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Abstract

The Nature and Basic Structure of Kagura of Japan

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The aim of this paper is to explore the nature and basic structure of kagura, which is not only the most ancient Japanese ritual but also Japan's most ancient art form. All the forms and contents of Japanese traditional arts, whether ceremonial or artistic, trace their origin to the kagura. Therefore, this study, I think, will be helpful to understand the nature and characters of Japanese traditional performing arts. I will argue that in kagura religious practice and artistic performance are harmonized by the settings of performance - stage, music, tools, masks and dancing style and structure. With the use of its settings, the religious part and artistic part of kagura can be compounded or divided.

Kagura, a form of religious dance performance prevalent in Japan, is performed as part of local religious festivals and in private homes. The kagura evokes and manipulates its powerful symbols to exercise shamanic and magical efficacy and to entertain its audiences, both human and its divine.

In popular usage, kagura means any performance - often one of made dancing- that is part of annual festival of local Shinto shrine. To scholars of the performing arts, however, kagura is one of the three primary categories in a widely accepted classification system of Japanese Folk Performing Arts. In this context, kagura is essentially the invocation of gods followed by the performance of songs or dance or both, the whole event serving as prayer for prolongation or revitalization of man's life.

Most scholars agree that the word ÒkaguraÓ is of Japanese origin, and is probably a contracted form of Kami no kura, or Òseat of the kami.Ó There is a major division between mikagura, the kagura performed in the Imperial palace and the shrines related to it, and sato kagura, the folk kagura performed in the countryside. My main concern here is with the latter. Sato kagura is divided into types that are more or less defined by locality. The main types are: miko kagura, Ise kagura, Izumo kagura and Shishi Kagura. Except for miko kagura, they have all been strongly influenced by Shugendo

This kagura tradition represents Japanese folk religious traditions, attitudes and practices, a field which has been neglected in Korean scholarship until recently.

In this work, the kagura is studied for the main theoretical focus of this work: the significance of dance as religious expression and artistic behavior. Thus the nature of the performance and its setting are analyzed and ÒreadÓ herein as an informative source on the nature of Japanese traditional artistic practice.

Historical background of kagura is introduced in chapter 2. In chapter 3, the geographical distributions is provided, and types of Kagura is examined. The symbols and the structure of the performance are explored in chapter 4. The detailed description and analysis of which elucidates the power of dance as a form of religious practice and artistic performance, is presented. Finally, the core of the kagura performance and power are analyzed in chapter 5. Herein, the settings of performance - stage, music, tools, masks and dancing style and structure - are described and investigated for the symbols they evoke, their special powers and meanings.

This study is based mainly on the field-work, conducted in the summer of 2001 at Izumo area which includes Okinosima Island. Therefore this study concentrates on Dozen kagura of Okinosima.

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