

## WHEN AN OLD ENEMY TURNS PATRON: STATE EXPANSION AND CONTEMPORARY THEATRE IN JAPAN

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### *Abstract*

The impacts of phenomenal increase of public supports to the arts since the late 1980s have been most pronounced in contemporary theatre. The changes observed in the Japanese theatre world can be meaningfully conceptualized in terms of “structuration of organizational field” proposed by Paul DiMaggio (1983, 1991). The cases of field structuration reported by DiMaggio also provide materials for a comparative analysis. After sketching out the expansion of state support and consequent changes in the theatre world, this paper proposes a preliminary framework for the comparative study,

*Key Words:* Field Structuration, Arts Policy, Theatre Troupe, Art Worlds, Non-Profit Theatre

### *Abbreviations/Glossary*

AJTC	Association of Japanese Theatre Companies
CSTC	Council of <i>Shingeki</i> Theatre Companies (antecedent of AJTC)
GIAO	Grants for Independent Arts Organizations
JAF	Japan Arts Fund
JPA	Japan Playwrights' Association
<i>gekidan</i>	theatre troupe
<i>shingeki</i>	new theatre; a school of Japanese drama which developed towards the end of the Meiji Era under the influence of realistic texts and techniques from the West

### *Introduction*

Japanese art worlds have experienced a phenomenal expansion of municipal and state supports in the 1980s and 1990s. According to an estimate, the total amount of state and municipal expenditures for “arts and cultures” almost quadrupled during the ten years from 1983 to 1993. The establishment of the Japan Arts Fund in 1990 and Arts Plan 21 in 1996, and the opening of the New National Theatre in 1997 mark this sudden expansion of public supports to the arts.

On the one hand, the increase of public support to the arts meant the emergence of much-coveted resources of unearned income for noncommercial arts companies in Japan. On the other hand, however, these new resources in some cases have posed serious problems

concerning artistic autonomy as well as integrity of artistic disciplines.

These problems were the most acute in the case of contemporary theatre because *shingeki* or Japanese modern theatre has been affiliated with leftist movements and traditionally antagonistic to the state. Although the rivalry between the state and modern theatre has been considerably attenuated after WWII, state support to modern theatre had been almost negligible. To those people engaged in contemporary theatre, then, the drastic changes in cultural policies in Japan were perceived as though an old enemy suddenly turns into a patron. In fact, among various art genres, contemporary theatre is unique in that the expansion of state support has brought about a fundamental transformation of its disciplinary structure.

Elsewhere, I (Sato 1999) applied the idea of “structuration of organizational fields” (DiMaggio 1983, 1991) to these changes and found this concept extremely useful. Upon closer examination, however, one can find a number of interesting differences between American cases and Japanese cases. This article first sketches out the expansion of state support and consequent changes in Japanese theatre world. This paper then provides a preliminary framework for a comparative study of field structuration.

### *Expansion of Public Supports for the Arts*

#### **Budget for Arts and Cultures**

The period between the late 1980s and early 1990s marked a critical turning point of cultural policies in Japan both at the state and municipal levels. In this period, not only the sum total of public subsidies indicated a phenomenal growth, but also unprecedented types of support programs were conceived and put into practice. These qualitative as well as quantitative changes in Japanese cultural policies gave great impacts to the art worlds.

Fig. 1 shows budgets for cultural affairs of municipalities as well as the total budget of the Agency for Cultural Affairs, by far the largest governmental unit responsible for arts and culture, in the last thirteen years.

As we can see in this figure, the sum total of cultural budgets of the municipalities had almost quadrupled during the ten years between 1983 and 1993. In many municipalities, expansion of cultural budgets were accompanied by the establishment of foundations specializing in cultural affairs. (In former days cultural affairs had been usually assigned to the school board.) A number of municipalities even instituted resident companies in the cultural halls they constructed. This was epoch-making in Japan, since the majority of municipal cultural halls have been constructed as multi-purpose halls for rental use.

When compared to the sum total of municipal arts supports, the state support to the arts may not look quite impressive. It may also seem that the municipalities rather than the state have led the cultural policies in Japan. Indeed, the cultural agency is nothing but a sub-unit of the Ministry of Education and the ministry itself is the politically weakest ministry. The appropriation for the cultural agency had been approximately 1 percent of the educational ministry's total budget and it had long remained less than 0.1 percent of the total state budget since its establishment in 1968.

Yet if we examine the so-called “budget for arts and culture” of municipalities in detail, we soon notice that approximately 90 percent of the cultural budgets go to the construction

FIG. 1 BUDGETS FOR CULTURAL AFFAIRS

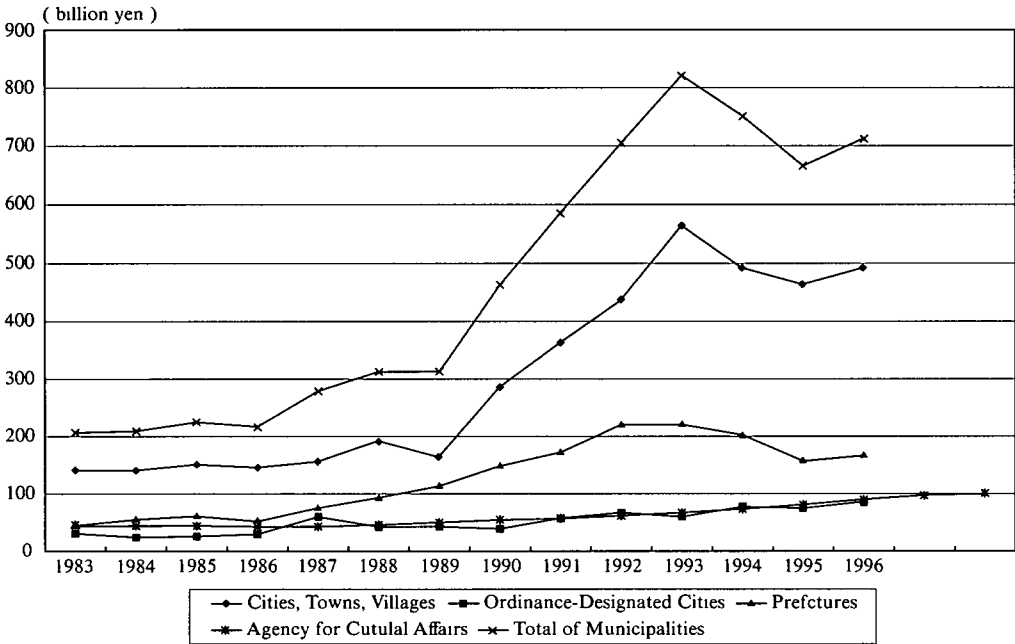
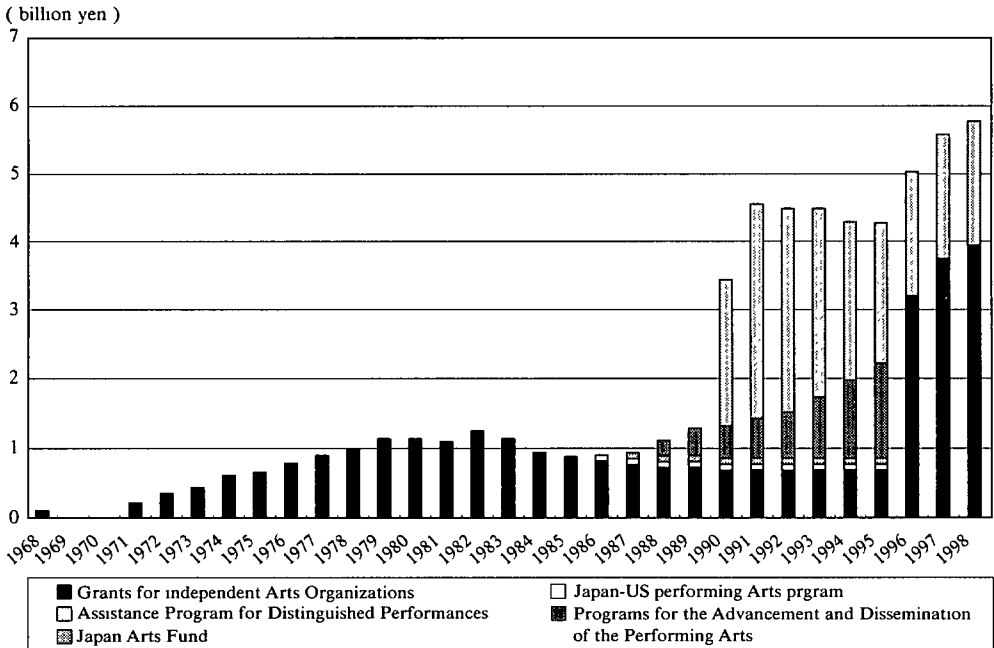


FIG. 2 DIRECT SUBSIDIES TO ARTS ORGANIZATIONS (AGENCY FOR CULTURAL AFFAIRS)



Sources: Bunkacho Geppo 1968-1990; Agency for Cultural Affairs (1998b: 9).

and maintenance of cultural halls and the majority of the remaining 10 percent has been used for the purchase of productions to be presented in such halls, i.e., not for the support to creative process itself. This large share of the construction expenses explains the phenomenal increase of the number of cultural halls constructed by municipal governments. While Japan had only 520 public cultural halls in 1975, the number rose to 1970 in 1996. It is noteworthy that in the 1980s and 1990s a number of cultural halls were constructed with expenses over ¥10 billion.

In contrast to the municipal budgets tending toward the construction of cultural halls, the cultural agency drastically increased direct subsidies to arts companies in the late 1980s.<sup>1</sup> Fig. 2 shows the total amount of direct subsidies to arts organizations provided by the cultural agency and Japan Arts Council, a special corporation which was established by the agency and takes charge of the Japan Arts Fund (JAF).

### Three "Incidents"

As we can see in Fig. 2, the total amount of state subsidy for the arts through the Agency of Cultural Affairs more than doubled by the establishment of the Japan Arts Fund in 1990. The restructuring of the whole subsidy scheme as Arts Plan 21 in 1996 added to this and during the ten years from 1989 to 1999, the total subsidy increased approximately by 4.5 times. The expansion of governmental supports to the arts as well as the opening of the New National Theatre in 1997 were hailed with great enthusiasm by many who were engaged in performing arts. Indeed, the drastic changes in state arts policies between the late 1980s and the mid-1990s were perceived as a sort of "incidents" by them.

The original idea of the Japan Arts Fund (JAF) was a initiative of a member of the House of Representatives. In his original plan, the size of the fund was gigantic ¥400 billion, with ¥200 billion from the government and another ¥200 billion from municipalities and private sources (mostly contributions by major corporations). During the process through which this original idea materialized as the first governmental arts fund in Japanese history, the size of the original capital shrank to approximately ¥61.2 billion, with ¥50 billion from the government and ¥11.2 billion from private sources. In addition, subsidy programs to amateur activities were added to the original plan that was supposed to consist mostly of direct subsidies to professional arts companies. Still, the birth of the fund gave a great enjoyment for many arts organizations which had received almost nothing from the state and were left to their own devices.<sup>2</sup>

The euphoria arising from the establishment of the JAF, however, soon subsided with the decline of its total budget. Because the fund have been operated by the interest on the original capital, the lowering interest rates in the 1990s have hit the programs of JAF very hard. The sum total which amounted to some ¥3.1 billion in 1991 had almost halved by 1998.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that both GIAO and JAF include not only subsidies to artistic productions but also grants to various outreach programs. A certain proportion of JAF is also allocated to amateur arts groups.

<sup>2</sup> These discussions may have given an impression that a critical turning point was marked in 1990 by the establishment of JAF. It should be noted, however, that a series of new programs were instituted from 1986 to 1989: i.e., Japan-U.S. Performing Arts Program, Assistance Program for Distinguished Performances, and Program for the Advancement and Dissemination of the Performing Arts. This is in part to compensate the decrease of Grants for Independent Arts Organizations, which had almost halved during the ten year period between 1982 (more than ¥1.2 billion) and 1990 (¥0.62 billion).

Partly in order to compensate for this decline of the state subsidies through JAF, the cultural agency restructured the whole system of arts subsidy as "Arts Plan 21" in 1996. In an official document issued by the cultural agency, it is stated that the objective of the scheme is to "promote creative artistic activities for the establishment of culturally-oriented nation in the twenty-first century" (Agency for Cultural Affairs 1998a:17). Through this restructuring, the agency succeeded in boosting its appropriation for arts subsidies (not including the subsidies through JAF) by 50 percent and the appropriation have increased steadily since, as is shown in Fig. 2. Among four programs included in Arts Plan 21, "Special Program to Support Artistic Activity" is most noteworthy because this program provides year-round supports to a number of arts companies which are expected to "serve as a drive force for raising Japan's artistic levels" (Agency for Cultural Affairs 1998b: 8).<sup>3</sup>

Along with these monetary supports, the opening of the New National Theatre in 1997 had a special meaning for those who are engaged in performing arts. According to the cultural agency, the purposes of the New National Theater are "promotion and dissemination of modern performing arts" (Agency for Cultural Affairs 1992). "Modern performing arts" in this case include opera, ballet, contemporary dance, and contemporary theatre.

The facilities of the national theatre include main theatre (approximate number of seat is 1,800), medium-size theater (1,000 seats), and small theater (300-450 seats). It was 1966 that Japanese government opened the first national theatre, that has been used almost exclusively for *kabuki* and *bunraku*. It took, therefore, more than thirty years before the Japanese government opened a national theatre for modern performing arts. During the meantime, while the Japanese government built three other national theatres, they are used for traditional performing arts such as *noh*, *kyogen*, and *bunraku*.

The construction of the New National Theatre, then, had been a dearest wish for many who are engaged in modern performing arts. Significance of this "flagship theatre" constructed by the government is not limited to a symbolic one. Relatively large sums of money (tax as well as contributions from private sources) have been spent for commissioning productions of new works in the theatre. Although the national theatre does not have resident companies except for one ballet company consisting of dancers employed part-time, the significance of the fact that public monies are spent for the productions of modern performing arts is not small.

### Background of Policy Changes

Official documents issued by the cultural agency are a poor guide in identifying driving forces behind the critical changes in the state and municipal cultural policies. In those

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All of these three programs established in the 1980s and 1990s marked a critical turning point in governmental cultural policies in Japan, in which emphasis has been always put on historical preservation and outreach, rather than support for artistic innovations. As Havens(1982:57-58) aptly puts it, in American terms the Agency of Cultural Affairs is "both a National Endowments for the Arts and a National Trust for Historic Preservation, with two thirds of its resources tied up in the latter." Actually, approximately 70 to 75 percent of both manpower and appropriations of the cultural agency had been allocated to historical preservation such as maintenance of old shrines and excavation of ancient tombs. Although the remaining 30 to 25 percent of the total budget has been allotted to the category of "promotion of arts and culture," only 5 to 7 percent has been used for "promotion of creative activity."

<sup>3</sup> Other three programs are Program to Promote International Artistic Exchange, Program to Develop Infrastructures for Artistic Creativity, and Program for the Promotion of the Performing Arts.

documents, we can frequently find such phrases as “age of culture,” “spiritual and personal fulfillment,” and the importance of “sharing (or ‘dissemination’) of culture.” By combining such key phrases, these documents depict Japan as a society confronting a critical turning point from the age of economy to the age of culture. In such a society, the improvement of living standards have led people to seek not only material affluence but also spiritual and personal fulfillment (Agency for Cultural Affairs 1992: 1). We can frequently find similar phrases and themes in the official documents issued by municipal cultural foundations.

Elsewhere (Sato 1998, 1999a, 1999b) I have shown in detail that the expansion of public support to the arts is not explainable by such official statements. Rather, the transformation of Japanese society from a production-oriented society of scarcity to a consumption-oriented society of affluence and concomitant shift of Japanese economy to service-oriented one have pushed to the fore the policy area of arts and culture.

In addition to these long-term trends, we also have to take account of the booming economy, or so-called “bubble economy” as a critical factor leading to the “culture boom” during this period. The state and municipal governments could enjoy relatively abundant tax revenues thanks to the booming economy. Private firms were also looking for the items of new investments as outlets for their surplus capital.

The interests of the two parties were frequently matched in urban redevelopment projects in which emphasis was put on such matters as “culture” and “amenity.” (Cf. Zukin 1982). This led to the construction of halls and theatres either as independent buildings in newly developed commercial districts or as subsidiary facilities within new commercial buildings. These new facilities quite naturally required the artistic programs to fill in.

These factors of public and private sectors, in combination with the increased discretionary income of Japanese consumers across the board, led to a sort of “culture boom.” All of these short-term trends pushed to the fore the long-neglected policy area of culture and arts.

The sudden popularity of “mécénat” or corporate philanthropy for arts support was no doubt closely related to the booming economy. Indeed, the 1980s was an age of largess and corporate supports for the arts became a kind of “boom.” In many cases, it took the form of sponsorship for specific arts- or sports-related events or programs. Many firms also established an independent section for cultural affairs. A number of firms even established cultural foundations for the support of the arts. This trend culminated in the establishment of the Council of Arts Subsidies Foundations in 1988 and the Association for Corporate Support for the Arts in 1990. It is against this backdrop that the Japan Association for Cultural Economics was established in 1992. Not only economists and students of cultural policy but also architects, urban developers, and officers of municipalities joined the academic association.

### *Impacts of State Expansion*

Even though corporate supports to the arts have dwindled considerably since the economic bubbles burst around 1990, the public expenditures to the arts continued to increase and this had great impacts on the art worlds. In some cases, the public money had an effect in compensating for the declining ticket sales due to slumping economy. In other cases, some companies used the new resources to embark on new projects. Contemporary theatre was unique in that the expansion of state supports led to a fundamental transformation of its

artistic discipline. It indicated a clear contrast to other disciplines such as orchestra, opera, and ballet, in which the increased public monies and other resources gave relatively small impacts on the existing disciplinary structure. In some cases, the increased resources even solidified the existing hierarchy within a discipline.

This contrast among different art genres was most clearly seen in the process leading to the assignment of an artistic director of the New National Theatre. Though in a less dramatic way, it was also seen in the shares of direct subsidies by the state.

### Artistic Director Problem

The New National Theatre has an artistic director for each of its three artistic areas – opera, dance and ballet, and theatre. As for the opera and dance/ballet, the first directors were appointed in 1992 without much fuss. In the case of opera section, Ryosuke Hatanaka, a former board member of Nikikai became its artistic director. As for dance/ballet, Hiroshi Shimada, the president of the Japan Ballet Association, became the artistic director. Nikikai is the largest opera company and the Japan Ballet Association is the largest association of ballet dancers and choreographers. Both Nikikai and the Japan Ballet Association had served as funnels for state aid to each discipline as a whole. The nominations of Hatanaka and Shimada were, then, highly predictable.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast, virtually nobody in the Japanese theatre world could predict who would become the first artistic director of the theatre section. And actual nomination by the Agency of Cultural Affairs ignited heated arguments in and out of the theatre world.

The person who was first nominated by the cultural agency in 1992 was Naoya Yoshida, a university professor and a former director of a TV station. Confronted with vehement oppositions from a number of artists who were members of a subcommittee for the national theatre, the cultural agency soon dropped the nomination. The Association of Japanese Theatre Companies (AJTC), on its part, nominated Hiroko Watanabe. She was a director of Mingei, one of the major theatre troupes belonging to the AJTC. The cultural agency's reply to the AJTC's nomination was to "include her as one of candidates." Four months later, the agency proposed the idea to assign Hirisho Fujita as the director and Watanabe as sub-director. Fujita was a theatre critic who specialized in traditional theatre arts like *kabuki*. AJTC objected again to the nominations and Watanabe was hesitant at first. It took three more months that Watanabe eventually accepted the nomination and somewhat irregular two directors system started in May of 1993.

Yet, the dispute over the nomination of the artistic director(s) was not settled by this arrangement. Several groups criticized both the cultural agency and AJTC. The objection raised by a forum group "For Better Communication about Contemporary Theatre" was most widely publicized through the mass media. This group was formed in November of 1992, shortly after AJTC held a symposium on the New National Theatre. The majority of the members of the forum group were engaged in avant-garde theatre, while most troupes belonging to AJTC adopted some sort of realism as their basic theatrical style. Oriza Hirata,

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<sup>4</sup> Hatanaka and Shimada served first and second terms as artistic directors. The third term was served by Igarashi Kiyoshi for opera section and Asami Maki for dance/ballet section. Igarashi is one of the board member of Fujiwara Kageidan, the second largest opera company, and Maki is the leader of Maki Asami Ballet. These nominations were also highly predictable.

a young playwright/director who led the forum group, charged that the AJTC had not disclosed enough information about the New National Theatre, even while a number AJTC directors had been long involved in the issues of the national theatre as members of government committees.

Hirata (1993) comments in a newspaper article:

The Japan Association of Theatre Companies consists of sixty-three theatre troupes, most of which are *shingeki* troupes. It would be needless to say that modern theatre in Japan is not run by those troupes alone. The database in a PC of my Agora Theatre includes more than 1700 names of troupes, playwrights, directors. It is also said that some 3000 or 5000 theatre troupes exist in Japan as a whole. We need to reconsider sincerely how we can disclose information to the theatre world as a whole, which is highly segmented.

### Fragmented Theatre World

Even though Hirata somewhat exaggerates the total number of theatre troupes in Japan, the artistic director problem revealed that contemporary theatre in Japan is an extremely fragmented social world. Although AJTC is the largest federation of *shingeki* troupes, only fifty to sixty troupes have joined in association, whereas it is estimated that the number of professional *shingeki* troupes exceeds 200. As for the troupes engaged in avant-garde theatre, there was no federation or association of any kind until the 1990s. In fact, while there is a general distinction between *shingeki* and “small theatre” or avant-garde theatre, even the troupes belonging to the same camp have been relatively indifferent to each other. Some of them even came into conflict with each other especially when they differed in their political stances. In light of these facts, some have argued that “theatre world of Japan” is a misnomer and the overall world of theatre troupes and theatre people is nothing but a assemblage of small villages that are mutually antagonistic or indifferent (Miyashita 1995).

This lack of disciplinary integrity is in large part due to the absence of artistic standards in contemporary theatre. While many *shingeki* troupes at the outset adopted western (and often socialist) realism as the model to emulate, each troupe eventually developed its own style of acting, directing, and training. The situation is even more extreme in the case of avant-garde theatre. While non-realistic expression is the common denominator of the small theatre troupes, the acting style of each troupe tends to be governed by idiosyncratic style of its charismatic leader. Both in the case of *shingeki* and small theatre, then, there has been little common ground of communication with regard to their artistic activities. (Tanokura 1998).

Affiliation with leftist thoughts is another reason why the theatre world had been highly fragmented in Japan. Since the heyday of “proletariat theatre” in the 1920s and 1930s, many theatre troupes and people have adopted socialist realism as well as leftist ideology. Even those who have not adopted socialist realism have often indicated sympathy for leftist thoughts and movements. While the leftist thought at times worked as a glue to form tenuous anti-government coalitions during pre- and post-war periods, the political affiliation also frequently split the troupes apart especially when there was sectionalism in leftist thoughts themselves. Indeed, the history of modern theatre in Japan is rife with episodes of internal strife arising from sectionalism in political parties.

Highly segmented audience base is the third factor which has fragmented theatre world. Although theatre in Japan tends to be extremely centralized activity in Tokyo, each theatre



troupe tends to develop and rely on specific audience base. This was especially the case with avant-garde theatres. Most of the audience of avant-garde theatres usually consists of ardent “fans” or devotees. Even in the case of *shingeki* troupes, which have shared the market of Worker’s Theatre Council (modeled after an audience organization in Germany), they rarely worked in concerted efforts for audience development.

The theatre world is not only highly fragmented. It is also quite difficult to demarcate its boundary. The lack of clear artistic standard have led to the ambiguity of the professionalism and blurred the distinction between professional and amateur. In contrast to the opera, ballet, and classic music, in which artistic standards of western origins are widely shared and many practitioners learn their skills from their childhood, there have been relatively little “barriers to entry” for emerging theatre troupes. In addition, only a handful educational programs for theatre have been provided in Japanese universities while there exist over 125 music courses. As a consequence, relatively large number of theatre groups have existed in Japan, ranging from a few major companies which perform year-round and pay full-time salary to its members to those groups which produces only one play for a week or so every two or three years. It is, therefore, quite difficult to estimate the exact number of “professional” theatre organizations in Japan.<sup>5</sup>

It is no wonder that the Agency for Cultural Affairs could not find any “umbrella organizations” or major trade associations to negotiate with when it had to appoint someone as the director of the theatre section of the New National Theatre. In contrast, the cultural agency had no difficulty in appointing the artistic directors of opera and dance/ballet sections, because in the case of opera, dance/ballet, and orchestra, one can identify a number of major companies widely acknowledged for their professionalism. One can also easily identify a hierarchy among the major companies. In other words, while the theatre world is fragmented, other worlds of performing arts are consolidated and can be characterized as a sort of oligopoly.

## JAF and Arts Plan 21

One might say, then, that the process leading to the assignment of artistic directors of the New National Theatre reflected and even reaffirmed the *status quo* of ballet and opera worlds. The same can be said of the other new developments in state arts policies in the 1990s, i.e., JAF and Arts Plan 21.

Before the establishment of the JAF, the major government source of direct subsidy to the arts organizations was Grants for Independent Arts Organizations (GIAO). GIAO tended to be provided to established arts federations or major arts troupes which are incorporated as public service corporations (either as corporate juridical persons or foundational juridical persons). In contrast, the grants of JAF are supposed to be provided to arts groups of various sizes and merits as well. Emerging arts groups are, then, given opportunity to get unearned income for their creative activity.

This change in subsidy policy did not lead to great changes in orchestra, opera, and ballet.

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<sup>5</sup> The number of theatre troupes listed in *The Theatre Yearbook* was 398 in 1996. It jumped to 688 in 1997 chiefly because the committee for the yearbook could receive a grant of Program to Develop Infrastructures for Artistic Creativity of the Arts Plan 21 and send a large number of questionnaires to the troupes which had never been listed in the yearbook.

Quite predictably, the majority of the grants of JAF were divided among major federations and arts organizations which were also recipients of GIAO. Only a small portion of its grants were provided to emerging arts groups.

Similarly, one could easily predict that the recipients of "Special Program to Support Artistic Activity" of Art Plan 21 would consist of the major orchestra (e.g., Tokyo Symphony Orchestra, Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra), opera companies (e.g., Nikikai, Fujiwara Kagekidan) and ballet troupes (e.g., Maki Asami Ballet, Matsuyama Ballet), which also had been the major beneficiaries of GIAO. One might, then, say that the changes following the establishment of JAF and Arts Plan 21 have been incremental and the oligopolistic and hierarchical structure was kept intact in these art genres.

The situation was quite different with contemporary theatre. While the CSTC, the antecedent of AJTC, had been virtually the sole beneficiary of GIAO, more than two hundred theatre troupes, which had never received state subsidies of any sort, became recipients of JAF. These troupes include relatively small theatre troupes and troupes in local areas. Yet, it was not difficult for informed people to predict such changes in view of the fact that CSTC/AJTC covered only a tiny portion of the theatre world. On the other hand, even those who were the most informed could not predict that not only major *shingeki* troupes belonging to the AJTC (e.g., Haiyuza, Bungakuza, and Mingei) but also small groups of relatively short history such as Seinendan, Theatre Project Tokyo, and Gadzilla would become recipients of the grants of "Special Program to Support Artistic Activity" in Arts Plan 21. Quite understandably, much of the arguments about public arts policies evolved around "proper" allocation of state subsidies in the case of contemporary theatre. Indeed, the problem of the shares of state subsidies as well as the artistic director problem provided those who had been engaged in contemporary theatre with a critical moment to reconsider the constitution of the theatre world.

### *Emergence of the Theatre World*

One might say that the theatre world worthy of its name did not exist before the 1980s but has been gradually created in a series of events following the expansion of state supports. Three noteworthy events in this regard are 1) incorporation of AJTC in 1992, 2) establishment of Japan Playwrights' Association in 1993 and 3) establishment of Theatre Inter Action in 1996.

#### **Incorporation of AJTC**

The Agency for Cultural Affairs has urged arts companies and arts federations receiving state aids to incorporate their organizations as public service corporations. As for opera, orchestra, and ballet, most major companies and federations incorporated their organizations by the end of the 1970s.

In the case of contemporary theatre, the Council of Shingeki Theatre Companies (CSTC), the antecedent of AJTC, became a funnel for GIAO as well as for subsidy of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government to the constituent troupes in the early 1970s, and the argument about incorporation of CSTC started in 1975. Yet, it took approximately twenty years that the federation of *shingeki* troupes was eventually incorporated as a corporate juridical person. Relatively large sum of original capital required for the incorporation is one

of the major factors which delayed the incorporation. Suspicions about the intention of the state was another factor. Because public service corporations are supposed to be monitored occasionally by government offices, theatre people in general, many of whom had experienced oppressions by the state before and during WWII, were wary of state intervention which might jeopardize their artistic freedom.

Another problem which was no less critical than these two problems was the coverage of CSTC as the “umbrella organization” for Japanese theatre world as a whole. As was previously pointed out, it was estimated that only one fifth or sixth of professional and semi-professional troupes belonged to CSTC.<sup>6</sup> In addition, no avant-garde theatre troupe was a member of CSTC by 1990. In view of the fact that avant-garde theatre has indicated considerable artistic achievements since the mid-1960s, the underrepresentation of avant-garde troupes in CSTC was a serious problem. Yet the adequacy of the CSTC as *the* organization representing the world of contemporary theatre was not perceived as a great problem until the late 1980s. Although the CSTC remained virtually a sole recipient of GIOA, the amount of subsidy that each constituent troupe received was quite limited.

The situation, though, had gradually changed since the mid-1980s. In 1984, Japanese government finally decided to construct the New National Theatre and the original plan of JAF was proposed in 1986.<sup>7</sup> The cultural agency also set up a series of new subsidy programs from 1986 and 1988. Because there was no other arts federation representing the theatre world, the CSTC had to deal with these issues, and the expansion of state support no doubt speeded up the process of its incorporation.

It was finally decided in the annual meeting of CSTC in 1990 to incorporate its organization and CSTC held a conference to urge non-members to join in the organization. As a consequence, the membership of CSTC grew from 51 to 67 by 1992, when it was finally incorporated and reborn as AJTC.

Even though the number of member troupes increased, the change was rather incremental. Among the new members, only seven troupes could be classified as avant-garde troupes. As for public subsidy, AJTC remained a funnel for state and municipal aids to its constituent troupes. On the other hand, this federation has held a series of symposiums and conferences including non-member troupes and other trade associations. One of the new activities of AJTC is the publication of *Theatre Profiles: A Guide to Japan's Professional Theatre* in 1998. The publication of the directory was funded by a program in Arts Plan 21 called “Program to Develop Infrastructures for Artistic Creativity” and lists not only 67 member troupes but also 24 non-members.

In sum, while AJTC remained a funnel for public aids to the member troupes, this federation at the same time has explored its identity as a service organization providing information and services to the world of contemporary theatre as a whole.

### Theatre Inter Action

AJTC had to confront the artistic director problem shortly after it became incorporated.

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<sup>6</sup> Even though AJTC is not an umbrella organization representing the theatre world as a whole, the share of the theatre troupes belonging to this association amounts to approximately 50 percent in terms of the number of productions as well as the size of audience.

<sup>7</sup> See note 1.

While they made every effort to let the matters known not only to member troupes but also to the other troupes, the limited resource and manpower in addition to the relatively rapid development of the event did not allow them to inform widely enough. It is little wonder that those in the small theatre camp felt slighted and indicated strong antipathy against AJTC.

The group "For the Better Communication for Contemporary Theatre" is indeed one of such reactions from the side of avant-garde theatre, and a number of its members became core members in the establishment of the Theatre Inter Action in 1996. Different from AJTC, the Theatre Inter Action is not an association of theatre troupes but an advocacy organization in which those engaged in performing arts (i.e., not limited to contemporary theatre) are supposed to join as individuals.

Another crucial difference between the AJTC and Theatre Inter Action is that while AJTC consists mainly of the troupes located in Tokyo and its vicinities, many members of the Theatre Inter Action are engaged in theatre activities in regional areas. Indeed, Theatre Inter Action puts the first priority to the promotion of inter-regional communications and formation of inter-regional networks among theatre people living in local areas (Engekijinkaigi 1996).

The first president of the Theatre Inter Action is Tadashi Suzuki, a director of world fame known for his original training and acting system, "Suzuki Method." Suzuki is also famous in Japan for his spearhead effort to introduce municipal supports to contemporary theatre. He served as the artistic director of the theatre section of Mito Arts Center and directed performances of ACM (Acting Company Mito), the first resident theatre supported by a municipal government in Japan. He also became the general artistic director of the Shizuoka Performing Arts Center when it was established in Shizuoka Prefecture in 1997.

The prospectus of the Theatre Inter Action, as well as its members at times, maintain that the association does not purport to be an alternative funnel for public aids to the troupes that do not belong to AJTC. Yet, critical comments given by a number of its core members against AJTC have aroused the suspicions of the partisanship and its membership has barely exceeded 150 since 1997.

### Japan Playwrights' Association

Theatre Inter Action was not the only theatre-related association which was newly established amid the expansion of public support for the arts. Since the late 1980s, a great number of forums and organizations have been formed to collect and analyze information about new developments in cultural policies. Among them was the Japan Playwrights' Association (JPA) which was established in 1993, as the first professional association for playwrights in Japanese history.

JPA is unique in that it has indicated a strong stance in claiming the rights of a specific profession: Two major members of the association characterizes the federation as a "pressure group" and a "guild" (Hirata 1995:109; Fukui 1995:2). While Japan does not lack theatre-related trade and professional associations, most of them tend to be a sort of fraternities rather than "bellicose" unions. As will be discussed shortly, *gekidan* or the theatre troupe in Japan is a very much *Gemeinschaftlich* organization and tends to swallow and blur the conflicting interests of different professionals. The explicit stance of JPA appealed to many playwrights in Japan and the association succeeded in attaining the membership of 500 in 1998.

JPA gave rise to a lot of heated arguments when it advocated an explicit agreement about minimum fee for the payment to the playwright in 1995. JPA also maintained that the

interested parties should exchange contracts whenever a play is produced. It is customary in Japanese performing arts that various types of fees (i.e., not limited to fees for playwright) are paid by verbal agreements rather than by contracts. It often happens that the amount of fee to the playwright is decided by the discretion of a theatre troupe's producer without any prior consent on the part of the playwright. In some case, fees are not paid at all.<sup>8</sup>

JPA and AJTC jointly held a symposium in 1995 on the problem of fees for playwrights. This symposium was the starting point for their continued discussion about the issues of contract and fee. The expansion of public subsidies to the contemporary theatre no doubt existed in the backdrop of the beginning of such debates. In the symposium as well as in the continued discussion, the participants repeatedly referred to the proper shares of an enlarged "pie."

### *Structuration of an Organizational Field*

#### **Structuration**

Paul DiMaggio's (1983, 1991) idea of "structuration of organizational fields" provides an analytical framework in conceptualizing the changes in contemporary theatre in Japan following the expansion of public art supports. Organizational field refers to a set of "organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life" and includes "key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies and other organizations that produce similar services and products" (DiMaggio & Powell 1983: 148). In the case of art worlds, then, an organizational field includes not only arts organizations of a given art genre but also governmental agencies, trade and professional associations, and various service organizations (Cf. DiMaggio 1991: 267). In his seminal article titled "State Expansion and Organizational Fields," DiMaggio (1983) points out that the increased presence of the state in art worlds following the establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965 has led to an increasing centralization and formalization of the interorganizational relationship in artistic fields. He calls this tendency "structuration of organizational fields." According to DiMaggio (1991: 277), field structuration consists of four dimensions: (1) increase in the density of interorganizational contacts, (2) increase in the flow of information, (3) emergence of center-periphery structure, and (4) collective definition of a field.

We can discern a number of close parallels between what happened in art worlds in the U.S. after 1965 and what has taken place in Japan since the late 1980s. The expansion of state and municipal supports to the arts has revitalized dormant trade and professional associations and gave impetus to the mushrooming of new associations as well as grassroots forums in various art genres. A typical example is the Japan Modern Theatrical Actors Association, which had long been a sort of fraternity. The association set up a number of operative units in 1995 for the first time in its 37 years' history and began publishing its newsletter in 1997.

As in the case of the publication of *Theatre Profiles* by AJTC, new state programs also

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<sup>8</sup> It was not theatre troupes alone that decided various fees by verbal agreements. Similar customs can be found in theatre halls, entertainment corporations, and broadcast stations. JPA and AJTC, then, have jointly negotiated with these organizations.

have led to the increase of the flow of organizationally salient information such as directories, statistical data, and periodicals. One of the most noteworthy publication in this regard is *Performing Arts Data Book 1997* which was published by the Japan Council of Performers' Organizations. This book was epoch-making in that it gave, for the first time in the postwar history, a comprehensive statistical picture of the art worlds in Japan. Like *Theatre Profiles* published by AJTC, the publication of this statistical book was funded by the grants of Program to Develop Infrastructures for Artistic Creativity. The grants are supposed to be provided to umbrella organizations of each artistic discipline. Numerous symposiums, workshops, and training sessions for "arts administration" and "arts management," many of which emulate American models, have been also effective in disseminating information about arts organizations and their management. These educational programs have been operated by various organizations including government offices, municipal governments, private foundations, universities and grassroots organizations.

As for center-periphery structure, the impacts of expanded public aids vary according to art genres. As was previously pointed out, even though JAF created a new source of unearned income for emerging arts companies, the oligopolistic structure in opera, orchestra, and ballet has changed little after the establishment of the new arts fund. The Arts Plan 21 even solidified the hierarchical structure in these genres. In contrast, in the case of contemporary theatre, the AJTC's virtual monopoly of state aids was shaken by the establishment of JAF. The legitimacy of AJTC as the organization representing contemporary theatre as a whole was further questioned in the artistic director problem. The inclusion of a number of avant-garde troupes as recipients of the Special Program to Support Artistic Creativity was another blow to AJTC and its constituent theatre troupes.

A series of events from the late 1980s to the 1990s, then, have made those engaged in contemporary theatre aware that they are in the same boat, whether they like it or not. As long as they segregate each other by sticking to their own audience bases, they don't have to care much about the activities of other troupes. This is one of the major reasons why the metaphor of octopus trap has been frequently applied to the theatre world of Japan (Cf. Miyashita 1995). The emergence of common resources have made it increasingly difficult for those engaged in contemporary theatre to shut themselves up, as an octopus in a trap (pot) does, in their own theatrical troupes and/or specific sub-genres such as *shingeki* or avant-garde theatre. Indeed, many of them had the chance of knowing the names of other troupes for the first time when those names were printed on the page of governmental publications listing the beneficiaries of JAF and Arts Plan 21.

In other words, for the first time in the history of Japanese contemporary theatre, those engaged in contemporary theatre came to recognize themselves as inhabitants of the same "theatre world" (Becker 1982; Gilmore 1990).

### Commonalities and Differences

One of the major reasons why there are close parallels between the U.S. and Japan is that arts had been mostly private affairs in both societies before a certain period. Until the establishment of the NEA, governmental art support had been virtually non-existent in the U.S. except for the period of Works Progress Administration of the 1930s (Cf. Dubin 1987). Similarly, arts have been given the lowest priority in public policies in Japan. Even after the Agency of Cultural Affairs was established in 1968 the subsidy to the arts has occupied the

tinest portion of the agency's budget, whose total appropriation itself has rarely exceeded 0.1 percent of the total governmental budget.

Especially in the case of contemporary theatre, the dearth of public supports and the bitter experiences of state control and oppressions before and during wartime had made theatre people rather indifferent to state supports.<sup>9</sup> The sudden expansion of public support since the late 1980s was, then, perceived as a "big wind," as a famous playwright once commented (Inoue 1994). The field structuration following the state expansion could be most typically observed in contemporary theatre in Japan.

Upon closer examination, however, one can find a number of interesting differences in the field structuration of the theatre world in two societies. One example of such differences is concerned with the legal status of artistic organization. While the legal system for non-profit organizations had a long history in the U.S., it was as recently as in 1995 that the Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities was legislated in Japan. Because it had been very difficult for arts organizations of limited manpower and monetary resources to incorporate themselves as public service organizations, many of the theatre troupes in Japan were incorporated either as joint stock company or limited liability company, and many are not incorporated at all. While noncommercial theatres in the U.S. could refer to the organizational forms of other art genres such as opera and orchestra when the Ford Foundation started its arts program in 1957 and then NEA in 1965 (Langley 1990), theatre troupes in Japan had few models to emulate when the expansion of public supports took place in the mid-1980s.

### Field Structuration and *Gekidan* System

Among a number of crucial differences between the American case and the Japanese case, the difference in the basic unit of noncommercial theatrical production stands out to suggest a more detailed comparative analysis. Whereas the regional theatre is the basic unit of non-profit theatre in the U.S., the heart of contemporary theatre in Japan is *gekidan*, or theatrical troupe which does not have residency in any theatre hall. The theatre troupe in Japan is essentially a production company which rents theatre halls constructed by private corporations or municipalities for a certain period in presenting performances.<sup>10</sup> Approximately 70 to 80 percent of the members of a troupe are actors and actresses, and in some cases the membership of a theatrical troupe exceeds 100 and even 200.

The dearth of public and private supports has forced the Japanese theatre troupe to have various functions within itself. Because there have been few educational institutions for theatre-related professions, most troupes had to train younger members in their own organizations. On the other hand, the absence of social security system for artists in general and the lack of common artistic standards of contemporary theatre in particular have made the theatre troupe to adopt a sort of life-time employment system, though few of its members are employed full time and many had to earn their living by side jobs. Even "company tax" has been often collected from actors and actresses who work part-time in the mass entertainment

<sup>9</sup> While public supports from various sources sometimes amount to as much as 40 percent of the total organizational budget in the case of orchestra, the public grant occupies only 3.3 percent in the budget of theatre troupes (Japan Council of Performers' Organization 1997: 116, 126).

<sup>10</sup> Each production usually runs for one or two weeks and rarely runs over a month even in the case of major *shingeki* troupes.

industry (Kurabayashi 1996; Havens 1982: 165). In addition, members are expected to sell a certain number of tickets that are assigned to them as quotas. Many of the theatre members take this for granted because they regard their activities as a part of artistic and/or political movement rather than as a job for making living.

The theatre troupe in Japan is, then, a production company, school, cooperative, family, and commune, all included in one organization.

It is noteworthy that the structuration of the theatre field has been accompanied by the "decomposition" of this organizational form which has a long history in Japan. In other words, institutionalization of the theatre world has been accompanied by the de-institutionalization of the organizational form that was previously predominant.

Nowadays, it is not rare that actors/actresses of a specific troupe participate in productions of the other troupes. When conflict arises between the schedule of their own company and that of the other company, priority may be given to the latter rather than to the former. (The theatre troupe, on its part, sometimes invite "guest players" from the other troupes and cast them for major roles.) Similarly, the allures of the jobs in the mass entertainment industry are so strong that many actors/actresses eventually quit the troupe and become freelancers. Similar things can be said of technical staff, who once constituted an integral part of self-sufficient and self-sustaining theatre troupes. Technical personnel nowadays tend to become freelancers or set up their own companies for technical services, after they received apprentice training in theatrical troupes.

Several factors are involved in this process of de-institutionalization of *gekidan* system. The passing away of charismatic figures, who led respective troupes as well as the *shingeki* movement itself, has no doubt weakened the centripetal force of each company. Some also mention changing mentality of younger members, who tend to be allergic to the hierarchical structure and seniority rule characteristic of theatre troupes in Japan. Others point out "the end of ideology" and increasing de-politicization of Japanese society as a whole as a more general background of the loss of cohesiveness of *shingeki* as well as avant-garde troupes.

In light of this tendency toward de-institutionalization of the *gekidan* system, it is not easy to predict the ways in which the expansion of public supports leads to the increasing "organizational isomorphism" among theatre-related organizations (DiMaggio 1983; DiMaggio and Powell 1983). As DiMaggio (1983: 157; Cf. Scott 1995: 106-107) argues, increased field structuration often leads to an increased similarity of the formal and substantive attributes of the organizations in the field. DiMaggio mentions three types of isomorphic processes: i.e., coercive, mimetic, and normative.

While all of these three processes could be found in American theatre world (DiMaggio 1983; Ziegler 1977) and have led to a high degree of homogeneity among noncommercial theatres, so far we can identify only sporadic instances of isomorphic processes in contemporary theatre in Japan. For example, the incorporation of the AJTC is a clear-cut example of coercive isomorphism. An example of mimetic isomorphism is found in the cases of theatre-related organizations which attempted to be incorporated as an NPO under the Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities. It is noteworthy in this regard that the organization which was incorporated as a non-profit organization for the first time in Japanese history is a regional theatre in Hokkaido. The growing interest in the system of arts-related non-profit organizations in the U.S. is no doubt in the backdrop of this tendency (Cf. Ito et al. 1996). In spite of all these instances, however, we cannot find any significant trend toward structural



homogeneity within the population of theatre groups.

It would be adequate to say that theatre people in Japan are groping for the organizational forms which are viable in changing environments. Or, we might say that those engaged in contemporary theatre are looking for the models alternative to *gekidan* system in order to re-institutionalize the theatre world in a new way. Among such alternatives is the "producer system," that has been often hailed as the alternative to *gekidan* system. Even though a number of independent producers have achieved considerable artistic and/or commercial successes, the majority of theatrical productions are still produced by theatre troupes. Similarly, whereas a number of municipalities have experimented with resident theatre, they are still a small minority and the artistic achievement and the viability of this system are yet to come.

We can also discern different organizational models in the proposals and activities of the trade and professional associations we have just examined. While the AJTC sticks to the old organizational model of *gekidan*, the Theatre Inter Action advocates the resident company as an ideal model. Japan Playwrights' Association clearly emphasizes the interests of a specific profession.

### *Proposal for a Comparative Study*

It seems that the viability of the organizational form that was dominant before the state expansion is a key factor in determining the extent to which organizations within a population resemble each other after the state expansion takes place. In the U.S., the generic framework of regional theatre had been already instituted before the mid-1960s (Ziegler 1977; Langley 1990: 171-172; Poggi 1968). The arts programs by a private foundation which started in the late 1950s and state subsidies beginning in the 1960s, then, had an effect in crystallizing and stabilizing the generic framework. In clear contrast to this, the *gekidan* system had been already in decay in Japan when the state expansion took place in the late 1980s. On the one hand, the state supports funneled through the AJTC, as well as the grants of Special Program to Support Activity provided to major *shingeki* troupes, had an effect of making the *gekidan* system survive. On the other hand, however, the state expansion has accelerated the decay of *gekidan* system by giving subsidies to emerging theatre groups which do not necessarily adopt the old organizational form.<sup>11</sup>

One must also have to take account of the roles that professional associations play in field structuration. While professional associations and unions in the U.S. had been long institutionalized and have considerable bargaining power (Harding 1927; Bauman and Bowen 1966), the

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<sup>11</sup> There was a critical development quite recently. While four theatre-related arts organizations were chosen as recipients of the subsidies of the Special Program to Support Artistic Creativity in 1996, it was decided in the spring of 1999 that the subsidies to three of them would be terminated. All of the three organizations are theatre troupes and the only recipient that is supposed to receive grants for another three years adopts "producer system." In addition, among the five organizations which became recipients in 1999, only one organization is theatre troupe and the other four adopt "producer system." There were heated exchange of words between committee members of the Arts Plan 21 and theatre people in a symposium held by AJTC. Much of the argument in the symposium, quite naturally evolved around the question of whether or not the Agency for Cultural Affairs and/or the committee members would regard the producer system, rather than the *gekidan* system, as an ideal system of theatrical production. There was no explicit answer on this point from the committee members (See AJTC 1999).

power of theatre-related professional associations in Japan had been quite limited and some of them had been virtually subsidiaries to theatre troupes. It is symbolic that all of the offices of the Japanese Theatre Directors Association, the Japan *Shingeki* Managers' and Producers' Association, and the Japan Stage Managers' Association once existed within the office of the AJTC! Koreya Senda, one of the most noted charismatic figures in postwar *shingeki* movement, once held the presidency of both AJTC and the Japanese Theatre Directors Association. Still now, we can find considerable overlaps of membership among the board of directors of AJTC and a number of professional associations. This also complicates the viable organizational form in the new environments.

Although I touched on these differences in field structuration in two societies in my monograph on contemporary theatre in Japan (Sato 1999a), limited time and resource did not allow me to carry out a detailed analysis of the American case. While I could have interviews with a number of staff members of theatre-related service organizations (Theatre Communication Group, ART/NY) and a union (Actors Equity Association), I had to rely mostly on secondary sources for the information about the making of American theatre world. The secondary sources themselves are quite limited in quantity as well as their coverage.

The research project I am planning to carry out in the U.S. expands the scope of the comparative analysis. Specific research questions to be addressed include the following:

#### **Gekidan and Regional Theatre (Japan and U.S.)**

- How can we conceptualize differences between *gekidan* system and regional theatre with respect to such issues as audience base, income sources and governance structure?
- Does the idea of "reward system" in cultural production (Crane 1976; Peterson 1994)<sup>12</sup> provide a meaningful analytical framework for the conceptualization?
- To what extent had the generic form of regional theatre been instituted before mid-1960s?
- Were there any significant changes in the generic form before and after the state expansion?
- If so, were the changes drastic or mostly incremental?

#### **Union and Professional Association (U.S.)**

- How did the state expansion change theatre-related unions and professional associations in the U.S.?
- How did the state expansion change the relationship among regional theatre, unions and professional associations?
- Were the changes qualitative or just incremental?

#### **Private Foundations (U.S. and Japan)**

- To what extent had the support by the Ford Foundation accelerated the field structuration of contemporary theatre before the state expansion took place?
- Are there any clear contrasts between the impact of the Ford Foundation and that of the Saison Foundation (the largest private foundation supporting contemporary theatre and

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<sup>12</sup> Diana Crane (1976) mentions four distinctive types of reward systems according to who allocate the symbolic and/or material rewards as well as who control the evaluation process and the means for cultural productions – 1) independent, 2) semi-independent, 3) subcultural, 4) heterocultural. Peterson (1994: 170) mentions the field of regional theatre in the U.S. as an example of semi-independent reward system (See also Sato 1999: 111).

dance) in Japan?

### **Cultural Industry System (U.S.)**

- How do various sub-sectors of contemporary theatre (e.g., commercial theatre, regional theatre) are related to each other to constitute a “cultural industry system” (Hirsch 1978)<sup>13</sup> in the U.S.?
- Is it possible to combine the idea of cultural industry system with that of reward system to construct an analytical framework in understanding the relationship among various sub-sectors of an artistic field?
- How did the relationship between various sub-sectors change before and after the state expansion?

### **Arts Genres and Structuration (U.S.)**

- Were there any significant differences in the impacts of the expansion of state supports of various art genres in the U.S.?
- If so, how did field structuration vary according to the dominant organizational forms before the state expansion take place?

I am planning to stay in the U.S. for a year or so for the research project. I hope I can get access to more extensive documentary sources including archival data and conduct intensive interviews with the people engaged in performing arts. It is expected that increased access to primary sources would make empirical basis of my argument firmer. It is also expected that the comparative study provides a chance for examining the validity of a number of theoretical statements, key hypotheses and suppositions included in a number of my previous articles on contemporary theatre in Japan.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The author expresses his appreciation to the following foundations for their supports to my field research on contemporary theatre in Japan – the Saison Foundation, Japan Securities Scholarship Foundation, Seimeikai Foundation, Hitotsubashi Alumni Association. The author is also grateful to Professor Paul DiMaggio for his helpful and critical comments for an earlier version of this paper.

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<sup>13</sup> Paul Hirsch (1978) classifies organizations and media acting as cultural gatekeepers into two categories according to whether they are primarily oriented to cultural producers or to distributors. Hirsch calls the former “productions organizations” and the latter “distribution organizations.” He mentions theatre companies as a typical example of production organization.

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