On Making Kyôgen based on Funny Stories

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The purpose of this paper is to consider the process of how an original humorous story is transformed into Kyôgen (classical Japanese comic theater), and from which elements in the story laughter arises.

Some Kyôgen plays are based upon famous stories, a few of which do not change the outline of the original story. Here, I examine “Busu,” which falls into this category, and “Kani-Yamabushi,” in which the original story has undergone change. These two works were created in the early days of Kyôgen and have continued to be performed consistently over the years.

From this examination, some points of Kyôgen based upon a single story become clear, as follows:

1) In such Kyôgen, there can be two dimensions to the comicality: one is caused by the contents of the story itself, the other by the actors’ performance.

2) When creating such Kyôgen, two kinds of ‘devices’ relative to presentation
and performance are added to the text: first, the basic, indispensable audiovisual constituents that turn the written word into performing theater; the other is a device unique to Kyōgen, namely adding a song, a dance, a comic dialog, etc. (these elements are known as ‘Kyōgen no Syukou’). The latter is necessarily written clearly in the script, and is typically thought of as more important. But it is useful to keep the former in mind as we consider the relation between Kyōgen and its original story.