



**Choreomundus:
International Master in Dance Knowledge, Practice, and
Heritage**

Paola Marisela González Pinzón

**Tradition and Innovation: Embodiment of Transmission
Practices of a Professional Taiko Group in Japan**

2020

Abstract

Taiko is a Japanese ensemble drumming practice that has rapidly developed, gaining popularity throughout the world. Oedo Sukeroku Taiko is a group, based in Tokyo, that was a pioneer of this practice, and it is considered the first professional Taiko group. Its characteristic style includes a stance inspired by Japanese traditional arts, the production of rhythmic patterns accompanied by choreographic movements and the use of the slant stand. This dissertation aims to explore how the Japanese principles of tradition and innovation were embodied in the transmission practices of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko. Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in Japan, where fieldnotes, interviews, photographs, video and audio recordings were gathered during visits to Taiko classes and performances. The further analysis of the material was framed by the concepts of communities of practice and situated learning; previous research about Taiko, and information about the Japanese socio-cultural context. In the group, teaching and learning happen within an apprenticeship system, where the proficiency of the practice is obtained after years of direct training following one master. Their transmission practices, based on imitation and repetition, are intertwined with the principles of the group, which bestow importance to tradition and innovation through the embodiment of their techniques in order to achieve individual expression and creativity. The students and possible future professional performers need to learn the physical, mental, affective, and spiritual aspects of the practice to deliver synchronised performances that create an impact on the audience, through the aural, visual and kinesthetic elements characteristic of the practice.

Key words: Taiko, Japan, drumming, transmission, communities of practice

Acknowledgements

I would first like to express how grateful I am to the Choreomundus Consortium for the tremendous opportunity they offered me to be a part of this incomparable programme that has enriched my life in all aspects. Besides, I would like to acknowledge all the convenors and teachers of the programme for sharing their invaluable knowledge.

Especially I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Chi-Fang Chao, for her valuable assistance during my fieldwork and through the writing process because her feedback was crucial for the completion of this dissertation.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to Professor Judy Van Zile for helping me to organize my thoughts and for her precise feedback on my writing process, and to Professor Egil Bakka for his helpful comments on my work. Besides, I would like to acknowledge the guidance of Professor Joseph Small at the beginning of my fieldwork. Furthermore, I would like to thank Professor Alejandro Schwartz, whose expertise and knowledge, have been a determinant influence on my journey in the dance world.

Moreover, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all the members of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko. Especially to Master Seido Kobayashi for allowing me to do my fieldwork with his group, and to Mizuho Zako for trusting me, and for being the link between the group and me. Without her, this dissertation would not have been possible.

I would also like to thank Mayuri Sato for being a friend, a host, a translator, and a tremendous help during my stay in Miyagi. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge Mayumi Aizawa for introducing me to Ome Sogo High School, and Kaoru Kuranaga, who was my guide in Tottori. Both of them were very kind guides during my visit to their cities.

I am also grateful to all the people that were somehow involved in my fieldwork, including Saaya Ikeda, Chris Palermino, Takahiro Sato, and Nori Kajio. Besides, I would like to acknowledge the friends who hosted me for some time during my fieldwork period, including Natsumi McHugh, Miwa Toshima,

Trevor Campbell, Yuki Honda, and my classmate Tainá Louven who shared her accommodation with me. Furthermore, I would like to thank my classmates, who were a continuous support, and a source of joy and inspiration through all the Choreomundus programme, and especially Jorge Poveda, Bianca Benduzi and Maria José Bejarano, who provided helpful comments about my work.

I would also like to thank my friends, the ones that shared some moments with me during my fieldwork in Japan, but also the ones that, despite the distance, have always been there for me.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my family, especially to my mom, for her unconditional support in all my crazy ideas.

Table of contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgements	3
Table of contents	5
List of illustrations.....	7
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	8
1.1 Taiko terminology	8
1.2 Oedo Sukeroku Taiko	9
1.2.1 Instruments used in Oedo Sukeroku Taiko.....	10
1.3 Research question and methodology	11
1.4 Structure of the Dissertation	12
Chapter 2: Literature Review	13
2.1 Theoretical framework	13
2.2 History of Taiko.....	15
2.3 Previous research about Taiko.....	16
2.4 Culture of education and arts in Japan.....	21
2.4.1 Context of transmission of traditional performing arts in Japan.....	23
2.4.2 Japanese concepts: Ma, Iki and Ki	25
Chapter 3: Methodology	28
3.1 Outlining the field.....	30
3.1.2 Overview of the communities encountered in the field.....	31
3.2 A self-reflexive ethnographic account.....	35
3.3 Methods and materials.....	36
Chapter 4: Oedo Sukeroku Taiko: An Ethnographic Account	39

4.1 Description of the setting.....	39
4.2 Taiko classes	41
4.3 The summer festival	43
4.4 Becoming a student	47
Chapter 5: Transmission principles and practices of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko	50
5.1 Tradition and innovation	51
5.2 Transmission of embodied practices	57
Chapter 6: Discussion and conclusions	63
6.1 Discussion.....	63
6.2 Conclusions	67
Bibliography	70
Appendices	74
Appendix I – Glossary of Japanese Terms	74
Appendix II – Map of fieldwork in Japan	76
Appendix III – The myth of the creation of Taiko	77

List of illustrations

Figure 1. Professional members of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko performing in the <i>Tsukiji Festival</i> (González, 2019).....	10
Figure 2. Final rehearsal of <i>Ome Sogo High School</i> (González, 2019).	33
Figure 3. Performance of <i>Ome Sogo High School</i> (González, 2019).	33
Figure 4. Props used by <i>Uguisawa Yatsushika Odori Hosonkai</i> (González, 2019).	34
Figure 5. Masks used by <i>Nakano Kagura</i> (González, 2019).	34
Figure 6. <i>Iwami Ryujin Daiko</i> performance in the <i>Gaina Festival</i> in Tottori (González, 2019).....	34
Figure 7. The classroom at the studio of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko (González, 2019).....	40
Figure 8. Participation of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko in the <i>Tsukiji Festival</i> (González, 2019)	44
Figure 9. Oedo Sukeroku Taiko <i>happi</i> (González, 2019).	45
Figure 10. Map of the places where my fieldwork took place.	76

Chapter 1: Introduction

The first time I saw a Taiko performance was in Mexico in January 2014. Back then, I had just begun practising Japanese martial arts, so I had started to learn about Japanese culture from my teachers and classmates. The performance was in the main theatre of Veracruz, the city I was living in, and it was captivating. I remember leaving the theatre with the feeling that I had just witnessed a performance that involved my senses much more than any other kind of dance or music I had seen before. Almost a year later, I had the chance to visit Japan for the first time, and I was fascinated by its culture. When I needed to decide a place and practice to do fieldwork, Japan and Taiko were my first choices to develop my research.

1.1 Taiko terminology

In Japanese, *taiko* means drum, any kind of drum; and the word *wadaiko* is employed to refer to Japanese drums (*wa* stands for Japanese, while *daiko* means drum). *Kumi-daiko* is the Japanese name of the practice I will do my research about. It refers to the ensemble of drummers that arrange barrel-shaped wooden drums of various sizes for stage performance like an orchestral percussion section, which require vigorous use of the body because of the physically demanding and intricately choreographed performances (Bender, 2010; Matsue, 2016). Taiko has become one of the most globally successful performance genres to emerge in post-war Japan (Bender, 2016). Even though the specific name for these groups is *kumi-daiko*, around the world, the term Taiko is the one used to identify this kind of ensembles. According to ethnomusicologist Jennifer Matsue (2016), even in Japan, not all practitioners are familiar with the term *kumi-daiko*, and many groups use the word Taiko to refer to their group.

In this text, the word “taiko”, without capitalization, will be used to mention the drum as an object. The word “Taiko” will refer to the *kumi-daiko* practice, which is the main topic of my research because it is the term most commonly used, internationally and in Japan, to refer to these Japanese drumming ensembles.

1.2 Oedo Sukeroku Taiko

Oedo Sukeroku Taiko has been one of the most influential groups in the development of Taiko outside Japan, especially in the United States and Canada. Its history involves four founding members. Two of them, eventually, formed their own groups, which share stylistic hallmarks, including a characteristic *kata* and the slant stand (Wong, 2004). Their style included elements from Japanese traditional arts like *hogaku* (classical Japanese music), *nagauta* (narrative song used in *kabuki*) *nihon-bu*yo (Japanese traditional dance) and martial arts (Endo, 1999; Leong, 1999; Wong, 2004). It also included choreographic movements that ‘involved rotating around drums and other players, coordinating drum hits between two drums, and jumping or spinning between and around drums and other players’ (Powell, 2012b: 131). The style of this group will be further analysed in Chapter 5.

The founders of this Tokyo based group were four teenagers who started to play individually as part of the *Obon* festivals in the summertime, and who also began to compete against each other at *Bon-daiko* contests. They became popular, and the four of them joined to form a *Bon-daiko* group called *O Edo Sukeroku Kai*¹. The transformation from a collective of individual players to a group of ensemble performers began when one of the members answered a newspaper advertisement soliciting members for a Taiko club. The new group was called *Shin-On Taiko*, but they quit soon after starting due to personal reasons and economic disappointment. After quitting, a shamisen player offered them to form a professional ensemble of Taiko drums and shamisen which they called *Sukeroku Daiko*. The group was inspired by a Korean female drum troupe that incorporated acrobatic spins and jumps with successive solo displays of individual drummers (Bender, 2016). *Sukeroku Daiko* is considered the first professional Taiko group, performing in cabarets, clubs, and anywhere else that would hire them for entertainment purposes rather than ritual ones (Pachter, 2013). Two of the founders of the group continued the transmission of the *Sukeroku style* as leaders of their own groups. Seido Kobayashi is the leader of the group that, nowadays, is called Oedo Sukeroku Taiko. This group, besides the

¹ Seiko Kobayashi, older brother of Seido Kobayashi, was the leader of the group, which was named after Seiko’s noodle factory called *Sukeroku Seimen*. Nevertheless, the name *Sukeroku* also stood for the *kabuki* character Hanakawado Sukeroku who was a stylish dresser, a man of the arts, and a lady’s man with a big heart. He was considered a hero because he exemplified the spirit of old Tokyo’s people. *O Edo Sukeroku Kai* aimed to express the spirit of this *kabuki* character through its drumming. (Endo, 1999)

professional performing group, currently has a studio that offers different classes aimed at populations of diverse ages and backgrounds. In this place, I did most of my fieldwork.

1.2.1 Instruments used in Oedo Sukeroku Taiko

Taiko is a drumming practice where different kinds of drums are used according to each group. In this section, the instruments that are used by Oedo Sukeroku Taiko will be described. The main drums are called *chu-daiko*. They are medium-sized drums in which the cowhide skin is tacked onto the body of the drum, which is carved from a single tree trunk. These drums have a diameter of 42 to 45 centimetres and are regularly placed in *naname* (slant) stands that are characteristic of the style of the group. The *odaiko* is a big drum that has the same characteristics as the *chu-daiko*, but has a diameter from 55 to 61 centimetres (Endo, 1999). It is placed in a stand that situates the drum parallel to the floor at an approximate shoulder level of the player. The *shime-daiko* consist of a high-pitched tone drum made of a single piece of wood and cowhide tightened, traditionally, by ropes over iron rings. They are also used in *noh*, *kabuki*, in temples and other folk practices. They are usually tightened before use and loosened afterwards to improve the sound and prolong the life of the skin (Endo, 1999; Vogel, 2009). The *ootsuzumi* has an ‘hourglass shape and is made from the hollowed-out trunk of a cherry tree’ (Kobayashi, 2006: 69). It is also used in *noh* and *kabuki*. *Figure 1* illustrates the drums previously described.



Figure 1. Professional members of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko performing in the *Tsukiji* Festival (González, 2019).

The drums are played with *bachis*, which are drumsticks made of Japanese oak that measure approximately 41 centimetres long and 2.4 centimetres wide. For the *shime-daiko*, the *bachis* used are made of lighter wood and are approximately 32 centimetres long and 1.8 centimetres wide (Endo, 1999). The *atarigane* is a brass handheld gong played with a mallet made of deer antler called a *shimoku*. It resembles a shallow dish and serves as timekeeper played by one of the performers, while the others strike the drums (Vogel, 2009; Pachter, 2013). All the instruments previously described were included in different pieces of the group's repertoire.

1.3 Research question and methodology

My main research enquiry was to explore how the principles of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko were embodied in their transmission practices. To answer that interrogation, through ethnographic research I found out the values that were relevant for the group, and I study their transmission practices in their sociocultural context in order to find out the teaching methods and activities that were particular to the group.

For those matters, I looked at Oedo Sukeroku Taiko as a community of practice. According to anthropologist Jean Lave and educational theorist Etienne Wenger (1991), in a community of practice, learning is located in the relationship between the person and the world. A community of practice is as a social learning system, in which the recognized membership to the community gives the participants certain competence. This competence includes understanding what matters, being able to engage with others in the community, and using the repertoire accumulated through the community's history of learning. These elements could be found in Oedo Sukeroku Taiko, that is why I decided to use this theoretical approach. Besides, I will refer to the concept of situated learning practice, also coined by Lave and Wenger (1991). This concept was useful to understand the transmission dynamics within the group and how their teaching practices were related to their sociocultural context.

The methods I used to collect material were participant observation, having interviews, taking pictures, and video-recording rehearsals and performances. Nevertheless, I was not allowed to record any of the classes of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko, so my fieldnotes were my main source of information, as I could only take pictures and videos from the festival where the group participated.

After coming back from the field, I analysed the teaching practices from the material of the classes, as well as the interviews and fieldnotes. I also compared the information from Oedo Sukeroku Taiko with the material gathered from other amateur Taiko groups, school Taiko teams, and traditional performing arts groups that I visited. This analysis helped me to identify the elements that made this group different from the rest, and how those elements were related to their transmission practices. Besides, I used previous research about Taiko to understand the position and influence of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko within the Taiko world. Most literature about Taiko in another language than Japanese has been mainly produced in English by scholars from the United States, in most cases Japanese American ethnomusicologists. Therefore, I think my research, focused on the body, can contribute to the understanding of the particularities of the group.

1.4 Structure of the Dissertation

The first chapter is the introduction to this dissertation. The second chapter will present the literature review, including an overview of the theoretical approaches that were used to frame the research, a brief outline of the history of Taiko, as well as the main findings of previous scholars about Taiko. It will also include a review of certain elements of Japanese culture, education and terms that were relevant for the understanding of the context of Taiko. In the third chapter, I will present the methodology, as well as the material produced and a reflexive description of the roles that I had through the fieldwork.

Chapter 4 will be the ethnographic account of my experience with Oedo Sukeroku Taiko. It will introduce a summary of their activities, including their participation in a summer festival, and it will also present my experience as a Taiko student. The analysis of all the material will be addressed in the fifth chapter. This will include an outline of the principles of the group, according to the interviews and my observations on the field, contesting my material to the one found in previous research. Besides, I will analyse their transmission practices based on the corrections the teachers made during the classes and my observations on the teaching and learning processes. In the final chapter, and I will summarise the conclusions of the research, highlighting the uniqueness of Oedo Sukeroku.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The topic of this research is Taiko drumming in Japan, specifically the embodiment of the principles of tradition and innovation in the transmission practices of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko. To frame these practices, it was necessary to get some understanding of the cultural context of the group. For that reason, in this chapter, I will first present an overview of the theoretical approaches that I used for the analysis of the material. Then I will summarise the history of Taiko, which is relevant for my fieldwork because Oedo Sukeroku Taiko is one of the four main groups of the history of this practice. Next, I will introduce some of the main findings of previous research done about Taiko. Afterwards, I will present a review of relevant elements of Japanese culture and education, including a brief overview of the transmission of traditional arts in Japan, and the clarification of certain Japanese concepts related to the research.

2.1 Theoretical framework

In this dissertation, transmission as a process that includes practices of teaching and learning will be regarded using theories from ethnomusicology, dance studies, and Japanese studies. The concept of community of practice will be used as an analytical tool for the study of the teaching and learning practices that were observed.

Lave and Wenger (1991) define a community of practice as a sociocultural learning system where membership to a group implies sharing interests and goals through regular practice. A community of practice has characteristics of social systems like an emergent structure, complex relationships, self-organisation, dynamic boundaries and ongoing negotiation of identity and cultural meaning (Blackmore, 2010). In these communities, knowledge is related to culture and constructed through active participation (Hajian, 2019). This perspective understands learning as a situated, co-constructed, sociocultural process that emphasises the ‘mutually constitutive nature of persons, activity and environment’ (Powell, 2012a: 1), which occurs by the engagement of the members of the community on its practice, and its own negotiation of meaning in relation to a broader system (Wenger, 2010). The situated learning theory claims that learning, thinking, and knowing happen between relationships among people engaged in an activity that belongs to a socio-culturally structured world (Lave, 1991).

Through their participation, members learn to use the tools and artefacts of the practice as ‘a way to connect with the history of the practice and to participate more directly in its cultural life’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 101). Learning through conversations and stories supports the communication of the purpose, needs and methods of the community in order to contribute to the alignment of the learner to the group and gain competence within it (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999). Nevertheless, ‘learning and teaching are not inherently linked. Much learning takes place without teaching, and indeed much teaching takes place without learning’ (Wenger, 1999: 266), which has also been observed by other authors.

For example, researcher Olivier Morin (2013) mentions that in most societies, transmission is a matter of training and observation of others’ movements, and not of explicit teaching and that in most cases, learning requires individual practice which could be long and solitary. The engagement in regular practice will eventually produce changes in the nervous system as well as in the body, so knowledge would not only be located in the brain but also in the body and the environment.

According to Wenger (1999), there are three dimensions of the practice that define the community. The first one is mutual engagement which relates to the interactions within the group of heterogeneous members. The second is the sharing of a joint enterprise which gives purpose to the community and its members as individuals. The third dimension is a shared repertoire which includes the history of the practice, its artefacts, actions, vocabulary, routines, gestures, symbols, rules, policies, and goals. All of these dimensions contribute to the sense of belonging of the members to the community, and their understanding of a practice that is developed within historical, social, cultural, and institutional contexts. Besides, while the members develop certain skills, they also develop specialised sensitivities, perceptions, and an aesthetic sense that will enable them to judge the qualities of a product or an action, and therefore the appropriateness of what they do as part of their practice.

In this theory, learning happens through legitimate peripheral participation. This concept allows the study of activities, identities, intentions and relationships between newcomers and old-timers within communities of practice. Besides, their perspective of learning as a situated social process gives agency to the person as an active participant in a continuous construction of identity. Learning is not just acquiring skills and information; it is a process of becoming a certain person because it transforms

what the person is and what the person can do. Communities of practice take into account the individual and unique trajectory of each member of the community as it relates to the identity, point of view, and learning capability of each participant. In communities of practice, relative newcomers become relative old-timers, which can remain unnoticed until they help someone, or they realise to know more than they think they do (Wenger, 2010; Wenger, 1999; Lave and Wenger, 1991). The concepts addressed in this section will be useful to understand the transmission dynamics that are characteristic of the Taiko group.

2.2 History of Taiko

The use of taiko is ‘unquestionably ancient but, until recently, it was generally played as a solo instrument to accompany festivals or Buddhist ritual[s]’ (Wong, 2004: 203). As an ensemble practice the term Taiko was coined by scholar Nishitsunoi Masahiro in the 1970s’ (Pachter, 2013). Even though the term was coined during this period, the history of the practice started several decades before.

The character of contemporary Japanese taiko has been most profoundly shaped by four ensemble groups: *Osuwa Daiko*, *Sukeroku Daiko*, *Ondekoza*, and *Kodo*. These are not the only influential groups, as regional drum styles have been widely adopted across Japan as well. But only after these four groups started to popularize a new ensemble form of Japanese drumming did rhythmic motifs found in particular folk performances attract broad interest. These innovations remain in the ensembles’ performance style, aesthetic sensibility, and repertoire, as well as in those of the groups they have influenced. While these elements permeate contemporary taiko to the extent that only a discerning ear can recognize their influence, members of all four groups strongly maintain that they developed their music in relative isolation from one another. No single person or group, they say, can lay claim to being the singular “origin” of Japanese taiko.

(Bender, 2016: 48)

The first of these groups, *Osuwa Daiko*, was created by Daihachi Oguchi and got its biggest boost when it was included in the opening ceremony of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. Ever since, *Osuwa Daiko* has been considered the first example of these kinds of groups (Bender, 2016). The second group that is considered an influence in the development of Taiko drumming in Japan is *Sukeroku Daiko*, nowadays called Oedo Sukeroku Taiko. This is the group I was focused on during my fieldwork.

The next two groups, *Ondekoza* and *Kodo*, are related to each other. *Ondekoza* was formed in 1971 on Sado Island emphasising the combination of classical Japanese techniques and folk motifs. *Ondekoza* created what could be considered the most influential repertory in Taiko drumming (Bender, 2016), and led to the creation of *Kodo*, which is regarded as the most internationally recognised Taiko group.

In 1975, after some conflicts, Den Tagayasu, the founder of the group, left *Ondekoza* and started his own group. For a brief period, two groups with the name of *Ondekoza* were performing simultaneously. In the fall of 1981, it was decided that Tagayasu would retain the rights to use the name *Ondekoza*. The former members of that group would reassemble themselves under the new name *Kodo* (Bender, 2016). *Kodo*'s mission is to re-interpret traditional arts. *Kodo* has had a major influence inside Japan where many groups have followed their model of communal living and the development of their repertoire, featuring both regional drumming styles arranged for stage performance and original compositions (Pachter, 2013). By 2016, the *Nippon Taiko Foundation*² had, among its members, eight hundred Taiko groups and twenty thousand individuals (Bender, 2016). The popularization of the practice has led to some research about it, which will be addressed in the next section.

2.3 Previous research about Taiko

In the 1970s and 1980s, the rapid urbanisation of Japan created a nostalgic interest in the vanishing people and culture of old rural Japan. That situation fostered community revitalisation projects to help stimulate tourism and economic development, so new festival celebrations were created which generated venues and a greater demand for Taiko drumming groups (Bender, 2016). Taiko groups are not considered traditional but rather situated in a complex classification that has been a matter of discussion of previous researchers, as the boundaries between traditional, folk and popular music seem to be blurred when it comes to analysing Taiko drumming. Most previous research about Taiko has been done in the area of ethnomusicology. In this section, the main topics that have been studied will be presented.

²The *Nippon Taiko Foundation*, founded in 1979, is the largest organization of Taiko groups in Japan. (Bender, 2016).

Taiko is thus much more complex than its simplest definition as Japanese drumming might indicate. It is a global form that is often tied to local communities; it is a marker of postwar Japanese nationality and late twentieth-century Asian American identity; it is an art form with evolving conventions and aesthetic codes; it is a leisure activity, a form of exercise, and for some, a spiritual practice; it is music, dance, and theater; and it is a social practice that, in North America, has a great deal of overlap with Asian American history, activism, community, and performance. (Ahlgren, 2018)

Even though the previous description referred mainly to Taiko in the United States, it highlights the complex definition of Taiko. According to anthropologist Millie Creighton (2008), the consideration of Taiko as traditional is related to the use of the drums, which have a long-established craft process that links the practice to the pre-industrial past where Japanese values and symbols of identity originated. On the other hand, ethnomusicologist Jennifer Matsue (2016) mentions that in Japan, Taiko is positioned as tradition as well as something new. Taiko is not transmitted through the *iemoto* system, and the repertoire of Taiko groups, even though it might take inspiration of other traditional or folk arts, also includes several pieces that have been created in a non-traditional context. Furthermore, the aim of the groups, rather than to revive earlier folk styles, has been to generate new interpretations inspired by them (Bender, 2016; Matsue, 2016). That is why Taiko researcher Shawn Bender (2016) proposes the term neo-folk to classify Taiko. Taiko includes many elements of tradition, but according to him, there is no self-conscious identification with tradition among Taiko groups. Instead, Taiko reflects regional identities, which makes the practice closer to the concept of folk rather than to tradition. ‘Many Taiko ensembles adapted Japanese regional festival music for stage performance’ (Kobayashi, 2006: 108), as Taiko arose from the context of local festivity where older performing arts were showcased. The label of neo-folk emphasizes elements of community, innovation, creativity and openness to change, and implies a certain kind of instruction and transmission, rather than preservation or conservation. Furthermore, the lack of interest from young practitioners in learning traditional performing arts contrasts with the increasing popularity of Taiko (Bender, 2016). Besides, Taiko has been related to the creation of a national identity (Pachter, 2013; Bender, 2016), especially after its inclusion in the official school curriculum.

Taiko has been included in instructional guides and textbooks for students from primary school to high school, which has caused scepticism from scholars and performers as it might produce standardisation

of the practice, and a decrease on the creativity and innovation that has characterised the art form. Besides, the textualisation signifies the disembodiment of the transmission of the practice. Additionally, in a school context, Taiko has been used as a way to create interest in other traditional music expressions among students (Bender, 2016; Matsue, 2016). In the textbooks, Taiko is regarded as a generic national practice, disregarding regional styles, which on the other hand, ‘may help foster new kinds of localised taiko groups based around school communities’ (Bender, 2005: 197). Besides, the curriculum includes information about the main history of Taiko in Japan and its position in the world nowadays.

Nevertheless, as Matsue (2016) mentions, especially in the United States, but also in Japan, many Taiko enthusiasts are not aware of the history of Taiko and think of it as a traditional art, disregarding its modern creation. Outside Japan, Taiko is often viewed as a traditional Japanese practice, even though, as mentioned before, is a relatively new tradition (Fujie, 2001; Johnson, 2011; Creighton, 2008). In part, this is a consequence of the way the main Taiko groups have promoted themselves locally and internationally, emphasizing traditional ties to Japanese folk culture, referring to the history of general drumming in Japan, and incorporating costumes based on festival clothing (Fujie, 2001). In the case of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko, many of their rhythms are inspired by an old festival music of Tokyo called *edo-bayashi* (Kobayashi, 2006), but they do not describe their music either as traditional or revival (Pachter, 2013), as I could confirm during my fieldwork.

Taiko as a genre, in general, uses a wide stance form known as *kata*, which is also found in martial arts and other traditional Japanese arts. Good *kata* is fundamental for the production of clear, loud drum strikes, and is an important element of the choreographic aspects, which include gracefully executed and synchronised movements. In Taiko, the visual aspect of music is emphasised as much as its aural elements (Bender, 2005; Kobayashi, 2006; Vogel, 2009; Powell, 2012a), which are usually taught orally through a phonetic syllabic system called *kuchi-shoga*³ that denotes certain rhythms and strikes (Powell, 2012a). Performing the choreographies demands precision, individual mental concentration and group coordination (Fujie, 2001). ‘Playing taiko is almost like dancing. When many players play at the same time on the stage, their harmonious movements make the drumming visually attractive’

³ See Wong (2019) for further information and examples about *kuchi-shoga*.

(Izumi, 2001: 38). Stance, body posture and fluidity of motion are an integral aspect of sound because they are associated with particular dynamics and drum tones (Vogel, 2009; Powell, 2012a). ‘Taiko groups are the ultimate example of a musical tradition that is best experienced live’ (Fujie, 2001: 197). The sound and the visual stimulus of the strength, stamina, fluidity, and extension of the performers (Powell, 2012b), alongside the strong vibrations from the drums through the audience's bodies, make Taiko a multisensorial practice that has made an impact inside and outside Japan.

The embodiment of Taiko is manifested physically in the blisters and calluses that appear as a result of the practice, but is also reflected in the way that momentum is built from the twist of the hips and torso, which depends on having strong legs and feet firmly planted on the ground. This is also found in other folk performing arts that are believed to mime the movements of agricultural activity that relied on the strength developed in the lower- body. (Bender, 2016). ‘[E]mphasis on movement is not only essential to the aesthetic presentation of taiko drumming, but is also central to the way it both achieves meaning as a ‘Japanese’ activity and distinguishes participants as local or nonlocal practitioners’ (Bender, 2016: 197).

This is reflected in the way Taiko is transmitted, where the perfection of specific physical movements suited to the size and shape of the stereotypically Japanese body is expected. ‘The short legs and small bodies of typical Japanese individuals, often regarded by Japanese people as ‘inferior’ to the long legs and tall bodies of (white) foreigners, are re-imagined as the roots of the distinctly Japanese aesthetic’ (Bender, 2005: 198). As a consequence, there are many cases of rejection of foreigners practising Japanese traditional arts because the aesthetic components of the practice, including the movement qualities were established for the Japanese compact physique (Hahn, 2007). In Taiko, however, there is growing acceptance of the participation of a diversity of participants, even if for some people, Taiko represents Japanese heritage and identity (Creighton, 2008). Nonetheless, the practice of Taiko in a global context has made it an art form in continuous re-composition by its participants (Powell, 2012b). Taiko has promoted discussions about ‘how musicians move, how movers sound, and how these movements and sounds together stage and articulate a variety of identitarian, communitarian, and political stances’ (Ahlgren, 2018: 6), which has been manifested extensively in the United States, where hundreds of Taiko groups have been created.

The spread of Taiko in the United States fostered a new group of performers with different experiences and sensibilities. As intercultural relationships were built between American and Japanese groups, Taiko continued to evolve into new artistic directions (Pachter, 2013). Growing from just two groups in the late 1960s, and having a greater development in the 1990s through collegiate groups, Taiko groups increased to around 200 by 2000 and more than 450 in 2016 (Ahlgren, 2016). For Japanese Americans, Taiko has become a way of acquiring self-expression, self-respect, confidence and community revitalization as part of their cultural heritage. It has also become a medium to challenge racial injustice and to explore their identity through the bodies of Asian American performers (Konagaya, 2001; Ahlgren, 2016). In the United States, ‘virtually every taiko group seems to go through a process of self-examination and self-definition when its purpose and identity become a matter for focused reflection’ (Wong, 2005: 83). American Taiko groups may define themselves in relation to religion, race or gender affiliations. Nevertheless, the majority of taiko groups credit a stylistic debt to Oedo Sukeroku Taiko (Kobayashi, 2006). In 1968, the group had a tour in the United States where they met Tanaka Seiichi⁴, founder of *San Francisco Taiko Dojo* and current official representative of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko in the United States, who requested the members to teach him their style. After initially turning down the request, Yutaka Ishizuka, one of the members of *Sukeroku Daiko*⁵, remained in San Francisco for several weeks to teach Seiichi the basic elements of the *Sukeroku style*. When he returned home to Tokyo, he left behind several drums that they could not check on the return plane, bolstering the initial activities of San Francisco Taiko Dojo (Pachter, 2013).

Many of Tanaka sensei's students have gone on to form other groups in North America, and the Oedo Sukeroku style has gone with them. It would not be a far reach to say that most groups in North America owe a stylistic debt to Oedo Sukeroku. In fact, many groups play Oedo Sukeroku's repertoire, often improperly, without permission, and without realizing where the material originated from. Many songs that are commonly played by taiko groups in North America are actually Sukeroku compositions or arrangements. (Leong, 1999)

⁴ Tanaka Seiichi is a Japanese immigrant who had just begun performing Taiko at the San Francisco Cherry Blossom Festival in April of 1968, after being disappointed by the quiet atmosphere of the festivities, which motivated him to start playing with his friends in 1969. Later he travelled to Nagano and asked Oguchi Daihachi to teach him. Back in the United States, he founded *The San Francisco Taiko Doukukai's*, including repertoire from *Osuwa Daiko* and *Sukeroku Daiko*, besides his own compositions. In the late 70s, the name of the group was changed to *San Francisco Taiko Dojo*. People who saw the group performing started to invite Tanaka to teach them how to play Taiko. That is how the performance styles of *Osuwa Daiko* and *Sukeroku Daiko*, combined with his own, began to spread across the United States (Pachter, 2013).

⁵ By that time, *Sukeroku Daiko* was the name of the group that would eventually become Oedo Sukeroku Taiko.

Even though gender issues in Taiko will not be explored in this dissertation, it is worth mention that there has been previous research on this topic. Taiko has contributed to the reidentification of the stereotypical Asian woman through the actions of the body, manifested in an open leg stance, powerful beating of the drum, screaming and yelling (Kobayashi, 2006). Nonetheless, even if women lead groups, teach classes, compose new materials (Ahlgren, 2016), and play crucial roles in the administration of the groups, they are less visible than men, which also happens in Japan.

Lastly, it is important to recall the contributions of Kenny Endo (1999). He is a well-known and well-respected taiko performer and teacher, who played with Oedo Sukeroku Taiko for six years. His research was focused on one of the group's pieces called *Yodan Uchi*⁶. The song created in 1967 quickly became a signature piece of the group and is one of the most imitated compositions in Japan and the United States. In his master's thesis, Endo outlined the activities of the group back then, which was useful for this dissertation to establish a point of comparison.

2.4 Culture of education and arts in Japan

‘Musical traditions in different cultures are rooted in different assumptions and transmission practices; (...) [that] manifests uniquely in each national context’ (Gondo, 2019: 163). This section will include an overview of previous research done in Japan in the areas of culture and education, as they reflect some of the cultural characteristics that are important to understand the context of Taiko. First, I will outline some aspects of Japanese education in general. Afterwards, some specific elements about the transmission of traditional arts will be mentioned, followed by the explanation of some Japanese concepts that are related to this research.

In the book written by scholar Nancy Sato (2003) about education in Japan, she mentions how the idea of community did not only mean a group of people coming together with a common goal. Community is understood as a process that requires an everyday engagement within a committed, caring, and emphatic group, and includes beliefs, processes, values, and interpersonal relations. Her findings reflect that ‘knowledge is constructed if the learner becomes an active participant of a highly connected

⁶ *Yodan Uchi* means to beat four sides. It gained popularity because it features choreographed dynamic movements and syncopated rhythms. There is another version of the same piece called *Nidan Uchi*, which means beating two sides. This last version is played with up to five performers (Endo, 1999).

community in which knowledge and culture are integrated' (Hajian, 2019: 98). Sato also discusses the importance of verbal and nonverbal instruction, and even silence in the teaching techniques, which promote the integration of mind-body-spirit, and a reflection toward self-improvement and socialisation. These techniques resonate with the cultural values of recognising another person's feelings, and anticipating what needs to be done and doing it without having to be told, which was manifested in how 'being able to read others' bodies, faces, and eyes are just as important as being able to read books' (Sato, 2003: 205). Also, she highlights the importance of role modelling, and how there are Japanese phrases to refer to "remembering with the body", and "attaching something to the body" as a way to talk about learning. Besides, she mentions that in Japan, 'personal identity emphasises interpersonalism, self-discipline, and role perfection' (Sato, 2003: 208), characteristics that facilitate the teaching-learning processes. Similar findings were achieved through the ethnographic research of other authors.

For instance, scholars Thomas Rohlen and Gerard LeTendre (1998), who studied teaching and learning in Japan, found out that these processes continue throughout the whole life. Japan's early retirement and longevity rates foster time for self-reflection and self-perfection. Instruction includes memorisation, repetition and imitation, which in Japan are understood as means of achieving mastery and establishing a foundation for any kind of endeavour. They also found that learning relies more on physicality than on verbalisation and that it is accomplished in a collective environment where cooperation is regarded not as a goal, but as a foundation for other kinds of learning. Since school years, belonging to a community implied individual commitment to the group and full involvement with it. They noticed how almost every kind of learning begins with a set form (*kata*) that is repeated over and over as a way to embody what is being transmitted and which is expected to be perfected over time. They found that learning in Japan happens through experience of the whole person without a separation of the body from the mind and feelings, valuing the experiences of others' past experience.

Similar findings were encountered by scholar Paul Turse (2003), who analyses martial arts and *kabuki* as part of his research. He mentions that the initial phase of Japanese actor training is through imitation as a way for the young actor to discipline himself through the repetition of basic patterns of movement (*kata*), which have been created and perfected by his elders. In *kabuki* as in martial arts, only after mastering the basic *kata*, the student can create its own. The training in both contexts has the goal to

mould the bodies and the minds of the practitioners. He adds that in martial arts, the perfection of the technique goes along with the perfection of oneself. When *kata* is embodied, there is no need to think about it, and there is no unnecessary tension, nor muscular nor mental.

Regarding music education, researcher Koji Matsunobu (2019) has contributed to the study of music and creativity cross-culturally in Japan and the United States. He found that in Japanese culture, music is a path for lifelong self-cultivation and that the majority of students of Japanese arts are adults. In Japan, creativity involves mastering and perfecting skills through rigid training and takes the form of renovation rather than invention. Creativity is a result of embodiment. Therefore, imitation and repetition are highly appreciated and are fundamental for artistic development. Imitation and creativity are included at the core of the transmission of artistry in every field of arts, ranging from martial arts to performing and fine arts. In those fields, *kata* represents a basic form of highly stylised bodily movements that, once embodied and mastered, becomes a form of expression. In the Japanese view, creativity emanates from the body, not necessarily from the mind. The embodiment of the practice eventually allows the practitioner to be skilful and imaginative enough to create something new. Besides, ‘an embodied form of music can change over time within the body of a master. (...) The actual performance and teaching style of the player may change over time as he or she develops and embodies a further relationship with a piece’ (Matsunobu, 2019: 90), which accentuates the importance of the master-apprentice relationship over a long period of instruction. Furthermore, in Japan, the motivation of most music students is related to making life more meaningful and purposeful rather than making creative music. The notions of embodiment for learning and the importance of non-verbal communication and silence will be confirmed afterwards, through the findings of researchers that have studied transmission in traditional performance settings.

2.4.1 Context of transmission of traditional performing arts in Japan

Even though Taiko is not considered a traditional performing art, it is important to give the reader an overview of the transmission of traditional performing arts in Japan, where the idea of tradition ‘is not a static object, but something that is always evolving’ (Pachter, 2013: 344). Values related to tradition will be explained to show how some elements of traditional arts are reflected in the Taiko world, even if it is not explicitly recognised.

In Japan, the idea of lineage is often tied to the *iemoto* system of transmission (“*iemoto*” literally meaning “base of the family”). A family-like hierarchical system that guides the transmission of traditional arts in Japan, the *iemoto* system not only includes the teacher-student relationship but also has connections to repertoire and performance practice. An understanding of this system not only is crucial to the understanding of transmission of artistic knowledge in Japan, but also has broader implications as well for an understanding of Japanese society. (Pachter, 2013: 28)

The *iemoto* system relies on the loyalty, obligation, and respect between members of a tradition, creating bonds between them that are the living thread of a tradition's prosperity, transmission, and continuity. In her book about *nihon-buyo*, scholar Tomie Hahn (2007) mentions how within the *iemoto* system, learning happens via kinesthetic empathy, alongside visual imitation and repetition through the practice and the embodiment of the tradition. According to her, kinesthetic empathy occurs by identification, coordination and alignment with the teacher's body. For this to happen, the relationship between the teacher and the student is reinforced every class through sensorial transmission that highlights the continuity of the art practice through notions of lineage and hierarchy. She also states that embodying practices are a personal and spiritual engagement towards a path to understanding. In *nihon-buyo*, as in most Japanese practices, embodiment happens through the repetition of formalised body movements (*kata*) that contributed to memorisation and embodiment of the pieces. Besides, as in other traditional arts transmitted orally, qualified practitioners are highly esteemed as culture bearers. Visual, tactile, and oral cues are used as means for correcting students (Sellers-Young, 1993; Hahn, 2007), and ‘tactile transmission [is] employed as a direct approach for guiding movement, posture, and poses’ (Hahn, 2007: 105). Barbara Sellers-Young, another scholar who studied *nihon-buyo*, also contributed to the research of transmission in Japanese contexts.

Similarly to what Hahn mentions, Sellers-Young (1993) states that in *nihon-buyo*, the main mode of transmission is non-verbally by repeated imitation. This allows the student to learn kinesthetically about the poses but also the transitions, which in many cases incorporate moments of physical silence without loss of physical energy. Through imitation, the movement would gradually become embodied in the students who are ‘encouraged to develop increased levels of somatic awareness and to literally think with their body’ (Sellers-Young, 1993: 46). In this practice, like in most Japanese traditions, studying and perfecting continue through a lifetime.

In relation to *iemoto* and Taiko, researcher Benjamin Pachter (2013), added that the *iemoto* lineage system is relevant to Taiko because students and professional players ‘often maintain a deep connection with their teachers, both in terms of performance practices and repertoire’ (Pachter, 2013: 30). Additionally, the *iemoto* system dictates who is allowed to perform a piece, and how learning certain signature pieces is especially important for the students. Regarding the implicit way in which *iemoto* is present in the Taiko practice, during my fieldwork, I found out that most practitioners have stayed with the same group since they started practising Taiko. The few people that have changed between groups did it mainly because they have moved to a different city. Furthermore, during conversations, I was told that Taiko teachers do not like to have students who have tried out with different groups because the style of each group has its own technique, so it is harder to teach another style when someone previously learned from another Taiko group, but it is also a matter of loyalty and respect.

2.4.2 Japanese concepts: Ma, Iki and Ki

As Sato exemplifies after her fieldwork about education in Japan, ‘just as the Eskimos have over 50 words for snow, the Japanese express innumerable messages through silence’ (Sato, 2003: 254). In Japan, the concept of *ma* is part of the lifestyle, aesthetics and art forms. It refers to the “negative” or “open” space and time, which are not believed to be empty but are considered to be expansive and full of energy (Hahn, 2007). *Ma* has also been understood as

the integration of time and space into the harmonious flow of the universe. (...) It is both a means of sensing the moment of movement and a pause in the movement. *Ma* is the expectant stillness of the moment preceding a change. The student is guided by the teacher to a somatic understanding of *ma* or the time/space continuum through an intuitive process which requires that the student focus her entire somatic awareness during the learning process.
(Sellers-Young, 1993: 50)

In Taiko, *ma* refers to the space between sounds, more specifically ‘the space between the actual strikes, as the driving force of songs. The beauty comes from what is not being played. It is a quiet, refined aesthetic’ (Aoki, 2015). ‘By increasing or decreasing this silence, the expression of sound takes on different qualities, creating tension and release in the sound. Thus, lack of sound becomes an integral part of the music’ (Powell, 2012: 104). It was important to clarify the use of this term, as it is embedded and embodied as part of the Japanese identity. Another concept associated with Oedo Sukeroku Taiko is *iki*.

Iki has several meanings like spirit, heart, breath, and stylish or chic. According to Kenny Endo (1999), the meaning of being stylish and chic is the most relevant to Sukeroku performances. This term ‘describes a particular way of moving with flash and flair that evokes the sophistication of “old *Edo*” (old Tokyo)’ (Bender, 2016: 123). This expression also means ‘the ability to combine one's artistic life with one's personal, private life’ (Sellers-Young, 1993: 51). During conversations with former Sukeroku members, as part of his fieldwork, Bender was told that

The people of *shitamachi*, which formerly composed most of urban Edo, like to think that their men possess this quality of effortless sophistication. The term *iki* also connotes someone who is vivacious and energetic. In this sense, the style of taiko that they played was not the slow, languid type one would find at a Bon dance, but an upbeat and fast-paced variety. For Sukeroku Daiko, the quality of *iki* embodied by the character of Sukeroku defined their approach to performance. (Bender, 2016: 58)

This term should not be confused with *ki*, which is also relevant for traditional arts and Taiko. *Ki* refers to energy or power (Hahn, 2007), but it is also translated as spirit or energy flow (Turse, 2003; Powell, 2012b). ‘Awareness and control of *ki* through the body fosters the flow of movement, [it] is developed through experience, rather than intellectual pursuits (...) Only through the gradual practice and observation can the development of *ki* awareness and embodiment be gained’ (Hahn, 2007: 60).

The embodiment of *ki* concerned a grasping of the holistic relationship that exists among the discrete elements involved in taiko playing. This involved attending to others’ playing, knowing how to support someone’s solo, coordinating and synchronism rhythms, maintaining energetic playing, and using *kiai* (conventional shouted syllables of taiko playing and martial arts), often in relation to the former elements as a means of keeping tempo, signaling to others, and keeping up the energy required for playing.

(Powell, 2012: 135)

According to Powell’s research of an American Taiko group, *ki* is ‘the way in which energy is used to connect the player with taiko and with other players’ (Powell, 2004: 191). Besides, Wong adds that in Taiko, the ‘synergistic set of relationships between body, *ki*, and sound is made visible and audible’ (Wong, 2019: 37). In the American context, however, *ki* is explicitly taught and is tangibly manifested through *kata* and *kiai* (Powell, 2004).

Through the literature review presented, the principles that framed this dissertation were described. Those included the theoretical approaches that framed the research, outlining the concepts of communities of practice and situated learning. A summary of the history of Taiko and findings of previous scholars were also introduced to provide the reader with some notions about the context of the practice. The information was supplemented with a review of elements of Japanese culture and education, as well as an outline of certain terms that do not have a direct equivalent in English and reflect a Japanese way of thinking, moving, and living. Next, the methodology used for this research will be presented.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The first part of this chapter will present the theoretical approach of the research, based on the contributions of dance anthropology and other theories related to Taiko, as well as some problematics related to the categorization of the art form. Next, an account of the decision-making process related to my research process will be presented. Afterwards, there will be a brief overview of the different communities related to Taiko that I encountered in the field and that influenced my perspective of the practice. Next, I will present a description of my role as a researcher during the fieldwork process, followed by an account of the methods and materials that integrated the research.

This study was based on theories from different fields of knowledge like dance anthropology, Japanese studies, education, ethnomusicology, and previous research about Taiko. The literature, however, presented some gaps due to the specific focus of each discipline.

The term “dance theory” usually refers to theories about the social, cultural, political, and economic production and consumption of dance, which in the field of music would be the domain of musicologists, music historians, or ethnomusicologists, not music theorists. This disparity in the basic terminology used to describe the subdisciplines within music and dance scholarship is one of the fundamental stumbling blocks to communication and cooperation between the two disciplines.

(McMains and Thomas, 2013: 197)

In Taiko, the aesthetic importance of patterns of movement in the drummer’s execution of strokes, and ‘the fact that [the patterns] are identified, appreciated, and taught by members of the culture as movement – brings the study of this aspect of music-making into the realm of dance research’ (Sutton, 1980: 17). Scholars like Kaeppler or Buckland, have used terms such as ‘socially constructed movement systems’ (Kaeppler, 1972: 55), or ‘culturally codified human movement systems, [highlighting that] the concept of dance was not necessarily universal’ (Buckland, 2007: 6). Nevertheless, the concept of dance is part of Japanese culture, but ‘the various arts in Japan are not as segregated from one another (...). Distinctions between theater, dance, and music are often blurred, and practitioners frequently have strong backgrounds in several disciplines’ (Hahn, 2007: 26).

In East Asia alone there are numerous genres in which dancers sound drums - Japanese and Okinawan Ancestor Festival dances (*bon-odori* in Japan, *eisa* in Okinawa), the

Korean "monk's drum" dances (*puk- chum*) and hourglass drum dances (*sol-changgo*), to name a few. In these dances, however, the "drummer" is more readily identifiable as a "dancer".
(Sutton, 1980: 17)

In contemporary western scholarship, music and dance are generally thought of as related but distinct performing arts. Musicians and music scholars often forget that no sound is produced without physical movement and that they have to move in certain ways in order to generate the desired pattern (Sutton, 1980). As scholar Judy Van Zile (1988) points out, movement is a necessary element in the production of sound and can play such an integral role of the music, that the musician can be considered a dancer. She adds how movement in music can be prescribed or choreographed, and that it can appear in music through different stages that include the movements before and after playing, which are considered an important part of the overall performance, especially in some cultures.

Previous literature has contributed to the analysis of movement as a means of bringing to light the underlying systems of a group that must be derived from the social and cultural construction of specific movement worlds. The focus on the system and the importance of intention, meaning, and cultural evaluation to assist in the understanding of a society is what makes movement studies anthropological rather than ethnological (Kaepler, 1991). Movement research is an instrument to uncover the meaning and function of corporeal practices in society, 'contributing to the understanding of people and their means of expression within the framework of a socio-cultural community' (Giurchescu and Torp, 1991: 7). Previously, however, Taiko has been mainly studied from an ethnomusicological perspective.

Dance and music privilege different senses; music as primarily auditory, and dance as primarily visual. Nevertheless, both invoke other sensory experiences, like kinesthetic empathy, that refers to the body's response to watching someone else performing (McMains and Thomas, 2013). The categorization as dance or music does not apply to all forms of arts with sound/movement elements. 'Many percussive dance forms, like tap and flamenco, or movement-centered music forms, such as taiko drumming and marching band, integrate movement and sound so completely that to watch without listening or to hear without watching would cause irreparable damage to the intended experience' (McMains and Thomas, 2013: 200). That is why, for this research, I took into account studies from different disciplines like dance anthropology, ethnomusicology and Japanese studies.

Fieldwork has been the way for dance anthropologists to gather their material for analysis. ‘Dance ethnographers put their movement observation and analysis skills to work towards understanding people, [calling] upon local, contextual information about social values, religious beliefs, symbolic codes, and historical constructions to illuminate the significance of a dance event’ (Sklar, 1991: 6). Fieldwork ‘connects an important personal experience with a general field of knowledge’ (Hastrup, 1992: 117). For this research, fieldwork provided the opportunity to acquire first-hand experience to build a new perspective of cultural understanding through an ethnography based on the embodiment, utilising an emic approach.

The emic approach aims to get the insiders' perspective on culture to provide an in-depth understanding of cultural preferences relying on findings from ethnographic immersion and observation. When emics are incorporated into cross-cultural research, they help to reflect local theories and nuanced practices of cultures. Nevertheless, they can be biased as they rely on researchers' interpretations (Zhu and Bargiela-Chiappini, 2013) because ‘cultural background influences what and how one perceives and interprets’ (Sklar, 1991: 8). For instance, most Taiko studies have been done within the field of ethnomusicology by Asian-American authors. Some have done fieldwork in Japan, but others have focused on Japanese American Taiko groups. Language has been an important factor for this, as many researchers, including myself, are not fluent in Japanese, which limits the access to literature about Taiko. This research intends to contribute to the scholarship about Taiko in Japan through an anthropological perspective and with a focus on embodiment.

3.1 Outlining the field

Before arriving in Japan, I had already established contact with some Taiko groups, but days before my arrival some of those contacts cancelled, and I became worried about that happening with others. From the previous information I had about Taiko groups in Japan, most of them were amateur and only gathered once a week. At first, that made me think about comparing and contrasting some of them, as I thought that just some hours a week would not lead to a deep understanding. Trying to find more groups, I browsed through Facebook group's webpages and found one called “Taiko community”, which determined the outcome of my research. One of the comments on the post I wrote led me to a woman named Mizuho Zako, a professional Taiko player of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko. She became my

main contact person throughout my whole fieldwork experience. Being able to visit a group several days a week changed my perspective of the fieldwork, however, when I arrived in Japan, I had some appointments already made with other groups. Nevertheless, after my first visit to Oedo Sukeroku Taiko, I decided that I would focus on them. Not only were they historically important, but they were very welcoming, supporting, and my main contact was a fluent English speaker. The only disadvantage was that they did not allow me to record any classes.

My research question was re-elaborated several times throughout my fieldwork. Some months after coming back from Japan, I went to a performance and workshop of a group called *Wadaiko Makoto* in Paris. This experience influenced my perception about the issues of transmission related to Oedo Sukeroku Taiko. The leader of the French group had performed with Oedo Sukeroku Taiko for approximately ten years. Later, she started her own group in France with the recognition of Master Seido Kobayashi. Even though it was just for some hours, my experience observing the activities of this group contributed to my reflective process about transmission. The experience of the workshop made me wonder how the context and the principles of a community influenced the drumming practice. That is why, I decided to use the theories of situated learning and communities of practice coined by Lave and Wenger (1991), because they consider learning as a sociocultural process co-constructed by the nature of persons, the activity and the environment.

3.1.2 Overview of the communities encountered in the field

In order to elaborate on the roles and my positioning as a researcher during my fieldwork, I established two different "fields". The first was an extended one that included all the activities and groups I visited, even if they were not part of my final research concern. The second one was just Oedo Sukeroku Taiko.

In total, my fieldwork was divided into five periods. During the first one, from June 23rd to July 12th, I stayed in Tokyo, observing the classes of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko. During that period, I also went to *Ome Sogo High School*⁷. This school had a Taiko team that I had planned to visit before meeting Oedo Sukeroku Taiko. The school was located on the outskirts of Tokyo, so the environment was much less

⁷ According to one interviewee, this high school has a Taiko team that has made it to the National Taiko Contest for 25 years. For this Contest, there is only one representative team from each of the prefectures, and two from Tokyo.

frantic than in central Tokyo. In the high school, the Taiko team was preparing for its main annual concert, so during my visits, I went to the previous rehearsals, and I also went to the performance. The team included students from the three grades of the school, ten to fifteen students per grade. The Taiko team is one of the many clubs that the school has⁸. The main motivation for the students to join is because it is fun, and they can spend time with their friends. The dedication to the team was outstanding. By the time of my visit, they had two-hour rehearsals from Tuesday to Fridays, and during the weekends, their practice lasted five hours. Besides, during the weekdays, they ran as a team for almost one hour during the mornings, following the *Kodo* model⁹.

The most surprising thing for me to observe was the absence of teachers during their practices. Even without supervision, the students were very organised and punctual, and everyone seemed to know what they were expected to do at any given time. The transmission system of the school reflected an apprenticeship scheme that is found in many manifestations of Japanese culture. As part of their rehearsals, the students spent time giving feedback. Anyone could express their opinion in a very organised and attentive way. There was a different leader for each one of the pieces they rehearsed. The students video-recorded all their rehearsals for later review. One day on the week before the concert, they had a guest teacher who focused on correcting their posture and movements, but also emphasised their gestures and expressiveness. The experience in the high school, as well as the short visit to an elementary school, which had a small group of students rehearsing for a Taiko presentation in a summer festival, helped me to understand how Taiko is addressed in Japanese schools nowadays.

⁸ In Japanese schools, a considerable amount of time is spent in extracurricular activities and are not really considered “extra”. In fact, there is a lack of terminology distinguishing “academic” from “nonacademic” activities. They are used for developing self-discipline, work ethics, perseverance, motivation, and a will to learn (Sato, 2003). Belonging to a club is taken into account in the student's admission in college. Entering to a good college determines the future job opportunities that the students will have.

⁹ Running was part of the training of *Ondekoza*, and afterwards of *Kodo* (Bender, 2016). Some other groups have integrated this activity as part of their Taiko training.



Figure 2. Final rehearsal of *Ome Sogo High School* (González, 2019).



Figure 3. Performance of *Ome Sogo High School* (González, 2019).

My second period of fieldwork was from July 13th to the 20th. During that time, I went to Miyagi (see *Appendix II* for a map of the places). I went there because my original plan included a comparison of Taiko with other forms of traditional drumming which are found in traditional Japanese performative arts. In Miyagi, I had a contact who knew some traditional groups, so, I could attend the rehearsals of *Youno Kagura*¹⁰, and I had interviews with the members of *Uguisawa Yatsushika Odori Hozonkai*¹¹, a traditional dance group, and with Takahiro Sato, leader of *Nakano Kagura*. The town that I visited was in a rural area, surrounded by mountains and valleys. The practitioners of the different groups had other professions and practised their art mainly as a hobby, but with a great sense of responsibility towards the preservation of it. All the groups mentioned how these practices were taught in schools when they were young, which is not happening anymore. In all cases, they recalled how, back in the days, the groups were only open to local men, which started to change after the Second World War, when people left their towns. Then, the artistic groups began to cooperate with each other and started to accept in the groups whoever was interested, regardless of gender, age, or place of origin.

¹⁰ Traditional art form that refers to ‘music for *Shinto* functions or formal parts of ceremonies at local shrines (*mi-kagura*), and music that accompanies *Shinto* festivals (*sato-kagura*) conducted at important seasonal moments in the agricultural cycle’ (Bender, 2016: 31).

¹¹ Deer dance preservation group.



Figure 4. Props used by *Uguisawa Yatsushika Odori Hozonkai* (González, 2019).



Figure 5. Masks used by *Nakano Kagura* (González, 2019).

Nowadays, they mentioned that it was hard to have new people interested in learning their art forms. In this area, there are few schools left because a lot of people have moved to bigger cities, so the participants have been trying to transmit the practices to their children or young relatives. They fear, however, the disappearance of the traditions. They also said that occasionally, they have been funded by the government or some private organisations, but they do not have ongoing support. Additionally, they mentioned that they have started to make modifications to the performances, in order to make them more appealing and understandable to contemporary audiences that are not used to these art forms anymore. My experience with these groups provided me with an understanding of the context of the traditional arts in Japan and helped me notice the difference between traditional Japanese performance arts and Taiko. After visiting Miyagi, I came back to Tokyo and stayed there from July 21st to the 26th. During this period, I was only focused on Oedo Sukeroku Taiko.



Figure 6. *Iwami Ryujin Daiko* performance in the *Gaina Festival* in Tottori (González, 2019).

Next, I went to Tottori prefecture, in the west of Japan, from July 27th to August 1st because I had made the compromise of visiting an amateur Taiko group that was performing in a summer festival. Besides the performance, I also went to the rehearsal of another amateur group. Tottori is a small, peaceful city close to the coast, so the way of life is more relaxed than in the city. It is not a touristic place despite being by the seashore, which reflected the Japanese lifestyle out of the main cities. From the two amateur Taiko groups that I visited, I discovered that they thought of themselves as creative groups, even though they copied repertoire from other groups from videos. They did not practice basic exercises. They only worked on the pieces that they would be performing, either copying or composing. One of the groups had mainly female participants and the leader, a man, mentioned that it was harder for men to join because of their job responsibilities. Despite having a leader, it was mentioned in both groups that they did not have hierarchies and that everyone collaborated with the composition of new pieces. They mainly played because it was a fun activity for them, without worrying much about their audience. Because the participants joined the group after their workday, they were flexible in terms of punctuality and assistance. Through conversations, I found out that in this area, Taiko was a common club in schools, but that the teachers merely copied pieces from videos to teach the students. The experience with them helped me understand how an amateur group differs from a professional one, and how Oedo Sukeroku Taiko was acknowledged among amateur groups. Finally, I stayed in Tokyo from August 2nd to the 18th just focused on Oedo Sukeroku Taiko.

3.2 A self-reflexive ethnographic account

Regardless of the places I was visiting, I always needed to be aware of cross-cultural differences that could affect the way I was perceived in the field. I have been to Japan before, and I have worked in a Japanese environment, so I had an idea of the degrees of politeness and respect expected in the Japanese culture. I had previous basic knowledge of Japanese, which allowed me to introduce myself and make small talk. Even if my skills of the language were basic, there were very helpful to establish a better rapport. Trying to communicate in Japanese, even if it was not eloquently, was appreciated by the people in the field. Besides, when I studied Japanese, I learned some relevant information about the culture, education, and cross-cultural misunderstandings that are common for foreigners in Japan. All

my previous experience related to Japan, including some short experience learning Japanese martial arts, proved to be very helpful during my fieldwork.

My position on the field ranged from being a distant observer to becoming a total participant. In the case of my visit to the elementary school, I just observed the rehearsal, and my only interaction was a brief introduction to the students when the class was finished. In the high school, I was a mere observer the day of their performance, but I had some more interaction during the rehearsals, as well as with the traditional performance groups and the amateur groups. My participation with Oedo Sukeroku Taiko was more active because I spent more time around them, which allowed me to be involved in the classes, but also in social moments, and eventually led me to be a full participant of some classes.

My roles as a researcher were also different according to the place. In my whole fieldwork, I was regarded as a foreign outsider, as a novice in Taiko drumming, and as a researcher. Except for Oedo Sukeroku Taiko, I think I was also considered a cultural tourist because my stay with the groups was very brief and focused on the Taiko practice. Nevertheless, with Oedo Sukeroku Taiko, as I had more time, I also played some other roles. For example, I was considered a dancer because there was a moment when Mizuho, my contact person in the group and former dancer, told me that when she met me, she thought I wanted to make a choreography using Taiko. Also, there were times when she talked about dance-related topics, and she considered my dance skills when she was teaching me. Finally, I became a student of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko, which was one of the most relevant roles I had during my fieldwork that will be described in the next chapter. Within that description, I will also mention a brief moment when I was considered an insider.

3.3 Methods and materials

Even before I decided that my field would be Oedo Sukeroku Taiko, I already had committed myself to visit and interview some other groups. The outcome of those visits were pictures, videos and interviews, which have information about the transmission of Taiko and traditional Japanese performance arts, and I kept writing fieldnotes through all of the places.

Regarding Oedo Sukeroku Taiko, I was doing participant observation of the classes and activities in the studio, as well as in social activities outside the studio, including a summer festival. I took fieldnotes

from the 22 classes I observed. I also had a fieldwork diary to keep track of other actions of the day, as well as of my own reflections. I had two interviews that were video recorded and then transcribed. I also had video recordings of the festival, as well as photographs. Most of the pictures were from the festival, and I had a few from the classes. The videos were also from the festival, except for the two interviews, which were video recorded. The interviews were transcribed for further analysis. My private lesson was audio-recorded and transcribed. Structuring the fieldwork material helped me to have a better understanding of the whole ethnographic experience.

Because I was always forbidden to video record, and I was only allowed to audio-record my private class, my notes were very important, as they were my only source of information from the sessions. The reason why I could not record is related to ownership and rights issues that have arisen due to the popularization of the group in the United States, where many groups have assumed that some of the signature pieces of the group are of public domain. That was why in 1999, during the Taiko Conference in Los Angeles, Seiichi Tanaka, presented a letter where Seido Kobayashi requested that the groups that were playing the repertoire of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko without permission stop doing so. The letter explained that if any North American Taiko group wanted to play their repertoire, they needed to contact Seiichi Tanaka to request permission. Groups that have contacted Oedo Sukeroku Taiko directly are usually scolded for breach of protocol. Groups need to request permission because Oedo Sukeroku Taiko expects them to show they can perform the material according to their high-level standards. Besides, each group is responsible for informing Oedo Sukeroku Taiko each time they wish to perform their material, and they are expected to pay royalties for its use, including the usage of the slant stand¹². According to this letter, if a performer is authorized to play the repertoire of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko, they can teach it to the students in their own Taiko group in order to perform the repertoire. Those students, however, do not inherit the ability to play or teach the repertoire if they leave the authorized performers' Taiko group, and they would have to get authorization for themselves to play the repertoire (Leong, 1999). 'The monetary element of Kobayashi's request was perhaps the most shocking to American performers, but it is not something unheard of in Japan' (Pachter, 2013:

¹² In Japan, Oedo Sukeroku Taiko had been granted two "design patents" on stands. One is for the slant stand, and the other one is for the Sukeroku's *odaiko* stand. Both stands were invented by Seiko Kobayashi, the older brother of Seido, but the patent listed the inventor as Seido Kobayashi. The validity of the patent expired in 2003. In Japan, in the 1970s and 1980s, this style was unique to Sukeroku Taiko, and even nowadays, it is rare to find in Japan a group using these stands (Leong, 1999).

360). Nevertheless, there were no legal consequences after the letter, and Oedo Sukeroku Taiko has not received royalties from American groups.

This controversy caused several discussions among the North American Taiko community, as it raised concerns about ownership, rights, tradition and lineage, as well as the cross-cultural relationship between North American and Japanese Taiko. As a consequence, some groups started using vertical stands instead of the slant ones (Wong, 2004). Besides, some groups have retired the pieces of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko from their repertoire (Kobayashi, 2006). Being aware that the group do not want their pieces or material from their classes to be reproduced without their authorisation, I decided not to use any sort of notation for this Dissertation. I believe it would be against the desires of the group, who trusted me to do my fieldwork with them, for me to produce any kind of score that could be used without their permission.

In summary, during the period of my research in Japan, the methods I used to collect material with Oedo Sukeroku Taiko were participant observation, having interviews with some of the teachers of the group, pictures and videos of the festival where the group participated and taking fieldnotes. My fieldnotes were particularly important because I was not allowed to record any of the classes, so they were the main source of information. After reformulating my research question based on my experiences on the field, through the analysis of the material, especially from my fieldnotes, I aimed to identify how the principles of tradition and innovation of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko were embodied in their transmission practices. In order to answer that interrogation, I used the theoretical framework of "communities of practice" to analyse the material gathered from the field.

Chapter 4: Oedo Sukeroku Taiko: An Ethnographic Account

4.1 Description of the setting

The Taiko studio was located near the electronic shopping area of Akihabara in Tokyo, once out of the crowded streets of the area. There was a buzzer at the entrance that I always used before going in, but during class time, the door always remained open. Most times, Yuriko, the wife of Seido Kobayashi, the leader of the group, was welcoming whoever entered the studio. She used to be a traditional dance master and currently is the manager of the group. She was usually working in a desk in the hallway behind the door. This corridor was also used by the men when they arrived from work to change their clothes. There was a table on the right side of the hallway where people could place their belongings, and they had some hangers in the edges of a cabinet ready for the students to use.

The corridor was short, just a couple of meters long. In the end, there was a space that had multiple functions, and where most social interactions took place. There was a table in the middle, usually with some snacks in the centre. A TV and all sort of video players were on the back wall. On the left side, there was a small kitchenette, because the teachers and the manager used to have dinner in the studio, usually taking turns while someone else was teaching. There was also a small toilet. When women arrived, they could open a door in the ceiling to enter an attic that was used as storage and as a women's changing room. In the right wall, there was a door that led to an outside staircase. In the door, in a Japanese style with wooden tablets, there was the schedule of the classes, as well as the names of the students of each class. The studio was located just beneath some subway railways, so it became very noisy whenever the door was opened. The classroom was on the bottom floor. It had a double door to reduce the noise coming in and out. Once inside, the classroom had a concrete floor. In one of the larger walls, there was a whiteboard, that was not frequently used, and a mirror which only covered the upper half of that side of the wall. All the walls had grey curtains that covered the noise-isolation material placed on the walls. There was a clock in each of the smaller walls, that reflected the importance of punctuality in Japan. Usually, every class started with eight *chu-daikos* placed in two lines of four in the middle of the room. At the back, there was an *odaiko*, some speakers and an audio player.

The classroom was small. It would not have been possible to have more drums in it. That was the reason why there could not be more than eight students per class. Nevertheless, sometimes there were some extra students in the classroom, because students were welcomed and encouraged as observers of any of the classes. In those cases, they would use the *odaiko* at the beginning of the session, when all the students played in a drum. The visitors or students not belonging to that class would just watch. Sometimes, however, this felt like a dangerous thing to do. During my fieldwork, several times, I thought I would get hit by the *bachis* when the students stretched their arms because there was not enough space between them and me. Fortunately, this never happened.



Figure 7. The classroom at the studio of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko (González, 2019).

During my fieldwork, a usual day would be arriving at the studio and making some small talk with the manager and the students before they went downstairs for the class. Normally, I was offered tea or coffee, which I managed to learn to reject politely because, in most cases, I was unable to finish it before the class started. Once the students noticed there were only some minutes left before the class, even if the teacher was not going to the classroom yet, they went downstairs to be ready for the moment the teacher arrived. Most of the times, that was the moment when I also went to the classroom, unless I was having a conversation with any of the teachers or the manager. In those cases, I waited for the teacher of the class to go to the classroom. I always left most of my belongings upstairs in the table where students placed their things, so when it was class time, I only took my notebook and a pen, as there was no space for belongings in the classroom. Once there, I would remain as close to the wall as

possible to avoid getting hit. In the beginning, the teachers told me where was the best place to stand according to the piece they were rehearsing, but as time went by and I was able to recognize what they were doing next, I started to place myself in the safest and least obstructing place. There was almost no talking between the students and me, and even among them, there was no chatting once the class started. Nevertheless, they always greeted me and also said thank you to me after saying thank you to the teacher when the class ended.

Depending on the day of the week, sometimes there were empty slots of time between classes. During those breaks, I remained in the waiting space upstairs. Those moments were important because it was the time when I could have conversations with the teachers or students. I also could watch how students and teachers interacted among them. Whenever I was in the studio, I never missed a class, except for one day when I stayed upstairs having dinner with Mizuho and the manager. That occasion was very significant as I had more time to talk to them and get information about the group, while building a closer relationship with them. I recall that during the conversation I was asked my opinion about the group, which I answered as honestly yet cautious as possible, and I remember they liked what I told them, which I think made them trust me more.

4.2 Taiko classes

There were three regular teachers in the studio. One was the Master Seido Kobayashi, the founder member of the group. Another one was Mizuho Zako, my contact person who is a fluent English speaker, so I got most of the information about the group through her. Another teacher was Masashi Itohara, who is the current main composer of the group. There were always at least two teachers in the studio. On some occasions, when two of the regular teachers could not be present because they had events during class time, two other young performers of the group would support the delivery of the lessons.

The students ranged from 10 to over 80 years old. In some cases, they were accommodated in groups according to their age or skill. For example, there was a group with students from the same high school, another advanced group with only young members, and another group of seniors. This last group was the only one where most members were men. In the rest of the groups, most students were women, and

there was one group with women only. There were ten different groups regularly, but sometimes they organised some special sessions for a specific event like the *Bon-odori* festival or for foreigners. Private classes were also arranged by request of current students, or sometimes by visitors coming from outside of Tokyo.

The classes lasted one hour and a half. On Tuesdays, there were two classes, both taught by Master Seido Kobayashi. On Thursdays, Mizuho was in charge of the only class. Masashi was the teacher of the two sessions delivered on Fridays. Saturdays were the busiest days with five classes, three of them taught by Masashi and the rest by Seido Kobayashi. This was the regular schedule. Even during bank holidays, the classes were never cancelled.

The teachers always wore trainers, jogging bottoms and Oedo Sukeroku Taiko t-shirts. Occasionally, they also wore sweatshirts as the air conditioner inside the classroom was quite strong. The students wore a similar attire. Nevertheless, some students used only socks instead of shoes. Other students wore *tabis*¹³, and just a few students stayed barefoot. In the classes with younger students, most of them wore loose shorts instead of jogging bottoms. The t-shirts most students wore were either of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko, or sometimes of other Taiko groups or events, or other sports events of their school. In the hottest days of summer, they also wore small towels or handkerchiefs on their necks because even with the strong air conditioner, it got very hot inside the classroom.

Every time, the beginning of the class was marked by the teacher saying *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*¹⁴, and the students answering using the same wording. Most classes followed a certain structure. First, the lessons started with the practice of some basic exercises. These exercises could vary from only one to around three, but sometimes they repeated them several times. Then they would practice some of the pieces. The students would arrange the taiko formation according to each piece, and in some cases, they would take out some other drums like *shime-daikos* or *ootzusumis*. First, usually, they would play the whole piece once, then the teacher would give some corrections, and the students would rehearse

¹³ Two-toed footwear with the big toe separated from the rest, regularly made of cotton with rubber soles, that fit the foot very close, like mittens. They do not have heel or arch support, providing a solid contact with the ground (Wong, 2019). They are commonly used in martial arts and traditional performing arts.

¹⁴ Japanese phrase used in different contexts. It is usually used in introductions meaning “please, treat me kindly” or “please, accept me”. In this context, it is used as a greeting before the class.

specific parts of the song. Next, they would play the whole piece one more time. Depending on the group, they would practice from one to three pieces each class. The classes always ended with the teacher saying *otsukaresama deshita*¹⁵ and the students answering *arigato gozaimashita*¹⁶. At the end of the class, the students placed the drums back to two lines, as they were found at the beginning of the lesson. Some students recorded the classes to practice at home. Some used just audio recorders which they turned on at the beginning of the session. A few others brought video cameras or used a flexible tripod to place their phones on the curtain racks. All students were allowed to do this for their individual practice, but usually, only one or two persons per class did so.

During some of the classes that I observed, the students were preparing for the *Obon* festival where the group has participated for many years, because besides the classes, the group has some events and performances throughout the year. Some of those events are intensive workshops, the end of year concert, and other smaller performances either of the professional group or of the students' groups, including presentations in Taiko festivals. They have had some international tours too. One of their main events is the annual participation on the *Obon* festival that I could witness. Their activities during the festival will be described in the next section.

4.3 The summer festival

In Japan, during summer, *Obon* is celebrated. *Obon* is a Buddhist tradition to honour the ancestors through festivals all across Japan. It starts in mid-July and ends in mid-August. In those festivals, *Bon-odori*, a folk dance performed to welcome the spirit of the ancestors, is danced to recorded *Bon* music accompanied by a Japanese drum player. *Bon-Odori* is usually performed in a circular formation around the *yagura*, a drum stand where the main drum is placed. Seido Kobayashi and the other three founders of what was originally called *O Edo Sukeroku Kai* were outstanding *Bon* music players. Nowadays, Oedo Sukeroku Taiko participates in a summer festival to remember the origins of the group, and to give the students an opportunity to perform.

¹⁵ Japanese phrase usually used after the completion of a performance, a task or a workday. It can be translated as “thank you for your hard work”.

¹⁶ Thank you very much.



Figure 8. Participation of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko in the *Tsukiji Festival* (González, 2019).

The festival they have been joining for years is outside a temple called Tsukiji. In 2019, it was from July 31st to August 3rd, just in the middle of my fieldwork. During this festival, before the *Bon-odori* started, they performed what they call *Bon-daiko*. The *Bon-daiko* is constituted by a series of patterns in *Sukeroku style* that match the rhythm of the music played for the *Bon-odori*. During this time, the teachers of the school took turns to play the main drum in the centre, and to play the *atarigane* besides the main drummer. The students took turns to play the *Bon-daiko* on the rest of the drums placed around the *yagura*. Both teachers and students wore a *hachimaki*¹⁷ and an Oedo Sukeroku Taiko *happi*¹⁸ with an *obi*¹⁹ to keep it closed. The teachers and most students wore *tabis* and black leggings, while some students, especially the youngest ones, wore sandals and shorts.

¹⁷ Headband used to keep the sweat off the face and worn as a costume accessory in festivals (Endo, 1999).

¹⁸ Japanese loose cotton jacket with wide sleeves, worn over the rest of the clothing (Wong, 2019).

¹⁹ Sash worn with traditional Japanese clothing.



Figure 9. Oedo Sukeroku Taiko *happi* (González, 2019).

Each day of the Festival, after the first slot of *Bon-daiko*, there was a presentation of the students of the group. After the performance of one of the pieces, the *Bon-daiko* continued, and the *Bon-Odori* started, so the people made a circle surrounding the drums and danced around them. Some *Bon-Odori* dancers took place around the main drum in the *yagura*. These dancers were wearing *yukatas*, and they were making the steps that the rest of the people on the ground floor followed. The Master's wife was part of the *Bon-Odori* dancers that were in the main circle. After a while, there was another break for a performance of another piece of the group. All the performances were by the students, except for the second presentation on the last day of the Festival, which was performed by the professional members of the group. After the second interval of the group, the *Bon-Odori* continued without the students playing anymore. The only drum left was the one in the *yagura*, who accompanied the recorded music. At this moment, other drummers that were not from the group were the ones playing the taiko.

One remarkable aspect of the Festival's performances by the students was the selection of the ones that would perform some of the repertoire pieces during the interludes of the *Bon-odori*. While I was observing these presentations, I could not remember watching those students rehearsing together in the studio. I thought I had somehow missed some classes, so I asked about this once the regular activities in the studio had restarted. It turned out that these groups of students never rehearsed together before the Festival. For this event, the teachers decided the pieces that were going to be played. Afterwards, they placed a sheet of paper where students wrote their names if they wanted to volunteer for any of those pieces. Then, one of the teachers made the selection from the students that had volunteered, according to their skills and regardless of the group they usually belonged to. On the day of the Festival,

the students that would play together only practised "singing" the song using the *kuchi-shoga* system, and walked-through the performance space, but they did not rehearse playing the drums together not even once before the presentation. It would not have been possible to guess by the audience that the players had never rehearsed together because their performance was absolutely synchronised.

Around the plaza of the temple, there were several stalls selling food and drinks. In one of the corners, there was a stall for the group where they had their costumes and their belongings. There, they promoted the group, especially after the performances, when people gathered to request information. The Festival is an opportunity to attract new students. While I was spending some time around the stall, I was told that the Master's wife made the design of the group's *happis*. The students only have the opportunity to wear them during this Festival and the main annual performance, which makes the Festival an important event for them. I also learned that there is a *Bon-odori* song composed on behalf of the group. This song was played several times during the evening. Besides, in the stall, they also exhibited some products like t-shirts, DVDs and CDs. Every year, they have a new t-shirt design for the Festival. This t-shirt commemorating the participation on the Festival was for sale in the studio before and after the Festival. The students that committed themselves to participate in the Festival for the four days, which was on a voluntary basis, received one of these t-shirts as a reward, which was highly appreciated for the students and conveyed a meaning of commitment to their community and their practice, which showed every time they wear it on the regular classes.

After the festival, the activities in the Taiko studio continued to be the regular ones even on the days that were national holidays, which corresponded to the main days of the *Obon* Festival. During those days, many offices were closed, and several people returned to their hometowns. Therefore, many students were absent. This was particularly significant for me because the pace in the Taiko studio became slower, which led to the day that I took a Taiko class for the first time.

4.4 Becoming a student

It was Wednesday, August 13th, and I had previously scheduled a private class and an interview with Mizuho Zako for that day. When I arrived at the Taiko studio, a class for *Airbnb*²⁰ “students” was just finishing. Mizuho conducted a class in English for these “students” only once or twice a month when the activities of the group slowed down, so this day instead of arriving at a studio full of Japanese people, I entered a room full of foreigners. At that moment, I was introduced as a researcher that had been with the group for some weeks, so suddenly my position was more of an insider, and in some previous comments before my private class, once they were gone, Mizuho told me that first, she thought that I could join the *Airbnb* class, but that then she thought that I should learn something different, and have my own private class.

Before my class started, I asked if I could record this time because as a researcher, I could not record the classes. I was told I could audio record, but I could not take video. I was back to be an outsider because the regular students are allowed to take video whenever they want. Once the class started, the first thing that she explained to me was the basic grip of the *bachis* and how the strikes come from the movement of the wrist. She explained that the hands should remain relaxed but not too open to lose the grip and that the *bachis* should be held approximately three centimetres from the edge. Next, she explained to me the position of the legs and the distance I should place myself from the drum.

After practising some strokes, she explained how the hands should relax after every stroke and how the arms should never go so backwards that you lose the sight of them, also how the energy for the strokes should come from the feet and then go throughout the body. Besides, she explained that the volume of the strokes depended on the speed of the movements, as well as the strength placed in the wrist. Also, she highlighted the importance of training more the left arm as it tends to be weaker for the right-handed people like me. When the session started, the first thing she asked was if I was right-handed without giving any further explanation, which came clear at this moment of the class. She also explained that the first thing a student has to learn is to stop the *bachis* just above the drum right after striking, which should happen without using one's strength but taking good timing and having a good

²⁰ In the *Airbnb* website, there is a section which is called “Experiences” where tourists can book activities when they are travelling.

of grip of the *bachi*, which will make it stop naturally. She added that to grasp this timing and feeling, it can take more than three years of practice and that it is easier to learn phrases and rhythms than to control the *bachi*, so even advanced students need to practice basic movements from time to time.

When we were almost in the middle of the class, she told me that learning the basic technique takes years of practice, and then she suggested to spend the rest of the time teaching me the *Bon-daiko*, which was performed in the Festival. She started to teach me those patterns using *kuchi-shoga*, the system of phonetic representation of the drum sounds, commonly used for the transmission of Taiko. While I was learning and practising the patterns, she kept making some corrections about the shape of the arms, the position of the hands and the qualities of the strokes. Also, because as a dancer she thought it would be easier for me, she showed me the variations of one of the patterns that instead of having a couple of strikes it had a big circular movement of the right arm. Once I was able to follow her through the patterns, she spent the last minutes of the class explaining details about the basic technique that she had shown at the beginning.

After the class, I interviewed her. Then she mentioned that the *Bon-daiko* that she had just taught me is what students usually learn first, so even if they start taking classes in April, by August, when the summer festival happens, they are able to perform it. Once the interview was over, we went upstairs to the common area where students and teachers waited before their classes. Master Seido Kobayashi, was there, and Mizuho told him that I just had my class and that I had learned the *Bon-daiko*. Unexpectedly, he invited me to take the next group class, which he was teaching. I was warned that I would not receive much attention or feedback as he needed to pay attention to the other students, but I was told that I could join and try to follow.

Therefore, I went back to the classroom. By that time, even though I had been observing many classes, I was not entirely sure about the structure of the basic exercises that the students practised at the beginning of every class. At that moment, the Master explained to me the patterns of the drills for me to follow. After we started doing those exercises, the Master made a pause to correct one of the students, and he also corrected the way I was gripping the *bachi*, which was the only moment he corrected me. After the basic exercises, they started to rehearse a piece called *Mikoshi*, so the Master explained to me one of the easiest patterns that were repeated throughout the song. He told me to continue playing the

pattern even when they were playing something more complex. I remembered, however, that during the interview with Mizuho, she mentioned how important was the eagerness of the student to learn even just by copying, and not only waiting for the things to be explained. Therefore, I tried my best, and I was able to follow some other patterns that appeared in the song.

The class ended, but I stayed in the classroom, waiting for the next students to come. When they arrived, there were two empty drums, so the Master invited me to join again. The structure of the class was the same. First, they practised the basic exercises, which, this time, were not explained to me. Then they rehearsed *Mikoshi* again, so I could play the patterns I had learnt in the previous class, but then they started to practice another piece, and I was told just to watch. Each of the group classes lasted one hour and a half, and my private class was one hour long, so at the end of my first day as Taiko student, I had been playing for almost four hours. When I arrived home, my arms felt very tired, and I needed to use both hands to grab a glass of water, but I was feeling pleased with my experience that day, and I remember it as being one of the most memorable days of my fieldwork. In the next chapter, I will present a deeper analysis of my experience in the field, focusing in the transmission practices and principles I could observe that the group followed, even if they did not explicitly acknowledge having.

Chapter 5: Transmission principles and practices of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko

Lave and Wenger (1991) define a community of practice as a sociocultural learning system where membership to a group implies sharing interests and goals through regular practice. Oedo Sukeroku Taiko is an example of a community of practice. Therefore, this theory was a useful tool to analyse the elements embedded in the transmission practices of the group. According to Wenger (1999), there are three dimensions of the practice that define a community. The first one is mutual engagement which is exemplified in the way members relate to each other, the bonds created through social activities, the sense of belonging, and the “family” feeling that permeates the group. The second dimension is the sharing of a joint enterprise which gives purpose to the community and its members as individuals, which in this case would be the Taiko practice itself. The third dimension is a shared repertoire which includes the history of the practice, its artefacts, actions, vocabulary, routines, gestures, symbols, rules, policies, and goals. The history of the group, its intricate relationship with American groups, the use of the drums, the repertoire, the *kuchi-shoga*, the *kakegoe*²¹ and the expected behaviours related to the classes are elements that belong to this third dimension. Besides the aspects previously mentioned, Wenger (1999) establishes some indicators of the formation of a community of practice that are also observable in the Taiko group. For example, the existence of sustained mutual relationships, the absence of introductory preambles in conversations as if these interactions were an ongoing process; knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to the practice; inside jokes, shared stories and discourses.

Furthermore, the theory of communities of practice regards learning as a situated sociocultural process that is constructed between the persons, the activity and the environment, where the practice acquires meaning as a part of a broader system. That is the reason why beliefs, values, and costumes that are part of the Japanese culture, and that were addressed in section 2.4 play a relevant role in the transmission practices of the group, even if they are not explicitly considered part of the teaching/learning process. As Leong recalls, the music of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko ‘is deeply rooted in Japanese musical tradition and culture, [so] they would like players to live, eat and breath in Japan to properly learn and appreciate the basis of [their] music’ (Leong, 1999). The cultural elements which

²¹ Vocal patterns that are shouted as part of the pieces, either in a prescribed way or spontaneously.

are absent outside Japan increase the difference between Oedo Sukeroku Taiko and other groups, even if these other groups try to follow the style, teaching practices and principles of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, in Paris, I had the opportunity of assisting to a *Sukeroku style* workshop. The information on the workshop was accurate, and the exercises that were practised were similar to the ones I have witnessed in Tokyo. I sensed, however, that something was missing in the way they played, even with all the years of practice that some of the students had. They were familiar with the style, they knew the technique and basic exercises, they played some of the repertoire of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko, and all of them have learned from a recognized teacher of the style. Even if everything seemed to be done “correctly”, I could perceive a difference between these students and the ones in Japan. The experience made me reflect on the components of the transmission of this practice, as aspects that included not only the drumming techniques, but also the way they were transmitted and the principles that permeated the whole teaching and learning processes.

This chapter represents the results of the analysis of the material that I collected during the fieldwork to see the relation between the principles of tradition and innovation of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko and their transmission practices. Consequently, the chapter is divided into two sections, one regarding the principles and the other about the transmission practices. Many elements, however, are related to both aspects. Therefore, this division will be used only for the organization of the material, but not to establish a division between the components of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko. As it will be shown, the physical, mental and spiritual aspects are intertwined and embodied into the characteristic drumming style of this group.

5.1 Tradition and innovation

Wong (2019) mentions how “the taiko spirit” manifests differently in each group. Groups outside Japan tend to be more explicit about their philosophy and identity as a group²². Through the ethnographic process, however, I had an approximation to the ideological principles of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko, which were manifested more subtly. In an interview with Seido Kobayashi, he mentioned that one

²² In the United States, the philosophy of many Taiko groups is explicit and codified, in some cases rooted in Confucianism or Buddhism. Besides, many groups refer to notions of nationality, gender, race and political ideology to define the identity of their group (Ahlgren, 2018; Wong, 2019).

fundamental aspect of the group regarded the perception of the audience. Their music should not just be entertaining, but it should be delivered with passion in order to impact and touch the audience. For this reason, they pay close attention to the setting of the stage for their performances because the placement of the drums can also affect the audience's perception. Even though teaching is one of the regular activities of the group, Master Seido Kobayashi highlighted that their main activity is not teaching but to create art through Taiko. Besides, they do not see the studio as a business, so they do not advertise themselves to get more students. They believe that if someone is interested in playing with them, that person will reach out, and then they will be eager to welcome the new student.

Another important difference between this group and the rest of amateur groups is that amateur groups only practice certain songs for their performance, but do not practice the basic techniques, which I could confirm through my experience with the amateur groups in Tottori. In Oedo Sukeroku Taiko, the practice of the basic techniques helps the students to learn the movements and the production of sounds with precision. As Bender also found, 'learning to play a particular style is a lifelong process, at the end of which one becomes not a generically competent taiko player but, rather, a specifically trained local performer' (Bender, 2016: 185). This resonates with the principles of the group, where learning is understood as a long process of knowledge acquisition through a certain teacher. The long process allows the students to get a deep understanding of the roots of the practice. On the other hand, some groups outside Japan are proud of learning and mixing different styles in order to create their own particular style, which in Japan would not be appreciated in the same way.

Oedo Sukeroku Taiko is perceived by its members, but also by outsiders as stricter than most Taiko groups. The elements that make it stricter are basic rules that are also usually followed in other kinds of Japanese traditions. In the group, there are some essential actions before and after each class like the salutation and greeting actions, that include bowing, as well as saying "*yoroshiku onegaishimasu*" at the beginning of the class and "*arigato gozaimashita*" at the end. According to the teachers of the group, this differentiates them from amateur groups, as it is a more formal way to frame the class experience similar to what is done in traditional arts. Nevertheless, these phrases are just expressed in words and with some bowing, but not through sitting in *seiza* and bowing all the way to the floor, like in some other Japanese art forms. Also, they require that the students call beforehand if they are going to be absent or late.

Another aspect that characterizes the group is the originality. Through their daily lives, the members of the group listen to various types of music, and they have embodied the essence of those styles which influences their compositions and improvisations. The focus of some of their repertoire relies on improvisation based on their techniques, that allow the player to express himself/herself. Regarding the compositions, Seido Kobayashi mentioned that sometimes the process starts with the creation of sound phrases, but that sometimes the inspiration and starting point is the movement. He added how nowadays it is very easy to copy material from the Internet, so many groups are reproducing their work but only on a superficial level. For example, the high school team I visited, as well as the amateur groups, mentioned how they learn some pieces from videos²³. The Master added that in their classes, regardless of the level, they try to encourage the students to create their own "solos". To achieve that, once students know a sound phrase, the teachers start suggesting them hints to incorporate movement that should reflect their own creation within the style. This process is gradual; and first, they teach examples for the students to learn how to jump or turn. The students should use these samples as inspiration for their creations. The main concert of the group occurs every December, and it is seen as an opportunity to motivate the students to showcase their creations. Even if they are not aiming to become professionals, the presentation gives students a goal that motivates them to raise their performance level. For this concert, the teachers decide what each student will play. The students, however, are always welcome to learn any of the roles of the piece. Nevertheless, in the advanced groups, which include students that have been playing for over ten years, they can decide among themselves which song to perform.

For a student to become a professional Taiko player, however, he/she cannot just copy. The student has to be able to create something new to reach a higher level as a performer. Creativity is the element that represents the change from a student to a professional. As a professional group, they aim to keep developing the practice within the frames and aesthetics of their style. The professional members of the group practised together two days a week. Sometimes they rehearsed for upcoming performances or used the time for the creation of new pieces. Besides, they had some time for individual practice throughout the week, and they also expended some time doing administrative work. Not all the

²³ Even though copying from videos happens inside and outside Japan, the members of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko resent it more when it happens outside Japan, reason why they have restricted the reproductions of most of their videos outside Japan in their *Youtube* channel.

members of the professional group taught. There were only three regular teachers, including the Master Seido Kobayashi, and two of the younger members were substitute teachers when the main ones were absent because of performances of the group. Even though the members of the group rejoiced with the increasing popularity of Taiko, they mentioned how the appearance of so many amateur groups represented a challenge for professionals. Sometimes there are more opportunities for amateur groups to perform as they have acquired a good performance level and are more affordable than professional ones. That is why most professional groups rely on their studios to have a more stable income.

Taiko does not strictly follow an *iemoto* system. In the group, however, the figure of Master Seido Kobayashi is highly respected. The other members of the group want to absorb the essence of his teachings, and they hope for the evolution and preservation of the style, but not in a static way just transmitting the previous repertoire. Instead, they want the style to keep evolving while maintaining his essence. For them, the only way to correctly preserve the practice is transmitting it face to face, through a long time with the same teacher, as it is done in the Japanese arts that follow the *iemoto* system. Regarding the repertoire, they always acknowledge the author of each composition and expect others to do the same. That is why, nowadays, when they give workshops for external people, they do not teach anymore the pieces that are part of their repertoire. They teach only their techniques in order to protect their repertoire, but also to give freedom to other groups to create their own material based on the *Sukeroku style*, which they hope to keep alive for future generations. According to some members of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko, outside Japan, some Taiko groups are using Japanese drums, but are not really creating music with a Japanese spirit, which they do not perceive as something wrong, as long as it is acknowledged. They think that groups outside Japan should have the experience of learning from Japanese teachers or of studying Taiko in Japan, at least for a while. This would prevent them from portraying an image of Japan based on stereotypes and misconceptions about Japanese identity. Besides, there is a spiritual aspect related to the practice. In Japan, the taiko has a spiritual connotation. It is a sacred instrument made with skin and wood that once were part of living beings, so when the performers play, they can still feel those energies, as well as the God or the spirit of the drum, which they can manifest through movement and sound. That is why the drums should always be treated carefully and respectfully. According to Seido Kobayashi, teaching is not only transmitting the physical and visible aspects of the practice but also the spiritual and the mental aspects that students aim to grasp through the lessons. Delivering these aspects from hands to hands is the way that something new

could be created. For example, Mizuho mentioned how even if she knows the pieces composed by Masashi, and she can demonstrate the sound patterns, the feeling of the phrases should be taught by the composer, which is the best way to transmit the practice.

The sense of belonging is also crucial in the group. Wong mentioned how ‘ideally, a taiko group feels like a family’ (Wong, 2019: 199). Even as an outsider, I could grasp a familiar atmosphere from the first time I went to the studio, which I did not feel in the other places I visited. Through my recurrent visits, I got to know that the manager of the group and the studio, Yuriko, is the wife of Seido Kobayashi. She was always kind and caring to all the students and me. She got together with the teachers for lunch every day as part of the professional group activities. Besides, during the evening, the teachers took turns to have dinner while someone else was teaching. That happened in the waiting area, so sometimes students were around, and there were always snacks, tea and water available for them. These details increased the familiar feeling for all the members of the community. Furthermore, the setting of the waiting area invited the students to hang out before, after and between classes. This implicitly encouraged conversations about the group, its members, and Taiko as a practice beyond the group. The classes were always punctual, and there was no chatting about things that were not related to the practice. Therefore, the space created outside the classroom but inside the studio played a relevant role in the relationship-building among students and in the spread of the discourses that conformed the group's identity.

A more utilitarian activity that students engage with is the packing of the drums into a van, whenever they have workshops or performances. The drums are heavy objects that require care and to be treated with respect. The students have to learn to carry and accommodate them quickly and without doing any damage to the drums or themselves.

Furthermore, Mizuho mentioned that, within the group, they know each other even more than their families. When playing, that was reflected in the way they synched with each other's *ma* or timing. In this context, *ma* also refers to the silence between the strokes, which in this style is often filled with movement. Because they knew each other's *ma*, and how it varies according to the occasion, they can feel each other and know when to strike. The skill of learning to perceive the other's *ma* is displayed

during the festival that was previously described, where students that do not regularly play together were able to deliver synchronised performances without rehearsing beforehand.

One moment that exemplified the sense of belonging to the group happened when the students were preparing for a performance. One of the students arrived with an injury on her wrist, which would not allow her to play the drums. Even knowing she would not be playing, she went to the class, and helped to time each of the pieces and the transitions between them. While this was happening, the Master, who was not teaching this class, entered the classroom. He brought a stick rattle shaker that she could play with the hand that was not injured. This action showed that even if she could not play, her presence was appreciated and her role as a member of the community prevailed above the ability to play.

Another activity that increased community engagement was the *nomikai*²⁴. A *nomikai* is an after-work drinking party that is part of the Japanese culture. I was invited to one in the first weeks of my fieldwork with the group taught by Mizuho. This was an opportunity for me to get to know more about those students, and it was an implicit way to be welcomed to their community. I could only join one of these gatherings. I figured, however, that this kind of activities were important within the group to create deeper bonds among its members, as well as to discuss issues concerning the group, their performances and principles, that would not have the time to be addressed as part of the regular class schedule. All the activities previously described were fundamental for the community bonding.

Even though gender issues are not the object of this research, gender is an element that needs to be at least briefly address to understand the perspective of the group on these matters. Through the different Taiko groups I visited, I noticed that most players were women. Most leaders, however, were men, except for the high school Taiko team, where leadership was distributed between boys and girls equally. According to the myth that is found in *Appendix III*, Taiko was originated by a goddess. Nevertheless, as Japanese society has been dominated by men, drumming practices, as well as other Japanese arts, have been mainly performed by men. Taiko, however, has been open to women, and nowadays, women are found in bigger numbers in most amateur groups and have almost equal participation in professional groups. One of the reasons, which was also mentioned by the leader of an amateur group in Tottori, is that women have more free time and fewer work responsibilities, so it is easier for them to join and

²⁴ For more information about the cultural implications of this practice see (Richard, 2018).

remain in a Taiko group. In Oedo Sukeroku Taiko, Mizuho mentioned that the role of Yuriko, Seido Kobayashi's wife, as manager of the group is very important²⁵. Also, that she has never experienced a difference as a Taiko performer herself, because she has even been able to play the *odaiko*, which has been perceived as a man's role for a long time and is still exclusive for men in some groups. Besides, she added that the students are taught equally, regardless of their gender. As studied by researchers Carol Mockros and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2014), in almost all fields where creativity is important, there has been a lack of recognition of noticeable women. Taiko is not the exception, even if gradually, women are assuming more leadership roles.

5.2 Transmission of embodied practices

According to members of the group, the biggest difference between Oedo Sukeroku Taiko and other groups is that they acquired their technique from the *Bon-daiko*, where in order to create an impact in the audience, they needed to develop not only the sound but also a lot of movement. Their characteristic style is manifested in the posture and the use of the body. In the *Sukeroku style*, the drums are placed on *naname* (slant) stands, where the 'centre of the drumhead [is] positioned at half the performer's height at a 45- to 60-degree angle' (Vogel, 2009: 70). Unlike other Taiko styles where the drums are placed in a vertical position, the slant stand dictates the asymmetrical form of the characteristic *kata* of the *Sukeroku style*. The position of the feet should be spread apart with the legs rotated outwards. The left leg should be bent, and the left foot placed approximately *the-measurement-of-a-bachi*²⁶ away from the drum. The right leg should remain straight, but both legs should be flexible to move. Like in Japanese martial arts, the centre of the bodyweight should be located in the lower abdomen. The whole body, from the tip of the toes to the crown of the head, should be engaged in every stroke. The arms should be used as a whip, keeping them flexible, and both arms should produce an equal sound with equal volume. The upper body should remain upright, with the shoulders aligned with the hips on the vertical plane. The *bachis* are like an extension of the body, and when performing competently, they remain aligned with the arm extending the line of the body. That is why in this group, they put a lot of

²⁵ 'Little research has explored how spouses influence the professional lives of eminent individuals. (...) Spouses, however, can be very helpful both at early and later, more prominent, stages of one's career. They can provide encouragement, emotional and financial support, and a peaceful home environment conducive to full concentration on professional goals' (Mockros and Csikszentmihalyi, 2014: 145), which is relevant in this case, considering that Yuriko is a former traditional dancer.

²⁶ The *bachis* are approximately 41 centimetres long. When the students need to confirm if they are standing in the right place, they put the stick on the floor to know where they should be standing.

effort in training the basic strokes, and sometimes they include more repetitions on the left arm, as most people are right-handed and as a consequence, their left arm is weaker.

To transmit the style's technique, Seido Kobayashi mentioned that the teachers of the group need to learn how to deliver a solid class, and how to raise the level of the students since they are beginners. As a teaching strategy, he mentioned how they give homework to all the students; the ones that make it progress faster. Nevertheless, for these students to stand out, they need to develop their creativity and motivation to keep continuously improving.

One important element of their teaching practices is that, unlike most groups, in Oedo Sukeroku Taiko all the students play on drums since they are beginners. There is no playing on tires within this group, which is a common practice in others, as it has been stated in previous research done inside and outside Japan, and I could verify through conversations at different stages of my fieldwork. Many groups use tires because they do not have enough drums, or because they want to reduce the noise. I believe that the use of drums from the start of the instruction as it happens in Oedo Sukeroku Taiko allows the development of a sensitivity towards sound production that otherwise, would not be possible.

When a student joins the community, they get one weekly lesson of one hour and a half. All students, however, are encouraged to observe all the classes. Learning through observing and copying is encouraged and expected. If there are free drums when they are watching, they might be allowed to join the class. This also happens when students missed their class and arrive at a different time to recover it. I could see that before the festival and the last weeks of my fieldwork, that were just before a summer workshop, more students arrived earlier or stayed later in order to audit more classes, and some others even went more than one day of the week to the studio. In the interview with Mizuho, she recalled how, when she was a student aiming to become a professional, she went to the studio three or four times per week.

The instruction process starts by teaching the students to play simple strokes, which lasts for around a year. Nevertheless, even the new students that join the group in April, when it is the beginning of the school year in Japan, are able to perform in the summer festival. For this event, they learn the *Bon-daiko*, which is what I also learnt in my private class. Once the festival happens, they go back to the

training of the basic techniques. In the first year, students also start learning by copying some of the solos included in the pieces. From the second or third years on, students are asked to create some original phrases because everyone is expected to look different in their solos and improvisations. To achieve that, they can use the material that they have previously learnt as a base. When they refer to the original creations by the students, they usually talk in terms of movement, because in most cases the music produced still follows the prescribed way, but the originality should be manifested in the movement. Concerning the repertoire, in the first year, students learn one piece of the group for the end of year concert. Nevertheless, for the students to learn the signature pieces of the group, it takes at least three years or even more, depending on their skills. Although they have scores, they do not use them, and students have to memorise the songs and be able to “sing” them using *kuchi-shoga*, because if the students are able to “sing” the pieces, then they can play them. For the advanced groups, it takes from two to three classes to learn a new song.

There were no beginner groups during the period of my fieldwork. I could, however, observe classes of various levels, where attention was paid to the development of different skills according to their proficiency. I was told that when new students arrive, the teachers tell them that if they want to move, first, they need to be able to produce a good sound. In the most advanced groups, where students have already learned the movement material, corrections were made about slight differences in the sound quality that, having no training as a musician, I could not perceive. Nevertheless, I could notice that the most advanced students had a greater engagement of the body while they were playing, which was visible through the rhythmic bouncing of the whole body that originated from the feet, and that was maintained while they were playing. The training of the group is usually focused on the perfection of the striking techniques and rhythm patterns. When students increase their level, they start learning the pieces with more intricate movements. Therefore, they turn the attention to the practice of these movements that might include jumping, turning or changing of places. Sometimes, the movements are practised in isolation from the rest of the piece, to be later incorporated when they have gotten enough competence on the moves.

Through the fieldwork, I kept a register of the corrections made by the teachers. Without aiming to make generalisations out of observations that occurred during a reduced period, I noticed some recurrent corrections that could reflect the more distinctive aspects of the group’s style. I noticed that

more than half of the corrections were about the movement. These included modifications of the stance, the use of the body weight, the placement of the centre of gravity, the position of the head, the relaxation of the arms and shoulders, the alignment of the sticks with the arms, the opening of the chest, the position of the feet, the movement of the arms without production of sound, the steps used for changing places, maintaining the flexion of the legs, and the timing of the movements. Besides, there were other corrections directed towards a modification of the movement or the position of the hands, wrists or arms, that as a result, would change the sound production which was the improvement goal. Regarding the sound, most of the corrections concerned the speed and the accentuation of the strokes, keeping a certain rhythm, and the qualities of the sound produced. Nevertheless, some of the corrections were related to the artistry of the practice, which included the facial expression, smiling, the directness of the gaze towards the drums or other players, the intention put into drumming, and the energy and quality of the *kakegoe*. All the elements previously mentioned were intrinsically intertwined within the practice and proved to be crucial for the delivery of an outstanding performance.

The corrections were delivered in different ways according to the moment of the class, and the group level. Sometimes once the students had started playing the basic exercise or the songs, the teachers paused the class to correct something specific, even if it was to only one student. There were times that they could repeat over and over only a segment of the piece and paused continuously to improve further details within the same fragment. These pauses were also an opportunity for the students to make questions, which otherwise would be difficult due to the constant sound of the drums. In many cases, the teachers showed through their example what they expected the students to do, but sometimes they gave short explanations or used metaphors to explain the idea they wanted to convey. Most times, the teachers played the drums striking on the rim to make the sound louder, which made it easier for the students to follow without being confused with all the other drums. Sometimes, they also touched the students to make corrections, such as the gripping of the *bachis*, the relaxation of the shoulders or the placement of the body weight. Because it was very noisy, there were times when the teachers just shouted basic words like "faster" or "stronger", and made gestures to remind the students about the opening of the chest, bringing the shoulders down, the gaze or the smile while they were playing. I noticed that in the least advanced groups, there were more verbal explanations, whereas, in the advanced groups, students used more peer-correction. When this happened, the teachers barely intervened, and most of the times, they only listened to the feedback that students gave to each other,

which was respected and taken into account for their improvement. The most experienced students offered more feedback to their peers. Nevertheless, everyone could express their opinions and give advice. Despite the concentration and the hard work teachers and students make to improve their practice, the atmosphere of the classes was of fun and enjoyment. Students usually laughed about their mistakes and struggles, and the teachers sometimes made jokes. Furthermore, especially when the students were playing their solos within the pieces, they used to smile spontaneously, showing their enjoyment of the practice.

During each class, I noticed that copying was a skill practised and encouraged as a means of improvement. In the interview with Mizuho Zako, she said that when students start learning pieces just by copying instead of waiting for the teacher to explain, it shows their eagerness to learn. She mentioned her own story learning one of the signature pieces of the group, which she learnt just by copying. She started to perform it when one day the Master asked if she could play the piece and she already knew it without having been formally taught. But besides copying, other elements are part of the learning process of Taiko, as Morin mentioned '(t)he transmission of most skills and dispositions (...) requires individual practice (often long and solitary); it takes place in a certain material context [and] it is helped by the observation of others' movements' (Morin, 2013: 230). These elements can be found in Oedo Sukeroku Taiko because the transmission takes place in the classroom where the students can observe each other, but also many of them record the class to practice on their own. The members of the professional team also have individual practice time as part of their regular activities. Despite transmission being a matter of observation and repetition, not of explicit teaching in apprenticeship communities like this one, verbal explanations aid the learning of elements that otherwise, would be out of reach (Morin, 2013). I could experience this when I took the first group class, and the Master explained to me the basic exercises. I have been observing many lessons by then, and I had an idea of the structure of the exercises, but it was until that moment, where I was verbally explained, that I understood the whole structure.

Besides the drumming techniques, the students also learn stage discipline. For example, for presentations, they rehearse the transitions between pieces that, in most cases, require the change of setting of the drums, which they learn to do quickly and silently, resulting in smooth transitions. They also rehearse the final greetings of their performance. These skills allow the students to deliver high-

quality presentations even before they are considered professionals. Nonetheless, one challenge that the teachers face in the advanced groups is that some students know the patterns like an equation but find it hard to be creative with the embodied material, which prevents their development as artists.

The teaching/learning techniques previously presented shape the bodies of the students in the style of the group, but also their minds and spirits. According to the principles of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko, for the embodiment of the style to happen, students should remain with the same group for an extended period. Only when students have a deep understanding of the practice manifested through their bodies, movements and sounds, they can show their creativity following the aesthetics of the group. This individual creation is a way for them to express their individuality as performers and represents a high level of proficiency in the practice, whether they become Taiko professionals or not.

Chapter 6: Discussion and conclusions

6.1 Discussion

Taiko is a performing art form in constant evolution and transformation, where the conjunction of bodies, sounds and movements preserve the feeling of traditional Japan. In Oedo Sukeroku Taiko, the Japanese concepts of tradition and innovation are embodied in their transmission practices and principles, as will be discussed in this chapter.

Previous literature has addressed some aspects that reflected my experience in the field; for instance, the apprenticeship system found in many groups, which is also encountered in traditional and folk performing arts, as well as instruction based on imitation, that relies on oral transmission (Vogel, 2009; Johnson, 2011; Bender, 2016). An aspect that belongs to an apprenticeship system is the relation between newcomers and old-timers. The incorporation of new members implies the replacement of the more experienced ones (Lave and Wenger, 1991), which was observed in Oedo Sukeroku Taiko by Endo (1999). He mentions how older members who retire because of the physical toll or economic reasons are replaced by young members eager to become professionals. Nevertheless, newcomers do not necessarily seek to change the practice more than established members do, because the continuity of it connects them to a history which they might be trying to incorporate as part of their own identity. In this kind of groups, there is a close relation between masters and apprentices, which confers legitimacy to the community (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999). These masters are also mentors and serve as teachers, friends, counsellors, and role models, providing support, nurturance, and guidance (Hooker *et al.*, 2014; Mockros and Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Nonetheless, a systematised group of peers and professional colleagues are essential in the transmission of knowledge within communities (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Hooker *et al.*, 2014). In Oedo Sukeroku Taiko, mentors are represented by the teachers, the professional players and the manager, but even they look up to the leader of the group Master Seido Kobayashi. When a new member joins the group, he/she is expected to be loyal to the community, but that is not the only reason why within the Taiko world, belonging to more than one group is often openly discouraged and even considered offensive. As Bender (2016) mentioned, joining a group implies adopting the training methods, repertoire, instrumentation, and

stage techniques that make that group distinctive and that conform its identity, so belonging to more than one group would have negative consequences in the embodiment of the practice.

In Japan, artistic pursuits are central to achieving mind-body unity through disciplined practice and mastery. Besides, in teaching environments, explicit verbal direction and conceptual understanding are intentionally avoided, as they may distract from a whole-body grasp of artistry that is gained only through experience (Powell, 2012a). That is why for learning Taiko, imitation and repetition are the preferred methods that would eventually allow the expression of individualities. Furthermore, learning Taiko echoes Japanese ideals of traditional education, through which traditions are passed on from one generation to another, and involves the principle of learning through the body (Creighton, 2008). For instance, the embodiment is manifested through *kata*, which can be perceived as the visual expression of sound (Powell, 2012a). Nevertheless, the embodiment of Taiko is also shown in the body through physical changes, such as blisters, callouses, a strengthening of the body, with special attention to the non-dominant arm; and occasional bruises that happen when the players hit themselves. These physical expressions also correspond to the level of proficiency of the performers. Advanced players would have callouses instead of blisters, and would not hit themselves anymore.

Even if some of the main characteristics of the *Sukeroku style* have been outlined in this text, it is worth mentioning how it is transmitted differently in *Sukeroku Daiko Hozonkai*, which is a preservation group whose leader was also a founder of *Sukeroku Daiko*. This comparison is possible because Bender (2016) studied with them during his fieldwork. This group has taken a different approach to the transmission of the *Sukeroku style*. Its members are devoted to the maintenance of the original repertoire of the group without creating any new compositions. According to Bender's experience, they do not have basic exercises. Corrections are made in an unspecific manner; the ideal form is never articulated, only demonstrated; experimentation is openly discouraged, and proficiency means embodying the inherited form through observation of more advanced players. They do not look to expand their technical competence but are continually refining their *kata* and movements. Because each song requires different playing positions, movements and rhythmic patterns are studied in isolation, and they are later combined in the order in which they appear on the pieces. Even if this group is dedicated to the preservation of the *Sukeroku style*, their approach is different as in Oedo Sukeroku Taiko. In both groups, however, the most common teaching method is showing the students

how the patterns should look and sound for them to copy. According to Ingold (2001), copying is a process of guided rediscovery that implies following in one's actions what other people do. Copying involves a mixture of imitation and improvisation because it takes place under guidance, but it generates knowledge that novices discover for themselves.

Another action fundamental for the *Sukeroku style* is repetition. According to researcher Jerri Daboo (2015), in training and rehearsing, repetition is used to generate change in the mind and the body. Repetition helps to deepen the engagement with the form over time, leading to greater physical abilities and stronger concentration. Through repetition, players embody the practice, and it becomes automatic, so they do not need to think about the elements of the technique and eventually, they are able to perform being in the present moment, so every repetition is actually different. Oedo Sukeroku Taiko members mentioned that every performance is unique because themselves as persons and performers are in constant evolution. The audience is also different, which also influences the group flow during the performance. The concept of group flow was used by scholar Keith Sawyer (2006) to refer to the state that sometimes groups reach when everything seems to happen smoothly. This state depends on the interaction among performers who can even anticipate what their fellow performers will do, allowing them to achieve synchrony and intersubjectivity without a conductor. This group flow can be exemplified in some Taiko performances; and in a Japanese context, this idea might be related to the concept of *ma*, described in section 2.4.2. Additionally, as mentioned by Sato (2003), Japanese people recognise the value of repetition because it is related to hard work, patience, dedication, and endurance, values that are highly estimated in Japanese culture. Furthermore, from this disciplined repetition, creativity can arise after the basics have been mastered.

Patcher (2013) mentions how tradition is not a static object, but something that is always evolving. Therefore, innovation is often considered to be an essential part of the continuation of a tradition. 'Contemporary taiko ensembles look to the future, emphasizing creativity, dynamism, and innovation, without ignoring what the past offers in the way of musical or visual inspiration' (Bender, 2010: 844). This corresponds to the idea that 'teaching tradition and promoting creativity should be viewed as the two sides of the same coin rather than isolated goals' (Matsunobu, 2019: 93). Tradition shapes bodies and artistic sensitivities from which creativity and individuality can be expressed. Therefore, embodiment through repetition and imitation does not lead to the repression of creativity and

individuality, elements that in some contemporary perspectives are often regarded as a matter of thinking rather than of embodiment (Matsunobu, 2019). Furthermore, Oedo Sukeroku Taiko's principle of creativity resembles the findings of researcher Hiromichi Mito (2019). He studied creativity manifested in musical performance, which refers to the creative process in which the music played is already written in musical notation or transmitted orally by others. Through analysis of biographies and interviews of renowned musicians from different cultures and genres, he discovered that originality and tradition are crucial elements of creativity in musical performance. The same piece is often reproduced differently, even among renowned performers, so originality is manifested in the way that performers attempt to express themselves authentically through their own sound, which in many cases is found out of imitation of others. The individual sonority is also influenced by a personal sense of timing and rhythm. Besides, the musicians stated that the value of a performance depends on traditional conventions and that the acquisition of a style implies the aggregation of traditional rules acquired by repeated practice.

Moreover, Csikszentmihalyi (2014) proposes that creativity happens in the interaction between a person's thought and a sociocultural context. A practice is only considered creative if it is judged to be worth preserving in the domain. A historical context is needed to determine if the product is, in fact, an adaptive innovation that had produced some variation in the information inherited from the culture. Oedo Sukeroku Taiko is a pioneer of the practice precisely because, inspired by the *Bon-daiko*, they created a new musical style that used traditional elements that adhered to the ideas of national identity that were being fostered at that moment in history.

Oedo Sukeroku Taiko is a professional group in constant creation and evolution. That is why its members believe that the misappropriation of their material by groups in North America, besides depriving them of revenue that is rightfully theirs, it also deprives the Taiko community of the original material that each group should be creating for themselves (Leong, 1999). After the letter sent by Seido Kobayashi in 1999, described in section 3.3, issues regarding respect for musical/cultural traditions, artistic lineage; authority, ownership, appropriate use of a style or a particular piece; getting permission to play certain songs and innovation within the form began to be discussed. In the United States, acknowledging ownership has been increasingly emphasized, and many groups stopped the use of the slant stand and the repertoire of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko after the letter, however, some groups have

gradually started to use them again (Wong, 2005; 2019). This situation does not comply with Japanese principles. In Japan, the importance of acknowledging the tradition is not only about rights and ownership. Tradition is embodied in their teaching practices and performances and should be learnt through a long process of transmission from master to apprentice.

Finally, it is important to recall that Taiko is a highly sensorial practice ‘that connects the material (drums, *bachi*, bodies) with the nonmaterial (mind-body unity, sound), giving form to abstract concepts such as identity within a culturally artistic practice’ (Powell, 2012b: 138). The visual and aural elements of the practice are interconnected and of equal importance. That is why for Taiko to be fully experienced, an audio recording would not be enough, and even a video would not be able to convey the feeling that the performers and the audience get through the vibration of the drums. Therefore, Taiko is a practice that from the initial transmission to the on-stage performances, relies on the bodies and the senses of whoever is experiencing it.

6.2 Conclusions

Taiko is an art form where the Japanese principles of tradition and innovation are embodied through sound and movement. It involves elements related to what is considered ‘traditional’ in Japan, such as the use of the drums, the costumes, some transmission practices, to mention a few. Nevertheless, it is not considered a traditional art. Even though it is a musical practice, it is characterised by stylised and sometimes choreographed movements, as well as the engagement of the whole body for the production of sound. For this dissertation, the aim was to explore how the principles of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko were embodied in their transmission practices. The findings of this research might be a relevant contribution to the Taiko scholarship, because Oedo Sukeroku Taiko was a pioneer of this practice, it is considered the first professional Taiko group, and had a determinant role in the creation of Taiko groups in the United States.

For this research, ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in Japan, mainly in the studio of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko in Tokyo, but also with short visits to school teams, amateur Taiko groups, and traditional performing arts groups in the prefectures of Miyagi, Tottori and the outskirts of Tokyo. Participant observation proved to be fundamental for the study of the group, as it helped to create a

bridge between previous research, what members of the Taiko community said about their practice, and what I could observe directly on the field.

Through the material gathered in the field, which included fieldnotes, interviews, photographs, video and audio recordings, I could analyse the transmission practices and principles of the group, taking into account the concepts of communities of practice and situated learning, as well as previous research about Taiko. Besides, information about the socio-cultural context of the practice framed the research process because, during the fieldwork, references to the traditional arts, education, history, and Japanese culture appeared in conversations, interviews, and events I witnessed.

Most previous research about Taiko has been done in the field of ethnomusicology, so this study presented a perspective grounded in bodily practices that were manifested in the teaching and learning processes and that corresponded to the specific set of principles of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko. My previous knowledge in the dance field and Japanese culture favoured a different perspective about the Taiko practice. I had, however, no experience in Taiko, which could have been a limitation, as I needed to learn and pay attention to basic aspects of the practice that might have prevented me from focusing in other elements that could have revealed a deeper understanding of the practice. Besides, the brief fieldwork period allowed me to watch only a fragment of the long learning journey that is fundamental to gain expertise in the practice. All the students had at least three years of experience, so I could not observe the beginning of the teaching process, which is crucial to comprehend the development of the students within the group.

Through the ethnographic process, however, I found elements that were part of the principles of the group that were intertwined with the transmission practices. These included the understanding of Taiko as an art form in constant evolution, where tradition and creativity play fundamental roles in the formation of students that might become professional players. For the group, the perception of the audience is one of their main motivations to keep developing and perfecting its art. To be considered a proficient player, performers need to embody the techniques to be able to play according to their individuality. Besides, they need to play with passion in order to impact the audience. For the mastery of the practice, years of training are required. Through the classes, the students and teachers focus on the basic drumming techniques, which include a posture of the body similar to the one used in other

Japanese arts, and movements that corresponded to the *Sukeroku style*, which are mainly learned through copying and repetition. The students also develop skills like learning to feel each other, which is crucial for the delivery of a synchronised performance. Moreover, they learn the spiritual and mental aspects of the practice, which is why they believed that the transmission process should be face to face and through the instruction of one teacher. Therefore, the sense of belonging and the loyalty to the community are also elements reflected on their practices.

One of the concerns of the group was the superficial reproduction of their repertoire and techniques fostered by the global accessibility to videos through the Internet. In the Taiko community, there has been an increased awareness about issues of rights and ownership. With the popularity of the group around the world, however, it is not possible to control who is performing their material. Nevertheless, the imitation and even the acknowledged instruction of their style outside the context of the group in Tokyo, has not resulted in a group that can truly resemble Oedo Sukeroku Taiko; possibly due to lack of proficiency of other groups, because they have mixed their style with other techniques, or in better cases because they have used the *Sukeroku style* as inspiration for their own. This last situation would be the one that is more correspondent to the principles of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko even if it turns out to be different as a drumming practice.

This dissertation aimed to present the current transmission practices and principles of the group, which are challenged by the situations previously mentioned. Nevertheless, only through time, it would be possible to know how the group adapts to audiences, cultural practices, and technologies that are in constant evolution. In the future, this study could be used on a comparative basis to reflect on a practice grounded in tradition, but in a continuous creative journey towards innovation.

Bibliography

Ahlgren, A. (2016) A New Taiko Folk Dance: San Jose Taiko and Asian American Movements, *Contemporary Directions in Asian American Dance*, pp. 29–61.

Ahlgren, A. (2018) *Drumming Asian America: Taiko, Performance, and Cultural Politics*. Oxford University Press.

Bender, S. (2005) Of roots and race: Discourses of body and place in Japanese taiko drumming, *Social Science Japan Journal*, 8(2), pp. 197–212. Available at: <https://www.ssrn.com/abstract=922835>.

Bender, S. (2010) Drumming from Screen to Stage: Ondekoza's *Ōdaiko* and the Reimaging of Japanese Taiko, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 69(3), pp. 843–867. doi: 10.1017/S0021911810001531.

Bender, S. (2016) *Taiko Boom: Japanese Drumming in Place and Motion*. Berkeley: University of California Press (Asia: Local Studies / Global Themes).

Blackmore, C. (ed.) (2010) *Social Learning Systems and Communities of Practice*. London: Springer-Verlag. doi: 10.1007/978-1-84996-133-2.

Buckland, T. J. (2007) *Dancing from past to present: Nation, culture, identities*. University of Wisconsin Press.

Creighton, M. (2008) Taiko Today: Performing Soundscapes, Landscapes and Identities, in *Performing Japan*. Global Oriental, pp. 34–67.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2014) Creativity and genius: A systems perspective, in *The Systems Model of Creativity*. Springer, pp. 99–125.

Daboo, J. (2015) To Be Re-Bitten and to Re-Become: examining repeated embodied acts in ritual performance, *Performance Research*. Taylor and Francis, 20(5), pp. 12–21.

Endo, K. (1999) *'Yodan Uchi' A contemporary composition for Taiko*. University of Hawaii.

Fujie, L. (2001) Japanese taiko drumming in international performance: Converging musical ideas in the search for success on stage, *The World of Music*. JSTOR, pp. 93–101.

Giurchescu, A. and Torp, L. (1991) Theory and Methods in Dance Research: A European Approach to the Holistic Study of Dance, *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 23, p. 1. doi: 10.2307/768392.

Gondo, A. (2019) Creativity, Change in Music Culture, and What Children's Song Should Be, in *Creativity in Music Education*. Springer, pp. 151–164.

Hahn, T. (2007) *Sensational Knowledge: Embodying Culture Through Japanese Dance*. Wesleyan University Press (Music / Culture).

- Hajian, S. (2019) Transfer of Learning and Teaching: A Review of Transfer Theories and Effective Instructional Practices, *IAFOR Journal of Education*, 7(1), pp. 93–112. Available at: <http://capitadiscovery.co.uk/roehampton/items/eds/eric/EJ1217940>.
- Hastrup, K. (1992) Writing ethnography, in *Anthropology and Autobiography*. Routledge (Asa Monographs), pp. 116–133.
- Hooker, C., Nakamura, J. and Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2014) The group as mentor, in *The systems model of creativity*. Springer, pp. 207–225.
- Izumi, M. (2001) Reconsidering Ethnic Culture and Community: A Case Study on Japanese Canadian Taiko Drumming, *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 4(1), pp. 35–56. doi: 10.1353/jaas.2001.0004.
- Johnson, H. (2011) Musical Moves and Transnational Grooves: Education, Transplantation and Japanese Taiko Drumming at the International Pacific College, New Zealand, in *Recentring Asia*. Global Oriental, pp. 310–333.
- Kaeppler, A. L. (1972) Method and theory in analyzing dance structure with an analysis of Tongan dance, *Ethnomusicology*. JSTOR, 16(2), pp. 173–217.
- Kaeppler, A. L. (1991) American approaches to the study of dance, *Yearbook for Traditional Music*. Cambridge University Press, 23, pp. 11–21.
- Kobayashi, K. (2006) *Tracing the development of Kumi-Daiko in Canada*. University of British Columbia.
- Konagaya, H. (2001) *Taiko as Performance: Creating Japanese American Traditions*. Available at: <http://sv121.wadax.ne.jp/~jaas-gr-jp/jjas/PDF/2001/No.12-105.pdf> (Accessed: 3 June 2019).
- Lave, J. (1991) Situating learning in communities of practice, in Resnick, L. B., Levine, J. M., and Teasley, S. D. (eds) *Perspectives on socially shared cognition*. Washington: American Psychological Association, pp. 63–82. doi: 10.1037/10096-003.
- Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning*. Cambridge University Press.
- Leong, D. (1999) *Taiko Resource: Oedo Sukeroku Daiko FAQ*. Available at: http://www.taiko.com/taiko_resource/history/oedo_faq.html (Accessed: 6 April 2020).
- Matsue, J. M. (2016) Drumming to One's Own Beat: Japanese Taiko and the Challenge to Genre, *Ethnomusicology*, 60(1), pp. 22–52. doi: 10.5406/ethnomusicology.60.1.0022.
- Matsunobu, K. (2019) Creativity and Embodiment in Pre-modern Japan and Twenty-First Century (North) America, in *Creativity in Music Education*. Springer, pp. 85–96.
- McMains, J. and Thomas, B. (2013) Translating from pitch to pli  : Music theory for dance scholars and close movement analysis for music scholars, *Dance Chronicle*, 36(2), pp. 196–217.
- Mito, H. (2019) Developing Creativity in Musical Performance: An Analysis of Famous Musicians' Autobiographies, in *Creativity in Music Education*. Springer, pp. 231–243.

- Mockros, C. A. and Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2014) The social construction of creative lives, in *The Systems Model of Creativity*. Springer, pp. 127–160.
- Morin, O. (2013) What does communication contribute to cultural transmission?: What does communication contribute?, *Social Anthropology*, 21(2), pp. 230–235. doi: 10.1111/1469-8676.12014.
- Pachter, B. J. (2013) Wadaiko in Japan and the United States: The Intercultural History of a Musical Genre. Available at: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/12215061.pdf>.
- Powell, K. (2004) The apprenticeship of embodied knowledge in a taiko drumming ensemble, in *Knowing bodies, moving minds*. Springer, pp. 183–195.
- Powell, K. (2012a) Composing sound identity in taiko drumming, *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 43(1), pp. 101–119. Available at: <https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1548-1492.2011.01159.x>.
- Powell, K. (2012b) The drum in the Dojo: Re-sounding embodied experience in Taiko drumming, in *Thinking Comprehensively about Education: Spaces of Educative Possibility and Their Implications for Public Policy*. Taylor and Francis, pp. 123–140.
- Richard, W. (2018) The Nomikai: Japan’s Business Drinking Culture, *Nomunication*. Available at: <https://www.nomunication.jp/japans-business-drinking-culture/> (Accessed: 24 June 2020).
- Rohlen, T. P. and LeTendre, G. K. (1998) *Teaching and learning in Japan*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sato, Nancy. (2003) *Inside Japanese classrooms: the heart of education*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer. Available at: <http://capitadiscovery.co.uk/roehampton/items/488896>.
- Sawyer, R. K. (2006) Group creativity: musical performance and collaboration, *Psychology of Music*. SAGE Publications Ltd, 34(2), pp. 148–165. doi: 10.1177/0305735606061850.
- Sellers-Young, Barbara. (1993) *Teaching personality with gracefulness: the transmission of Japanese cultural values through Japanese dance theatre*. Lanham: University Press of America.
- Sklar, D. (1991) II. On dance ethnography, *Dance Research Journal*. Cambridge University Press, 23(1), pp. 6–10.
- Sutton, R. A. (1980) Drumming in Okinawan Classical Music: A Catalogue of Gestures, *Dance Research Journal*, 13(1), p. 17. doi: 10.2307/1478362.
- Turse, P. (2003) *JTC Martial Arts and Acting Arts*, *Journal of Theatrical Combatives*. Available at: https://ejmas.com/jtc/jtcart_turse_0503.htm (Accessed: 4 June 2020).
- Vogel, B. (2009) *Transmission and Performance of Taiko in Edo Bayashi, Hachijo, and Modern Kumi-daiko Styles*. Rice University.
- Wenger, E. (1999) *Communities of practice: learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Available at: <http://capitadiscovery.co.uk/roehampton/items/334391>.

Wenger, E. (2010) Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems: the Career of a Concept, in Blackmore, C. (ed.) *Social Learning Systems and Communities of Practice*. London: Springer London, pp. 179–198. doi: 10.1007/978-1-84996-133-2_11.

Wong, D. (2004) *Speak it louder: Asian Americans making music*. Routledge.

Wong, D. (2005) Noisy Intersections. Ethnicity, authenticity and ownership in Asian American taiko, *Diasporas and interculturalism in Asian performing arts*, pp. 75–90.

Wong, D. (2019) *Louder and Faster: Pain, Joy, and the Body Politic in Asian American Taiko*. University of California Press.

Zhu, Y. and Bargiela-Chiappini, F. (2013) Balancing Emic and Etic: Situated Learning and Ethnography of Communication in Cross-Cultural Management Education, *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 12(3), pp. 380–396. Available at: <http://capitadiscovery.co.uk/roehampton/items/eds/buh/904366>

Appendices

Appendix I – Glossary of Japanese Terms

Arigato gozaimashita – thank you very much

Atarigane – handheld gong

Bachi – drumstick

Bon – related to Obon

Bon-daiko – music played for the *Bon odori*

Bon-odori - a folk dance performed to welcome the spirit of the ancestors

Chu-daiko – the medium drum most commonly used in Taiko

Daiko – drum

Edo – former way to refer to Tokyo

Edo-bayashi – old festival music of Tokyo

Hachimaki - Headband

Happi - Japanese loose cotton jacket with wide sleeves

Hogaku - classical Japanese music

Hozonkai – preservation group or organisation

Iemoto - base of the family, hierarchical system of transmission

Iki – spirit, hearth, mind; stylish or chic

Kabuki - classical Japanese dance-drama

Kagura - form of music and dance dedicated to *Shinto* gods

Takegoe - Vocal patterns that are shouted as part of the pieces

Kata – form; pattern of movements

Ki - energy or power

Kiai - conventional shouted syllables in Taiko and martial arts

Kuchi-shoga - mnemonic system used for learning traditional Japanese music

Kumi-daiko - ensemble of drummers

Ma – space between the notes

Nagauta - narrative song used in *kabuki*

Naname – diagonal

Nidan uchi – version of *Yodan Uchi* performed with only one *chu-daiko* on one side; to beat two sides

Nihon-buyo – Japanese traditional dance

Noh - classical Japanese dance-drama

Obi – sash worn over traditional Japanese clothes

Obon - Buddhist tradition to honour the ancestors

Odaiko - term used for any drum larger than 55 centimeters in diameter

Otsukaresama deshita - thank you for your hard work

Ootsuzumi - hourglass-shaped drum

Seiza - standard formal traditional way of sitting in Japan kneeling on the floor

Shime-daiko - rope-tensioned drum

Shimoku - mallet made of deer antler

Shinto - one of the two main “religions” of Japan, alongside Buddhism

Shitamachi – downtown area of east Tokyo

Tabis - Two-toed traditional Japanese footwear

Wadaiko – Japanese drum

Yagura - stand for taiko that has four, slightly splayed legs.

Yodan uchi – signature piece of Oedo Sukeroku Taiko; to beat four sides

Yoroshiku onegaishimasu – phrase used in introductions, please treat me kindly

Appendix II – Map of fieldwork in Japan

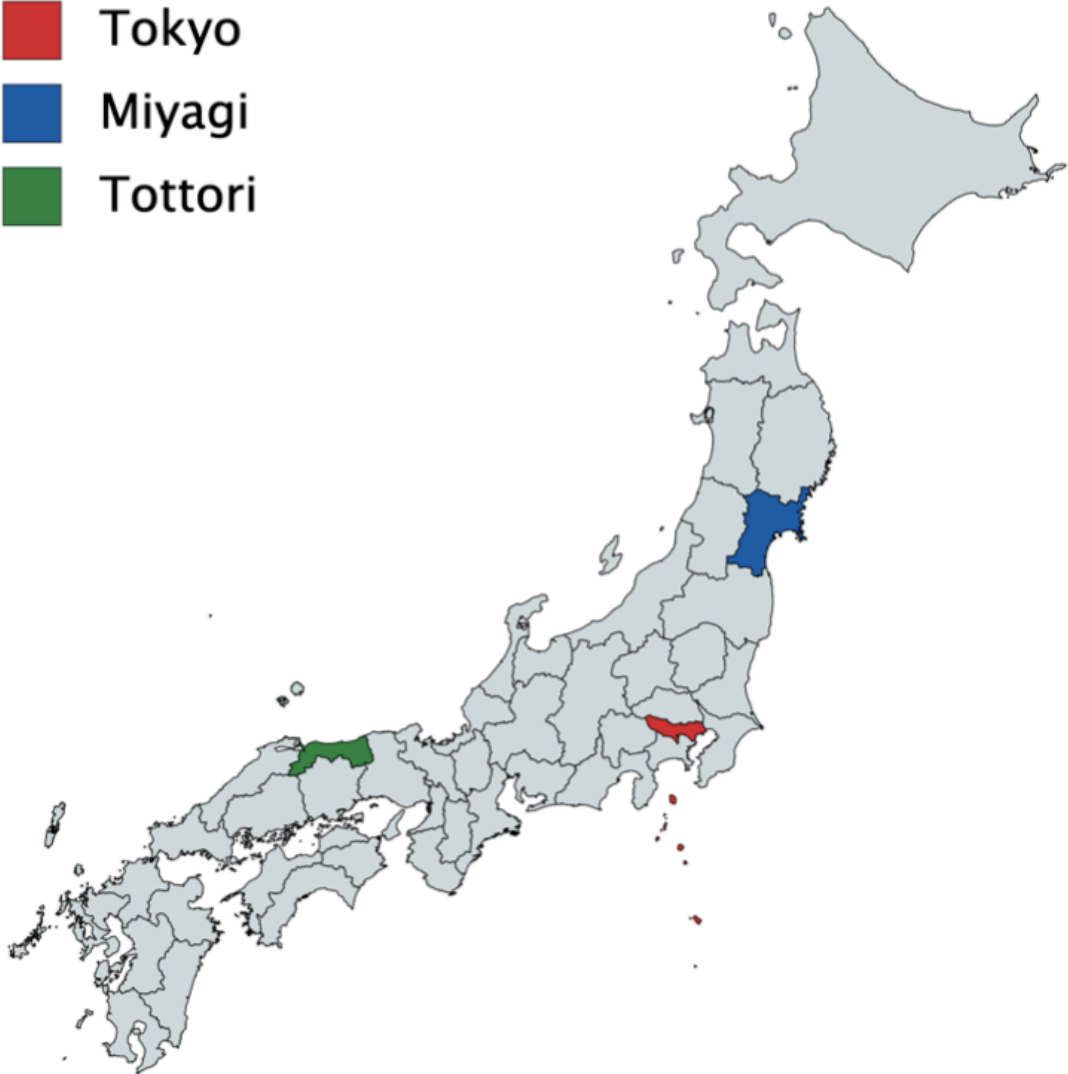


Figure 10. Map of the places where the fieldwork took place.

Appendix III – The myth of the creation of Taiko

Taiko was started by Ame no Uzume, a shaman-like female deity. One day, fed up with her naughty younger brother, the sun goddess, Amaterasu Oomikami, hid herself in a cave. The world became pitch dark, and the troubled deities gathered and conspired to appease Amaterasu so that the world would be bright again. They held a big party in front of the cave, and Ame no Uzume danced an erotic dance, stamping her feet on a wooden tub. Gods at the party laughed and cheered, and the noise was so loud that it provoked the curiosity of the sun goddess to come out of the cave to see what was going on outside. The world thus saw the light again. (Izumi, 2001: 38)