Review Article

Zeami no Keiko Tetsugaku

(Philosophical Investigation into Zeami's Teaching of Exercise and Expertise)

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This is a book intended to make a philosophical investigation into Zeami's "DENSHO", the theoretical texts on theater, performance and especially "Keiko" (lesson, practice, exercise, discipline, and expertise). The author mentions in the preface that attached a very long subtitle to this book, as "An attempt to make a philosophical investigation into Zeami's theory on 'Keiko', or to examine the interchangeable viewpoints, such as 'consciousness of unconsciousness or unconsciousness of consciousness' by clarifying the dynamism of Zeami's theory of 'Keiko' from the standpoint of a theoretical framework based in Eastern Philosophy". In fact, this subtitle seems to clearly tell us the outline of the book.

In this article, I will focus on what the author wants or intends to tell us through this book, taking Zeami's idea of "DOUBLE-EYES (*Niju no Ken*)" viewpoint ("interchangeable emergence of two conflicting viewpoints") as a key idea for understanding the book.

In construing Zeami's "DENSHO", or "Performance Notes", the author presupposes two points of view; the standpoint of "Zeami dancing with *MU-SHIN* (Non-mind)" as a Noh actor and that of "Zeami writing 'DENSHO'" with intention to hand down his own virtuosity to his authorized followers. In this book, the author focuses especially on the standpoint of "Zeami writing 'DENSHO'". This standpoint is that of Zeami's managing to write the state of "Dancing in *MU-SHIN*", realizing the impossibility or difficulty to do so, because such a state can not be thoroughly explained by words but can only be understood through "body".

The readers must know that Zeami did neither simply write down a document about his virtuosity, nor express his "state of *MU-SHIN*" which he attained as a Noh actor in poetical words. As a writer, Zeami always intended to focus on how to create and act, "dancing unintentionally in the state of *MU-SHIN*", on the stage. However, even though he had such an intention to do so, Zeami intended to write, at the same time, how to get out of consciousness of "how to" act while realizing the paradox by himself. Without recognizing this point, no one can understand what

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Zeami intended to write in “*DENSHO*” in a real sense. The author construes Zeami’s writing “*DENSHO*” as his unique way to teach his followers how to act in perspective of two conflicting viewpoints described as the “*DOUBLE-EYES*” viewpoint. The author’s insight into what Zeami intended to write gives us important suggestions not only for understanding “*DENSHO*” as a theoretical text, but also for analyzing what virtuosity is, how to hand it down to followers, and furthermore, how to clarify the relation between “what” and “how” to do in transmission of virtuosity.

Zeami’s attention to “*DOUBLE-EYES*” viewpoint suggests to us the importance of approach in the perspective of two conflicting viewpoints, namely one is to consider the state of “*MU-SHIN*” and the other is to consider the task or activity to make his followers achieve or attain such level at the same time. The author’s focus on the “*DOUBLE-EYES*” viewpoint exactly points out Zeami’s insight based on these two logically different viewpoints. In this sense, I would say again that this book serves not only to present one interpretation of “*DENSHO*” as a text, but also to present an important analytical viewpoint on the issue of transmission of virtuosity in general. As the author puts it, Zeami’s “*DENSHO*” is not a textbook for teaching those who can not yet act properly, but rather the one for those who are already able to act. Zeami felt that its true meaning could be understood only when they could reflect by themselves on the state of virtuosity which they had already attained. In “*DENSHO*”, Zeami tried to confront his followers who believed by themselves to have already mastered virtuosity physically with a big question (p.25).

In the discussions on “*KATA*” (Pattern of action) and “*MU-SHIN*” in Chapters 5 and 6, the author presents his ground for focusing on the “*DOUBLE-EYES*” viewpoint, where his unique interpretation of “*DENSHO*” can be seen. The discussions on “*KATA*” presented in his “Notes for further study” in Chapter 5 seem to indicate important keys for examining the significance of “*DENSHO*.” He points out that “*KATA*” was, on one hand, regarded negatively as “fixed pattern of actions” or “unit of movements” which easily obstruct actor’s creativity”, and was, on the other hand, regarded affirmatively as “fundamentals” necessary for mastery of virtuosity. However, relying upon its meaning as “Basis for enabling smooth stream of movement” defined by Hisao Kanze, the Noh actor (p.97), the author regards “*Keiko*” of “*KATA*” as learning of “Incessant Stream of Movement” and “Sensibility to Music.” He says that “*KATA*” does not mean just fixed bodily movements to obstruct creativity, but rather means “fundamentals” for nurturing proper body capable of performing improvised actions in the theatrical art (p.100). Even though the author confesses that he had to treat his discussions on “*KATA*” as “Notes for further study”, his insight into “*KATA*” apparently leads us to a way to solve such significant questions on transmission of virtuosity that has ever been discussed for a long time: Why can “*KATA*” be “fundamentals” for enabling improvised action? Or, why does learning of “constituents” lead us to learning of “attainments”? These are the questions Ikuta² and Howard³ have asked.

In the discussions on “*MU-SHIN*”, the author focuses on two interchangeably emerging conflicting viewpoints to examine the two logically different dimensions of learning, “learning constituents”(task) and “learning attainments”(achievement) in my words. As he puts it, “The word ‘*MU-SHIN*’ was not so important for Zeami.” (p.111) The author, however, gives a significant meaning to this word, defining it as “profound ‘BA’ (situation, or state) where different events emerge.”(p.136) As an example of a state of “*MU-SHIN*”, he refers to “*MA*” (a moment of pause or a moment between one action and another). He presents the reason why “*MA*” entertains the audience. It is because the audience are moved by the actor’s “disposition to do so without consciousness”, rather than the actor’s intentional discontinuation of movement. He regards such a

situation as emergence of synchronization or mutual sympathy between the actor and the audience (p.132). Then, how can it be possible to attain the state of “*MU-SHIN*”? Does something “supernatural” come up in the actor? He insists that “Writing Zeami” lived with self-reflecting consciousness just like a person in modern age and attempted to clarify the “reason” of the state of “*MU-SHIN*”.

However, there is one thing to be reconsidered concerning the understanding of Zeami’s “*MU-SHIN*”. Though the author seems to me to regard “*MU-SHIN*” as an upper “Stage (Step or Rank)” of learning (p.120), I would rather think that it should be construed as an actor’s certain “State” as inner experience. These two concepts actually belong to logically different dimensions, but he does not seem to discuss the difference between them explicitly. However, in fact, the author discusses this mutual relation between the two logically different concepts in the discussion on “*DOUBLE-EYES*” viewpoint. He says that “*RIKEN no KEN*” (Eyes at a distance), which is an example of the “*DOUBLE-EYES*” viewpoint, implies a “State” of “being aware of oneself while being unconscious of oneself” rather than being absent-minded, or self-intoxicated (p.147). Realizing the difference between “State” and “Stage (Step)”, the author points out that “Writing Zeami” could not but tell his followers about the “State” of “*MU-SHIN*” by using such phrases as “Eyes at a distance” or “flow experience”, even though he thought it impossible to teach them such a “State”, not a “Stage (Step)”, directly.

Finally, I would say that it is certain that the author’s interpretation of Zeami’s “*DENSHO*” has successfully been realized through his excellent philosophical insight into the idea of “*DOUBLE-EYES*” viewpoint.

Notes

- 1 Zeami (1363–1443). He is the Japan’s most celebrated actor and playwright, composed more than thirty of the finest plays of Noh drama. He also wrote a variety of theoretical texts, “*DENSHO*”, on theater and performance, and especially, a profound insight into “*Keiko*” (lesson, practice, exercise, discipline, and expertise).
- 2 Ikuta, Kumiko, “*Waza kara Shiru (Knowing from Virtuosity)*”, Tokyo University Press, 1987/2007
- 3 Howard, V.A., “*Artistry: The Work of Artists*”, Hackett Publishing Company, 1982 / Vernon Howard attempted to clarify the nature of teaching of virtuosity by means of conceptual analysis. Howard pointed out that we are likely to make a mistake to discuss the matter of “constituents” (task) and “attainments” (achievement) as if these are in the same category, but actually each of these is logically in different dimension from the other.