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Data Object Discourse Analysis

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Why Do Taiko Game Players Use Sharp-tip Drumsticks?

Try to picture a pair of drumsticks. Most people might come up with cylindrical drumsticks or jazz sticks with round tips. However, If you have watched top players play *Taiko No Tatsujin*, or "Taiko Drum Master", you would notice that they always use their sharp-tip drumsticks instead of any other drumsticks you might think of. Someone might ask why do they use these weird-shaped drumsticks? Would the tip damage the drum or hurt other people? These questions actually have longer answers than you might think.

Although not famous in western countries, *Taiko No Tatsujin* is the most popular and successful arcade rhythm game in Japan, and has even spread to China and South Korea. It is a 1-2 player game consisting of two big taiko drum controllers and a large screen. A typical game consists of three songs, with most songs having different levels of difficulty. The gameplay of this game is simple enough: hit the drum at the right timing following a chosen song, corresponding to notes scrolling from the right. The variety of notes consists of red and blue notes. The red note requires you hit on the face of the drum, while a blue note requires you hit the rim. Other notes such as yellow bar and balloon notes are called *renda* (連打) and require quick consecutive hits on the drum.

For top taiko players, the ultimate goal is to get the highest possible score and hit the top rank on most difficult songs. However, *Taiko No Tatsujin* is an old game that has been released for more than fifteen years. How do top players improve their score when most top taiko players could reach "all perfect" on all songs? The answer lies on *renda*. Even though the base highest score of one song is capped by regular red and blue notes, the more hits you land on *renda*, the more extra score you could add on the base score.



Sharp-tip Drumsticks (accuracy)

At the early stage, taiko players developed various ways for *renda* using the drumsticks comes with the arcade machine. But these techniques require players to either twist their body or changing the way they hold drumsticks, and thus are not very efficient in practice. Some players turned to snare drum techniques and found drum roll is the best way for *renda*. When a player hit the drum face with drumsticks, the tip will bounce back and forth and cause more hits on the drum, hence a drum roll. But soon sharp-tip drumsticks were invented and replaced the original drumsticks since they perform better. When hitting on the drum face, the tip of these drumsticks will vibrate at the drum face since its lighter and produce more rolls.



Public Drumsticks

Within a short period of time, the sharp-tip drumsticks were accepted by the taiko players community. Many players even produced and customized their own sharp-tip drumsticks for various purposes. But before we talk about different types of drumsticks, I want to introduce Bowker and Star's definition of classification and standard. They are closely related but not identical. A classification system is a set of boxes where we sort things out, while standard is in part a way of classifying them (p.10). For taiko drumsticks, there are two general classifications: "house bachi (ハウスバチ)" which translates to private drumsticks and "my bachi (マイバチ)", or private drumsticks. The public drumsticks are the drumsticks come with the arcade machines. Anything a player use to play taiko game other than public drumsticks, even chopsticks or bottles, are considered private bachi. However, specialized private drumsticks do have strict standards and can be divided into three types: *renda* drumsticks (連打バチ), accuracy drumsticks (精度バチ), and roll-processing drumsticks (ロール処理バチ).



Roll-processing Drumsticks

Renda drumsticks push the limit of drum rolls even further. This type of drumsticks is usually made from Magnolia wood, one of the lightest and softest wood to produce drumsticks. It also has thick handgrip tape to make the mass center move away from the tip to boost drum roll. Well-designed *renda* drumsticks could reach around 20 hits per one swing. Accuracy drumsticks, unlike *renda* drumsticks, are made from relatively denser and harder wood. This kind of drumstick is designed for beginners who are practicing to achieve "all perfect" for most difficult songs. Since they are heavier than *renda* drumsticks, players are more comfortable to get "perfect" judges from notes. Roll-processing drumsticks are specialized for double-stroke roll, which is a type of drum roll but only let the drumstick bounces twice. Some of the most difficult songs in *Taiko No Tatsujin* require player accurately hit a lot of notes in a few seconds. Take *Yuugen No Ran* as an example. It contains a 95 combo within less than 5 seconds, which requires around 20 hits per second. Even some top players could not reach that speed, but double-stroke roll could potentially double their hits per second and let them pass this barrier. Roll-processing drumsticks are often fully wrapped with hand grip tape and only leave the tip

uncovered. This tape adds more stability when performing the drum roll so that player could easily control the double-stroke roll.

Even though sharp-tip drumsticks has become the majority of taiko player community, there are still some people don't like it. When I played *Taiko No Tatsujin* at Anime Boston, sharp-tip drumsticks were banned for their damage to the drum face. Even in Japan, many small arcades don't allow players to use sharp-tip drumsticks since they couldn't afford to replace the drum faces. As a result, players in these areas either round their drumsticks to keep using them or fund their arcade to replace drum faces. Besides, old school players think using private drumsticks is cheating since official competitions only allow participants using public drumsticks. Some of them think taiko game should be the same as taiko instrument, and should only be played with traditional cylindrical drumsticks. However, as the game company introduces official private drumsticks and allows its use in competitions and more young players join the community, voices from old school players are fading away and these people might eventually leave the community. Although nowadays few players pick public drumsticks, using them to “all perfect” a song is a symbol of capability instead of stubbornness.

Works Cited

Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, "Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences", *The MIT Press* (2000)