, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2009/10/15/noh-go.html> (accessed 31st January 2013)
- (5) Ibid.
- (6) *The Yomiuri Shimbum*, 8th July 1919
- (7) *The Yomiuri Shimbum*, 12th December 1906
- (8) The Kudan Nohgakud was originally opened on 16th April 1881 at Shiba, Tokyo and donated to the Yasukuni Shrine in 1903. After that this Nohgakudō became to be called as the "Kudan Nohgakud ", because the location of the Yasukuni Shrine was Kudan area. See Kobayashi Seki, Eine kleine Geschichte des Meiji-zeitlichen Nō – anhand von Schauspielerbiographien der Tōkyōter Schulen. *NOAG*, 177-178: 185-197, 2005.
- (9) *The Yomiuri Shimbum*, 3rd January 1909
- (10) Ibid.

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- (11) *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, 29th September 1910
- (12) On activities of Yamashina Akiko, the following article is beneficial. See Aoki Ryōko: Onna ga Noh wo Enjiru to Iukoto. *Gakugekigaku*, 10: 1-18, 2003.
- (13) *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, 10th June 1920.
- (14) *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, 3rd January 1909.
- (15) *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, 8th July 1919.
- (16) *The Asahi Shimbun*, 18th November 1911.
- (17) Wakita, Haruko: *Josei Geinō no Genryō*. Tokyo: Kadokawa Publishing, 2001, 221.
- (18) *The Asahi Shimbun*, 12th December 1919.
- (19) *The Asahi Shimbun*, 8th May 1913.
- (20) Kobayashi Seki: Eine kleine Geschichte des Meiji-zeitlichen Nō –anhand von Schauspielerbiographien der Tōkyōter Schulen. *NOAG*, 177-178: 185-197, 2005.
- (21) Ito, Toshiharu: Nihon no 1920 nendai. In *Toshi Taishusyakai no seiritsu*, ed. by Hirai, Tadashi et al, Tokyo: Yuhikaku, 202, 1983.
- (22) Kondo, Tomoko: "Depart-girl" no tōjō. *Japan Business History Review*, 40(3): 27-43, 2005.
- (23) *The Asahi Shimbun*, 13th June 1937.
- (24) *The Asahi Shimbun*, 17th June 1937.

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Abstract

The status of women performers in Noh has been a subject of debate before women's entry into the Nohgaku Kyokai (Nohgaku Performers' Association) in 1948. In 1948, just a few years after the Second World War, several women were allowed to apply for professional status as Noh performers. Before that, women were only permitted to practice Noh as a hobby. Even after women were recognized as Noh professionals, it was not until 2004 that certain female Noh performers were recognized as Intangible Cultural Properties and permitted to enter the Nihon Nohgakukai (Association for Japanese Noh Plays). It means that they were not recognised at the highest levels of professional performance of Noh, though some of them were as skilled as male professionals. After that, however, there still remains a considerable negative attitude to Noh performances by women or women Noh players among critics or audiences. In this presentation, we examine articles on women's Noh performance run in some Japanese general newspapers after the late 19th century to the present and discuss these articles quantitatively and qualitatively. In this way we will find and analyse some tendencies or characteristics in discourse about performance depending on differences in sex, their skill, or their status as the Noh performers. The paper will discuss socially-accepted ideas represented in these articles. This will make it clear that the logic of some negative attitudes to Noh performances by women or women Noh players is based on the tradition of Noh as well as their ability or technique.