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## Komonjo Workshop

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Over the past several months members of the Yoriai have been discussing prospects for funding a workshop or series of workshops for non-Japanese Early Modern Japan specialists on reading *komonjo*. It is clear to us that more Kinsei specialists are either actively seeking more structured opportunities to develop manuscript reading skills so they can better exploit materials not available in printed form or they want to begin to learn those skills. This desire stretches across disciplinary boundaries. To date those of us who have made use of manuscripts have worked with tutors on an *ad hoc* basis and once we have returned to our home institutions, the opportunities for continued development have been very limited.

In our discussions to date, three general (not necessarily mutually exclusive) lines of attack have been discussed with representatives from the Japan Foundation, Monbusho, and the U.S. government's National Endowment for the Humanities.

- 1) Our first thought was to seek funding for an advanced training workshop. NEH does present an opportunity for this sort of activity and we are continuing to pursue it. The drawback is that NEH will only provide funds for permanent U.S. residents or citizens. If such a grant were funded, we would have to seek supplementary funding to cover the costs of non-U.S. participants.
- 2) More funding sources and larger budgets are available for joint research projects. Such applications however require, in addition to determination of a common theme and project, the selection of participants prior to submission of the application. Work on *komonjo* reading can be built into the project, but the main outcome would have to be publication(s).
- 3) Working cooperatively, we could begin to produce pedagogic materials to provide instruction in manuscript reading. The outcome would be a) text-like materials with reproduction of the original document, a *katsuji* version, a phonetic version, and an English translation; b) a digitized, machine-readable

version of the same materials. Some advanced planning would be necessary to plot out the kinds of materials that would be most appropriate as educational tools--for learning about texts as well as for learning to read them.

Regardless of which approach or combination of approaches we take, a core element of the project will be to have participants working with a Japanese *komonjo* specialist or specialists in a way that combines some group instruction with more individualized study. Our hope is to hold a six to eight week workshop, ideally in Japan at a major research site such as the Shiryō Hensanjo. This would permit participants to gather data as they study.

In thinking about these (and other) options, there is no need to confine ourselves to just one project or application; however, I would like to be able to move forward as quickly as possible. An NEH application can move ahead without further general discussion, but submission of applications for either cooperative research or a pedagogical project require some preliminary indications of interest from those of you who want to develop your manuscript reading skills.

We would appreciate answers to the following questions from those of you who are interested in working with projects such as those we are discussing:

- 1) Would you be interested in a collaborative interdisciplinary research project built on the theme "Local Perspectives on Early Modern Japan"? If so, what subject would you research? Are there useful collections in Tokyo and/or Kyoto?
- 2) Are there other themes appropriate for interdisciplinary cooperative research that you would find interesting and useful?
- 3) If we were to develop a primarily pedagogically oriented project, what kinds of materials should be developed first (*kenchi chō*, art scrolls, travel diaries, etc.)? Which materials would be most useful to you in your training of advanced undergraduate and graduate students? Which documents would you be interested in helping to develop into instructional materials?

We look forward to your suggestions and to discussing our options at the annual EMJ business meeting at the AAS

## Kabuki and Early Modern Japan

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In contemporary Japan, *kabuki* enjoys the status and government patronage of a valued national heritage. Enshrined in a National Theater, guided by Living National Treasures, with television appearances, international tours and worldwide acclaim, its existence, if not its popularity, has been assured for some time to come. But *kabuki* has not long been the recipient of governmental largess. During its more vibrant days it was criticized as decadent, even criminal, and, while barely tolerated, subjected to restrictions and economically disadvantageous situations which only the hardiest and most popular of entertainments could have survived.

Many analyses of the peculiar status of *kabuki* in Tokugawa Japan attribute it to toleration by the *bakufu* in spite of its superficially critical form of expression. Presumably it was tolerated because it did not challenge any of the basic tenets of Tokugawa rule. While there is a good deal of truth in this explanation (and it is certainly true that *chōnin* culture, at least by the Genroku period, had begun to adopt, in fact eagerly embrace, many of the samurai ideals), there were elements of the *chōnin* lifestyle and ideology which inevitably contradicted those of the samurai and worked slowly, albeit unspoken and (perhaps to many) unconsciously, toward the upheaval of Tokugawa social order and a more modern form of government and society in Japan. I think these elements can be clearly seen in the conception of individual action as illustrated in the quintessential dramatic efflorescence of *chōnin* culture, *kabuki*.

Historians of culture and of drama have often wondered at the variety and number of government edicts and activities designed to control, curtail, or suppress *kabuki* throughout all its stages of growth and development. But even more surprising to many has been the relative laxity with which they were enforced, and the relative ease with which the popular theater industry as a whole, if not in every case, avoided prosecution for breaking government injunctions and any ill effects from their own energetic willfulness. Regulations concerning theater hours, design, furnishings, use, edicts controlling costumes and equipment, laws about the content and performance of plays, and restrictions on the movements and lifestyle of actors and their fraternization, or worse, with members of the upper classes of society: all were broken with considerable frequency, occasional audacity, and consistent impunity.

A number of possible explanations for this somewhat surprising leniency on the part of the *bakufu* have been advanced. The most frequently encountered is the rationalization given by the *bakufu* itself for allowing the existence of popular theater. According to this view, the *kabuki* theater, together with the specifically designated pleasure quarter (*kuruwa* 廓, but surely *kabuki* belongs to the "pleasure quarters" in the broadest sense of this term), was grudgingly tolerated by the morally conservative,

Confucian-influenced *bakufu* as a reprehensible and insidious institution which was, nevertheless (regardless of the moral qualifications of the shōgunate to administer the government and set a good example for the Japanese people), a necessary instrument for the pacification of the townsmen and the diversion of their surplus energies from socially more harmful activities.

This may contribute to our understanding of why *kabuki* was not completely suppressed, despite its contravention of officially sanctioned Confucian ethics. Nevertheless it leaves one wondering why the *bakufu* permitted such a large number of relatively flagrant violations of its attempts to control this dangerous threat to public morals. By steering *kabuki* away from politically sensitive topics and isolating it physically and socially, the *bakufu* had hoped to reduce its evil effects on society. The enormous popularity of *kabuki*, the individual whims of shōguns, or perhaps practical limits on the government's ability to enforce its own regulations are possible, but at best only partial, explanation. Thus many historians have arrived at the conclusion that *kabuki* was tolerated because it did not pose a fundamental threat to Tokugawa social and political order.

To find an example of this type of thinking we may turn to Katō Shōichi's *History of Japanese Literature*. Commenting on the paucity of intellectual content exhibited by *kabuki* plays, the limitations of dialogue and the lack of universal appeal or applicability (all of these characteristics he derives from a comparison with European theater, and especially the plays of Shakespeare) Katō remarks:

This limitation of dialogue to an expression of specific emotions under specific circumstances robs the plot of intellectual interest and severely restricts characterization. The character of Ōboshi Yuranosuke 大星由良之助, the leader of the faithful forty-seven *rōnin*, is not of a complexity that requires him to re-examine the purpose of revenge. Sugawara Michizane 菅原道真 [in *Sugawara denjū tenarai no kagami* 菅原伝授手習鑑] and Yoshitsune [in *Yoshitsune senbonzakura* 義経千本桜] have no personalities as such but are merely cases of misfortune. The faithful retainers who frequently appear in *kabuki* are often torn between their duty to their lord and their personal feelings--but not one of them is moved by this personal emotional experience to criticize or re-examine the existing social order. The strain between the exterior rational order and the interior emotional needs never leads to the interiorization of the rational order, nor to the rationalization and thus the externalization of emotion. No confrontation arises between interpretations of the law derived from differing personal and emotional experience.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Katō Shuichi, *A History of Japanese Literature*, vol. 2: *The Year of Isolation*, trans. Don Sanderson, with a Foreword by René E. Etiemble.

Of the villainous "heroes" of the later, more decadent *kabuki*, Katō writes:

*Kabuki* at its peak produced heroes that were in effect egotistical villains who considered the ends justified any means. The definition of villainy depended on existing ethical values. In other words, the villain did not criticize or embody a criticism of the traditional social order but accepted it; his role was to produce a strong sensual stimulation within the given social and moral framework.<sup>2</sup>

Or again, of Tsuruya Namboku's 鶴屋南北 masterpiece of decadence, *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan* 東海道四谷怪談, Katō writes, "The story is unconcerned with the overall conditions of society and remains completely a purely personal matter of those involved."<sup>3</sup>

Donald Shively, one of the earliest Western scholars to examine the nature and effect of government regulation on *kabuki* informs us that while the historical plays, or *jidaimono* 時代物, depict the events of an earlier era, they depict a moral system and feudal psychology ideally characteristic of the Tokugawa samurai class. Furthermore,

[b]oth the history and domestic dramas [*sewamono* 世話物] assume inevitable capitulation to the ethical code which governed society. Characters entangle themselves in nets of loyalties and obligations which come into conflict with unexpected personal desires or sympathetic impulses. The code tolerates no generosity of interpretation. The hero transgresses, fully resigned to pay with his life. The fairness of the code remains unquestioned.<sup>4</sup>

The basic assumption of these and other scholars is that the apparently reprobate nature of *kabuki* along with its numerous excesses and frequent violation of government proscriptions were overlooked by a morally and financially conservative political leadership because the popular theater not only refrained from contravening the underlying moral values of the ruling class, but in fact strengthened and propagated these values among the potentially hostile *chōnin*.

Aside from a number of apparent contradictions at the level of moral behavior, I believe the validity of such an argument concerning the underlying nature of the *kabuki* theater is somewhat called into question when one compares the form of theater patronized, and (under Tokugawa rule) largely monopolized, by the military aristocracy, namely the *nō*, with the *kabuki* of the townspeople. While *kabuki* borrowed

(Tokyo: Kōdansha International, 1979; reprint ed. 1990), pp. 201-202.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>4</sup>Donald Shively, "The Social Environment of Tokugawa Kabuki" in James Brandon, William Malm, Donald Shively, eds., *Studies in Kabuki: Acting, Music, and Historical Context* (Honolulu: East-West Center Book/University of Hawaii, 1978), p. 2.

heavily on the *nō* repertoire as it matured, the basic conceptions about action and the role which individual action plays in society and in history found in these two dramatic forms are fundamentally different. *Kabuki* represents a radically different view of the human condition and of history from that exhibited by *nō*. It is also instructive to examine the *jōruri*, or puppet theater, in this context. By definition a hybrid form of dramatic performance, *jōruri* exhibits many features characteristic of the medieval mind-set despite its development as a popular urban entertainment and the extremely important influence which *kabuki* exerted during the course of this development.

Let us begin, then, by looking at the manner in which individual action is conceived of and represented in these various forms of theater. In particular we shall view actions which emanate from a conscious process of decision making which in turn leads a character to purposive action of dramatic significance. *Nō*, being the earliest of these forms of drama to develop, demands our attention first.

The action of a typical *nō* play is divided into two parts. In the first part the *waki* 脇, usually a traveller (often a Buddhist priest on a pilgrimage), visits a site of historical or poetic significance, and encounters there a character, the *shite* 仕手, who relates a tragic tale which occurred at that very place; the *shite* then requests prayers for the repose of the soul of one who has died a violent or untimely death, and whose story has just been related. In performance the second part of the play is often separated from the first by an interlude which allows the *shite* to change from the costume of the *maejite* 前仕手, or *shite* of the first half who relates the story, to that of the *nohijite* 後仕手, or *shite* of the second half. In the second part the *shite* reappears in the guise of the ghost of the character whose death was so movingly related in the first part. The *waki* realizes that the *shite* has now resumed his or her true form and recognizes this identity. The play ends with a moving reenactment of the action central to the play, and the disappearance of the ghost accompanied by pleas for endless prayers. A chorus often participates in the retelling of events, taking over descriptive and narrative passages from *shite* and *waki* both, sometimes speaking in their voices, sometimes as narrator. Plays structured in this manner are known as *fukushiki mugen nō*, 複式夢幻能 or bipartite dream plays, the entire performance being in many cases interpreted as a dream seen by the *waki*.

The emotional intensity and reserved beauty of these plays can be very moving, and the structure is unquestionably very dramatic, often reaching a feverish pitch near the end as the *nohijite* reenacts a battle in frenzied dance. But what of the action of the play, and, more importantly, the portrayal of action in these plays? Four important characteristics make themselves apparent. 1) The activity of greatest theatrical and narrative interest is recalled or retold within the framework of the play. 2) Little, if any, attention is given to the decision to act and the manner in which that decision was made. 3) The narrative immediacy of the retelling is undercut by the participation of the chorus in the activity of narration. 4) The most important philosophical and aesthetic movement of the play is the recognition by the *waki* of the identity of *maejite* and *nohijite*.

Before proceeding to elucidate and illustrate these points it will be

convenient to distinguish between two distinct narrative lines. The first involves the encounter between *waki* and *shite* and may be conveniently referred to as the diegetic action. The diegetic action of *fukushiki mugen nō* usually consists of the *waki*'s encounter with the *shite*, the *shite*'s narration of a bit of local and personal history, and the disappearance of the *shite*. But the tale retold and reenacted by the *shite* during the second part is usually a complete narrative itself, accompanied by appropriate gestures and movements on stage, and this may be referred to as the inner narrative. It is this inner narrative which constitutes the main interest of the piece, and from which the name of the play is almost invariably taken.

While structurally, ideologically and, perhaps most importantly, aesthetically important to the play as a whole, the diegetic action in which the *waki* and *shite* meet is of relatively little narrative interest. Emotional and dramatic intensity is focused on the inner action of the play. And yet, curiously enough, though certainly in keeping with the designation "dream play," this action does not take place before our eyes on stage. The antagonist or enemy of the *shite* never appears on stage in this type of play. Instead action which, in the diegetic time frame of pilgrim and ghost, has taken place wholly in the past is recounted and to a certain extent reenacted by the *shite*, with occasional assistance from *waki* and chorus. For these characters the action has no power to effect a significant change in their current circumstances; there are no longer dangers to overcome, trials to bear, decisions to make. The actions of the *shite*, however brave, honorable, poignant, or otherwise noteworthy, have the inevitability of history, and yet are one step removed from the diegetic consciousness of the stage figures, and yet another step removed from that of the audience seeing, not men or women in conflict, or the illusion thereof, but actors playing characters in static relationship who recount an old tale. Individual acts of a significant nature which depend on one's own will are not directly perceptible or capable of immediate apprehension in the performance, but are filtered through layers of memory and time, losing the affective quality of realistic sharp focus and taking on the gossamer sheen of aesthetic remove. The individual actor is enervated, removed from life and robbed of the power to materially affect his or her own destiny; the *shite* can only beg that prayers be said, and hope that the encounter will remain for more than a brief moment in the memory of those who have shared it.

To illustrate the effects of this separation of narrative and action let us look at *Kumasaka* 熊坂 by the playwright Zenchiku Ujinobu 金春禅竹氏信 (1414-1499?). A priest on pilgrimage from the Capital meets a local priest who begs his prayers for one who has died. The local priest turns out to be the robber Kumasaka no Chōhan 熊坂長範, killed by Ushiwakamaru 牛若丸 (Minamoto no Yoshitsune in his youth) when his band attacked the caravan of the gold trafficker Kichiji of the Third Ward 三条の吉次. When the *waki* (priest on pilgrimage) sees the *nochijite* appear in Kumasaka's form, the *waki* says, "If you are Kumasaka himself, tell me the story of those days." Whereupon Kumasaka replies.

There was a merchant, a trafficker in gold called Kichiji of the Third Ward. Each year he brought together a great store, and loading it in bales carried

it up country. And thinking to waylay him I summoned divers trusty men....<sup>5</sup>

As can be seen from this passage, little attention is paid to the played by the decision and will to act. The inner action of the play occasioned by a decision mentioned only in passing, "And thinking waylay him I summoned divers trusty men...." This is the only decision referred to in this description of Kumasaka's encounter with Ushiwakamaru, the only act of will, and yet it receives no attention. Like most action in *nō* plays, this decision proceeds naturally and ineluctably from the nature of the character; no development of character is evidenced, and no possibility of change in character admitted. The decision is determined not by force of will in conscious decision, but by instinct and nature. One other decision bearing on the course of this play mentioned, this in the diegetic action. Following a brief poem, the *waki* opens this play with the lines, "I am a priest from the Capital. I have never seen the East country, and now I am minded to go there on pilgrimage."<sup>6</sup> This is the willful act of a priest, and leads to the encounter with Kumasaka's ghost, thereby giving occasion for this play. Yet this decision has nothing to do with the inner action of the play; furthermore all attention is deflected from it by crediting it to a simple whim of the priest ("and now I am minded to go there"). Moreover, it is removed from the possibility of direct perception by being placed in the drama past and related as having taken place before the action of the play even began. Once again no explanation need be given, as the decision (to go on a pilgrimage) arises naturally and inevitably from the (static) nature of the character (a priest).

The inner action of *Kumasaka* is an highly dramatic and potentially exciting encounter. But it is reenacted by the *nochijite* without benefit of an antagonist, and the narrative immediacy and authenticity is further undercut by the convention of sharing the narration among the *waki*, the *shite*, and chorus. It is particularly interesting that the *waki*, to whom the story is being related and who should be ignorant of its narrative course (according to the premises of the play), is not behindhand in interjecting bits and pieces of the narration, and taking over from the *shite* at various points. The sources of action and meaning are effectively divorced, many voices other than the *shite*'s recite the story of the actions which the *shite* is once again performing. An interesting example of this can be seen in Hiyoshi Sa'ami Yasukiyo's 日吉佐阿弥安清 renowned *Hashi Benkei* 橋弁慶 (Benkei at the Bridge). While enacting the well-known tale of their first meeting the characters Benkei and Ushiwakamaru both describe their own actions as though from an observer's perspective.

Benkei: Then Benkei, all unknowing,  
Came towards the Bridge where white waves  
lapped.  
Heavily his feet clanked on the boards of the  
bridge.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur Waley, *The Nō Plays of Japan*, with Letters by Oswa Sickert (1911; reprint ed., New York: Grove Press, 1957), p. 96.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

- Ushiwaka: And even before he saw him Ushiwaka gave a whoop of joy.  
"Some one has come," he cried, and hitching his cloak over his shoulder  
Took his stand at the bridge-side.
- Benkei: Benkei discerned him and would have spoken....  
But when he looked, lo! it was a woman's form!  
Then, because he had left the World, with troubled mind he hurried on.
- Ushiwaka: Then Ushiwaka said, "I will make game of him."  
and as Benkei passed  
Kicked at the button of his halberd so that it jerked into the air.
- Benkei: Ah! fool, I will teach you a lesson!
- Chorus: Then Benkei while he retrieved his halberd  
Cried out in anger,  
"You shall soon feel the strength of my arm,"  
and fell fiercely upon him.  
But the boy, not a jot alarmed,  
Stood his ground<sup>7</sup>

While it is the inner narrative which contains the most exciting and, in conventional terms, the most theatrical action, the real philosophical movement of the play occurs in the diegetic narrative. As we have seen, the *waki* is usually a priest, significantly often one on a pilgrimage. It is his pilgrimage which sets the play in motion, and the only encounter in these dream plays occurs as a result of that pilgrimage: the encounter between the *waki* and the *shite*. The deeds of the inner narrative do not take place in the here and now of the *waki*, but are merely a reenactment of past events (though the movement between diegetic and inner narrative is often subtle and barely detectable). What does "happen" on the diegetic level is an epiphany, the appearance of the *shite* in his or her true form as *nochiyite*, and the recognition by the *waki* of this state of affairs. Permeated with Buddhist thought and doctrine, and in all likelihood incorporating ancient Shintō rituals as well, these plays revolve around the recognition of divinity. Thus in a sense the only thing that happens, other than a bit of dancing and story-telling, is that the *waki*, and hopefully the audience, experience movement from ignorance to knowledge, and are consequently released from the illusory realm of purposive action and raised to a higher level of understanding through an act of commemoration. Purposive action may have originally played a part in the inner action, but it is completely obliterated in the representation and reinterpretation typical of the *nō* stage.

Those familiar with the history of *nō* drama and its many forms may raise an objection to this analysis on the grounds that it deals only with the *fukushiki mugen nō*. What about the *genzai-mono* 現在物, one might ask; what about those plays in which the narrative takes place not as in a dream, but consists of the representation of events actually in progress on the stage? Surely these events in the here and now (*genzai*)

have not been etherealized; don't they present a more cohesive view of purpose and action?

Let us then momentarily leave the rarefied atmosphere of the *mugen nō* and turn to *genzai-mono*. Surely one would expect tales of Yoshitsune and Benkei to be full of action and adventure, so we shall turn to *Eboshi-ori* 烏帽子折 by Miyamasu 宮増 (sixteenth century). This is in fact a *genzai-mono* version of the events portrayed in *Kumasaka* (formerly titled *Genzai Kumasaka* 現在熊坂) and therefore should provide an excellent contrast to what we have just discussed. Here we have no wandering priests or malignant ghosts. What then occasions the action of the play? Surprisingly it is once again a perfunctory decision made before the action of the play begins, and is based entirely on natural instinct as determined by our expectations of a two-dimensional character. In this case the merchant Kichiji begins the play with a poem; then follows,

I am Sanjō no Kichiji. I have now amassed a great store of treasure and with my brother Kichiroku am going to take it down to the East. Ho! Kichiroku, let us get together our bundles and start now.<sup>8</sup>

Even the decisions of the hero Ushiwaka are similarly perfunctory. He spots a messenger from the Palace of Rokuhara 六波羅殿 who has been sent to fetch him back to the Capital and immediately responds, "I must not let him know me. I will cut my hair and wear an *eboshi*, so that people may think I am an Eastern boy."<sup>9</sup> And when he hears later that robbers are planning to attack Kichiji's caravan that night, his reaction is equally predictable:

Kichiji: We have heard that robbers may be coming tonight. We were wondering what we should do....

Ushiwaka: Let them come in what force they will; yet if one stout soldier go to meet them, they will not stand their ground, though they be fifty mounted men.<sup>10</sup>

And what result arises from these decisions? In many cases it leads directly to a straight-forward continuation of narrative. Take for example the decision to stand and fight against the robbers:

Chorus: And while he spake, evening passed to darkness.  
"Now is the time," he cried, "to show the world those arts of war that for many months and years upon the Mountain of Kurama I have rehearsed."  
Then he opened the double-doors and waited there for the slow incoming of white waves.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

- Brigands: Loud the noise of assault. The lashing of white waves against the rocks, even such is the din of our battle-cry.
- Kumasaka: Ho, my man! Who is there? [By this time the skirmish is already over.]
- Brigand: I stand before you.
- Kumasaka: How fared the skirmishers I sent to make a sudden breach? Blew the wind briskly within?<sup>11</sup>

There follows then a recounting, in the form of Kumasaka's questions and the brigand's answers, of the battle which has just taken place. In other cases the result is much the same. Let us take for example Ushiwaka's decision to disguise himself as an Easterner. This leads him to seek out a hatmaker who, upon hearing Ushiwaka's order for a special style of hat, proceeds to recount a "fine story about these left-folded *eboshi* and the luck they bring."<sup>12</sup> Ushiwaka's presentation of a sword in payment for the newly made hat leads the hatmaker's wife to tell the story of the presentation of this same sword by Ushiwaka's father to Tokiwa-gozen 常盤御前 when she bore Ushiwaka, and the way in which the hatmaker's wife herself had carried it to Tokiwa-gozen. This in turn climaxes in the recognition by the hatmaker of his wife as the sister of Kamada Masakiyo 鎌田正清, Ushiwaka's mother, the recognition by the couple of the identity of the sword, of their client as Lord Ushiwaka of the Minamoto, and of the hatmaker's wife as Lady Akoya 阿古屋, his aunt, by Ushiwaka. Thus, even in a *genzai-mono* purported to portray events actually in progress we find that a majority of the play consists of various characters recounting events of the distant or immediate past. Rather than escaping from the pattern of *fukushiki mugen nō*, *Eboshi-ori*, in the incident with the hatmaker, incorporates within its narrative a complete tale of retelling and recognition which bears remarkable resemblance to the narrative structure of dream plays. And though the diegesis of the play is ostensibly about the attack of Kumasaka, the ensuing battle is not presented on stage at all, but rather recounted by a brigand of Kumasaka's band, referring to each of Kumasaka's followers by name. This is the same technique used by the priest and Kumasaka when they recount the tale of his attack in the dream play of that name.

Even in the *genzai-mono* we see that once again decisions arise from the attributes which the characters are assumed to possess even before the start of the play. No wrestling with a decision, no belabored thought, no development of character is necessary. The actions, like the characteristics, are determined beforehand and ultimately lead to the proper recognition of a given state of affairs, which is, for the most part, recounted in the course of the play.

And what of the *jōruri* puppet plays, so popular among the townspeople of Osaka? Surely the *sewamono*, such as Chikamatsu Monzaemon's 近松門左衛門 great masterworks of love suicide portray

the agonizing of the hero and heroine as they contend with the forces of *giri* and *ninjō* and, taking their future into their own hands, decide to secure it for themselves alone. Such plays do unquestionably present the torturous process by which mankind attempts to face a dilemma and by decisive action grasp fate and future in one's own hands. And yet a brief examination of the early history of *jōruri* reveals that the *sewamono*, or domestic drama, both in terms of content and of treatment, developed under the direct influence of *kabuki*.

It is well known that *kabuki* in its development borrowed heavily on the puppet theater. As *kabuki* grew from suggestive dances with a crude and rudimentary story-line to intricately elaborated plots requiring a full day to perform, *kabuki* actors and playwrights appropriated techniques, plots, even entire plays from *jōruri* without the slightest compunction. Even the unique *kabuki* acting style known as *aragoto* 荒事 is said to have resulted from the *Kimpira-jōruri* 金平浄瑠璃 which Ichikawa Danjūrō I 初代市川団十郎, originator of the *aragoto* style, saw as a child.<sup>13</sup> But in the case of *sewamono* the borrowing seems to have gone in the other direction. The origins of the *jōruri* puppet theater are to be found in the medieval recitations of war tales. Some of these came to be accompanied by crude puppets which acted out the events described in the tale. In the middle of the seventeenth century *jōruri* was still predominantly a narrative art, and still firmly controlled by the conventions of medieval storytelling. The subject matter continued to be almost exclusively the great historical tales of the past, stories about warriors and aristocrats taken from legend, myth, and history. It was under the tutelage of *kabuki* that *jōruri* developed into a "theater form in which the narrative element is reduced in importance and emphasis is placed on enactment of highly theatrical scenes (*miseba* 見せ場)." The basis of Chikamatsu's apparently revolutionary *shinjūmono* 心忠物 (love suicides) was the *wagoto* 和事 acting style and *keiseikaimono* 傾城買物 (pieces about consorting with courtesans) of the *kabuki* actor Sakata Tōjūrō 坂田藤十郎. Chikamatsu wrote more than thirty *kabuki* plays for Tōjūrō and in fact had spent two decades writing love suicides for the *kabuki* theater before attempting his first *jōruri* play on that theme, the great *Sonezaki shinjū* 曾根崎心忠 (1703). One can go so far as to say that the basic role types and scenes found in all *jōruri sewamono* had been first established in *kabuki*.<sup>14</sup>

*Kabuki* is, above all, an actor's theater. It originated in the mass-dance crazes of the Muromachi period which were participatory in nature, not mere spectacles to watch while standing idly by. Even after it had become the domain of professional entertainers, it continued to be an example of how to act and an exhortation to do so. *Jōruri* merely recounted tales of ancient deeds with the help of puppets. *Nō*, on the other hand, also arose from popular dances and entertainments; but the religious and aesthetic ideals of a feudal society extracted all energy from action, removing it to a highly abstracted and cerebral plane where it could be adequately

<sup>13</sup>James Brandon, "The Theft of Kabuki," in James Brandon, ed., *Chūshingura: Studies in Kabuki and the Puppet Theater* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1982), p. 115.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

controlled without fear of impinging directly on the spectator or upsetting the social order. Action of the *kabuki* stage is performed, not simply recounted.

And thus we see in *kabuki* a shift of emphasis from the word to the act. As with most forms of drama, both *nō* and *kabuki* seem to have allowed some considerable liberty in the words spoken on stage during the early part of their development. Both, too, developed in literate cultures in which various influences of the fixed and written word and of the literary heritage were inevitably felt. But *nō*, encouraged by a range of social and historical factors, succumbed much more quickly to the lure of a fixed text and written words. Though not printed until much later, authorial attributions of *nō* plays go back at least to the time of Kan'ami 観阿弥 (1333-84), and, given the highly allusive nature of even these early plays, we can be certain of a high degree of "textual" stability. Subject matter was often literary, and narrative quite frequently replaced action. *Jōruri* developed as a mere adjunct to narrative art and, as the puppets could not speak, was never able entirely to escape the tyranny of the word, even in its imitation of *kabuki* dance pieces. *Kabuki* was dominated by the actor. Early skits relied entirely on improvised dialogue. But even as *kabuki* learned narrative complexity from *jōruri* and *nō*, it retained great fluidity in verbal expression. It was common for the *kabuki* equivalent of a playwright to merely outline a plot for the actors and allow them to improvise their own lines. Of course the lines could and did change from day to day, and even the plays of the best known writers, such as Tsuruya Namboku and Kawatake Mokuami 河竹黙阿弥, were subject to the whims of the actors. Needless to say, these writers had to tailor their efforts to the desires of the leading stars right from the start, but even in so doing did not have the final say when it came to performance.

The *genzai-mono* of *nō*, as we have seen, purported to enact events as though they were happening on stage. And yet these events were invariably borrowed from the past. *Kabuki* was relentlessly modern. The earliest skits exhibited no historical consciousness whatsoever, and scenes from contemporary life were the exclusive material of *kabuki* for its first few decades. Even when the *kabuki* theater embarked on wholesale adoption of historical pieces from the *jōruri* theater, it did so with a twist. No attempt at thorough-going historical authenticity was made; these representations of historical events were peppered with contemporary references, habits, styles, and customs. And in most cases the leading characters were given double identities which defied logic and any sense of historicity, and brought them solidly into the modern world. History, once the exclusive property of noble and samurai was appropriated and reduced to the comfortable and familiar world of the *chōnin*.

Moreover, *kabuki* relied very heavily on confrontation. Of course we can find confrontation in *nō* as well. Before Zeami 世阿弥 perfected the bipartite dream play, Kan'ami had written plays which climaxed in the confrontation of two characters. But these conflicts were usually conducted verbally, not physically. In later plays, as we have seen, the antagonist was completely removed from the stage, precluding any direct confrontation, and all that remained was a memory of what had taken

place. *Kabuki* thrived on stage confrontations of every kind, from reserved contests of will and determination to elaborately choreographed battle scenes in exotic locations and struggles against gods and animals of all sorts, real and imaginary. The delight in these scenes was so great that many of them were extracted from the plays in which they first appeared and became separate performance pieces in their own right, almost completely divorced from the plot which had generated them. The "Eighteen *Kabuki* Plays" 歌舞伎十八番 of the Ichikawa family include a high percentage of these pieces, such as "Elephant Tug" (Zōhiki 象引), "Sukeroku 助六," "Fuwa 不破," "The Subscription List" (Kanjinchō 勧進帳), "Oshimodoshi 押戻," "Kan'u 関羽," "Kamahige 鎌髭," and "Shibaraku 暫" (Just a Moment!), the ultimate in delightful, but plotless, confrontation.

Furthermore, the dramatic tension of many, if not most, *kabuki* plays is concentrated on the act and moment of decision making. The role of *giri* and *ninjō*, the contradictory demands of society and self, has been discussed at great length elsewhere and need not be further elaborated here except to point out that the result of cultivating this tension dramatically was to center the drama on the choice of the individual between these conflicting demands. While the consequences were never much in doubt, the individual was nevertheless granted the ability to chose his own destiny and accept with dignity whatever resulted from that choice. And while we find few passages of soliloquy which represent the process of decision making as a philosophical debate, in characteristic fashion the vast non-verbal resources of *kabuki* spectacle are concerted at this very point to dramatize it and heighten its effects. Music and sound effects, facial expressions, striking poses (*mie* 見得), tempo and rhythm, visceral exchanges in dialogic fashion combine to reach a frenzied pitch of dramatic intensity, usually punctuated by a final, powerful *mie* and the sharp retort of the *hyōshigi* 拍子木 indicating that the protagonist has finally arrived at a decision. In spite of a tendency to avoid precise verbal expression at such junctures, the issues and contending possibilities, as well as the emotional turmoil of the character are very powerfully conveyed through looks, movements, facial expressions, even grunts and groans, evidence of the ineffability of this turmoil.

That *kabuki* developed in the thriving business world of Japan's great cities is well known. Yet it may be instructive even so to look at how thoroughly the new commercial culture permeated this art form. *Kabuki* never enjoyed the privilege of aristocratic patronage to any significant degree. In its infancy it evolved from itinerant dances performed in exchange for alms to a rather crude method for advertising the wares of prostitution houses. Despite repeated government efforts to dissociate "legitimate" *kabuki* from prostitution, including the well known bans on female, and then young male, performers, it continued to enjoy an intimate relationship with the culture of the pleasure quarters. In fact this relationship was inadvertently strengthened by official attempts to isolate these institutions from the mainstream of society and the center of urban life, by placing the two outside the city center, but in close physical proximity to each other.

In Tokugawa Japan, the pleasure quarters were the epitome of wasteful consumption. According to traditional views, this portion of

society not only failed to produce anything of value, its sole purpose was to dissipate and destroy the wealth, energy, and talents of those too weak to resist its temptations. Nor was this destruction quiet and unobtrusive; extravagance was the order of the day. A customer made a name for himself in this world by spending freely and spreading his bounty widely among the social pariahs who inhabited this realm. Many a man was brought to financial ruin through his interest in such activities.

And yet the appeal seemed irresistible. For this was one of the few preserves in which class and rank counted for nought. In fact, because of government restrictions, on entering the pleasure quarters samurai were usually eager to hide the social status they so proudly displayed outside the gates of Yoshiwara. Within the gates money, or at least the squandering thereof, reigned supreme, creating a commercial utopia in which consumption seemed to exist for its own sake. Within the gates not only was it impossible to rely on the deeds of noble, brave, or mighty ancestors, the position of any individual in the elaborate hierarchy required constant expenditure to maintain. No act, however extravagant, insured a lasting position; only the hierarchy remained relatively stable, the inhabitants shifting rapidly up and down the ladder of success and fame like quotations on the stock market.

This was the universe of *kabuki*. This inspired its early skits, showing how to approach, woo, and treat a courtesan. This provided the roles, scenes and incidents for domestic dramas, the inspiration for Chikamatsu's masterpieces. This invaded the historical dramas, based on the medieval fascination for the remembrance of mighty deeds in battle, in the most peculiarly anachronistic way, transforming them into remarkably modern works. The *kabuki* theater was, for the *bakufu*, a nightmare of conspicuous consumption, indulging in and exhorting to extravagance, as spectators reveled in displays of splendor and sensual delights which sent the imagination soaring. Commercial sponsors sent gifts prominently displaying their brand. The *hanamichi* 花道 was at times littered with the products of commercial trade. Not only did the actors indulge their own fantasies in the most extravagant silks and brocades for their own costumes, their whimsies set the fashion for the day, generating a constant demand for new styles among the well-to-do ladies of the metropolis. The popularity of actors spawned a very lucrative sector of the printing business, which specialized in prints of currently popular actors and particularly moving scenes. These rapidly went out of fashion as one play replaced another, generating yet another flurry of consumption activity. Actors too were ranked according to their ability to generate box-office receipts, and had to work constantly to maintain their popularity with the public, ever on the lookout for new fads, new styles, the latest jargon.

The isolation of the pleasure and theater districts was a qualified success. It allowed the government to exercise some modicum of control over access, prevent the worst and most egregious abuses from getting out of hand, and, in the case of *kabuki*, to restrain the most blatant attempts of the theaters to capitalize on inherent interest in contemporary political events. But at the same time it was this very isolation from the nexus of traditional social and familial ties, the designation of these areas as a preserve relatively free from conventional morality, which

gave free rein to commercial forces already actively at work shaping the sub-culture of these domains. It is as though the *bakufu* unwittingly incubated within its very bosom the egg of the monster which was to devour it, for with its emphasis on the individual as self-conscious actor its recognition of the possibility of success through purposive individual action, and its vision of human activity as consumption, *kabuki* presented an uncannily accurate vision of the condition of the modern individual.

Surely this was one of the most important reasons for the continued success and popularity of *kabuki* during the first two or three decades of the Meiji period. It required but a small and superficial adjustment to represent on its stage the ideals and aspirations of the new era, politically and sociologically so different from the preceding centuries. And had it not been for attempts on the part of the new regime to enlist the resources of this flamboyant vision in the Ministry of Education, it would surely have fared even better than it did until gradually pushed aside by the march of technology in the employ of capitalism which created the ultimate in modern mass entertainment, the cinema.

## EMJ NETWORK ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING

The Early Modern Japan Network will hold its annual business meeting in conjunction with the Association for Asian Studies meeting in Boston. We have reserved the Vineyard/Yarmouth room of the Boston Marriott Hotel from 6:30 to 8:30 on Friday, March 25, 1994. All AAS members are invited. We have not arranged for a catered dinner, hoping instead to conclude business quickly and dine outside the hotel. **If you are interested in dining as a group, please contact Mark Ravina, the EMJ secretary/treasurer.**



## OKITE 掟

## BYLAWS OF THE EARLY MODERN JAPAN NETWORK

A Committee of the North-East Asia Council of The Association for Asian Studies

## Article I -- Name

The name of the committee shall be The Early Modern Japan Network.

## Article II -- The Objectives

The objectives of the Early Modern Japan Network shall be (a) to promote interest in and scholarly study of the society, culture, thought and history of Japan in the early modern era (approximately the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries); (b) to provide means for dissemination of scholarly, educational and other materials designed to promote early modern Japanese studies; (c) to promote cooperative activities and exchange of information within the international community of scholars and educators who specialize in early modern Japanese studies.

## Article III -- Powers

The Early Modern Japan Network shall have power to take all lawful action which is appropriate to the achievement of its objectives and which is within the authority granted by the constitution of The Association for Asian Studies.

## Article IV -- Organization

## Section 1. Authority in the Early Modern Japan Network

An Annual Meeting shall be convened in conjunction with The Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting during which officers of the Early Modern Japan Network shall present reports on the activities of the Network for the preceding year, plans for the forthcoming year, and a review of the current financial condition of the Network. The agenda of the Annual Meeting shall include an opportunity for other business.

Early modern Japan specialists who are members of The Association for Asian Studies or participants in its activities and who attend the Annual Meeting of the Early Modern Japan Network shall choose by ballot the elective officers of the Network.

Early modern Japan specialists who are members of The Association for Asian Studies or who are participants in its activities and who attend the Annual Meeting of the Early Modern Japan Network shall have the power to amend the Bylaws by a two-thirds majority of ballots cast at the meeting. Proposals to amend the Bylaws shall be submitted to the Network Secretary-Treasurer four weeks in advance of the Annual Meeting for distribution to Yoriai members.

## Section 2. Officers

The Early Modern Japan Network shall be administered by executive officers collectively known as the *Yoriai*.

The *Yoriai* shall be composed of 1) the Chair; 2) the Vice-Chair; 3) the Secretary-Treasurer; 4) two members-at-large; and the Editor(s) of the Early Modern Japan Network publications elected at the Annual Meeting of the Network.

Officers as well as members of all subcommittees, must be early modern Japan specialists and members in good standing of The Association for Asian Studies and with voting rights in the Association.

## Terms and Methods of Selection:

Officers shall be elected for staggered three year terms. To initiate election of officers the first election shall elect:

The Chair and Secretary-Treasurer for a three-year term; the Vice-Chair and editor of the newsletter, *Oboegaki* for a two-year term; and the two members-at-large for a one-year term. All officers thereafter shall be elected for the full three-year term.

Powers and Procedures of the *Yoriai*:

The *Yoriai* shall administer the affairs of the Early Modern Japan Network and shall have authority to execute all powers and functions of the Network that are consonant with the Constitution and Bylaws of the Association for Asian Studies and the bylaws of the Network.

The *Yoriai* shall approve the annual budget, reports to the North-East Asia Council and to the Association for Asian Studies; it shall appoint such subcommittees as it deems necessary, supervise their activities carried out on behalf of the Early Modern Japan Network, and shall receive and act upon budgets, recommendations, requests, and plans submitted by them.

The *Yoriai* shall meet at the time of the Annual Meeting and such other times as are necessary; it may also conduct its affairs by mail and/or by telephone. However, if the *Yoriai* votes other than at a meeting, any resolution thus adopted shall be approved by a majority vote of a quorum of its members.

A quorum of the *Yoriai* shall consist of at least two-thirds of its members.

The *Yoriai* shall nominate candidates for election to it. Any Early Modern Japan specialist may nominate qualified individuals

(see VII. D. 1. below) for vacancies by mail one month prior to the Annual Meeting. Such nomination shall be submitted to the Network Secretary-Treasurer.

#### Annual Reports:

The Chair shall present an annual report to the Secretary of the Association for Asian Studies and to the North-East Asia Council and shall publish it in the Early Modern Japan Network newsletter, *Oboegaki*; the Chair shall also present copies of Network publications to the Secretary of the Association.

#### Article V -- Amendments

Section 1. Amendments to the Bylaws may be proposed by the Yoriai, by those attending the Annual Meeting, or by petition from early modern Japan specialists submitted thirty days before the Annual Meeting.

Section 2. All proposed amendments shall be discussed at the first Annual Meeting following the proposal and shall be voted on at that meeting.

Section 3. Amendments shall be effective immediately upon adoption, unless the amendment itself provides otherwise.

#### Article VI -- Finances and Contracts

The fiscal year of the Early Modern Japan Network shall end on December 31.

##### Income and disbursements

All banking is handled through the account of the Association for Asian Studies.

All requests for reimbursement for expenditures must be submitted to the Secretary-Treasurer for approval and forwarding to the Association for Asian Studies for payment.

Specific grants or legal contracts for Early Modern Japan Network activities must be approved by a) the Yoriai, b) the North-East Asia Council, and c) the Board of Directors of the Association for Asian Studies and must be signed by the Yoriai Chair as well as the appropriate representatives of the Association for Asian Studies.

#### Article VII -- Officers

**Chair:** The Chair shall be presiding officer of the Early Modern Japan Network, and shall exercise the duties and responsibilities commonly associated with the office.

**Vice-Chair:** The Vice-Chair shall assume the duties of the Chair, holding the title of Acting Chair, in the event of the absence, death, resignation, or incapacity of the Chair.

**Secretary-Treasurer:** The Secretary-Treasurer shall have charge of the records and general correspondence; shall keep the subscriber lists; shall collect subscriptions; shall manage the accounts; shall make arrangements for the Annual Meeting; and shall perform such other duties as may be specified in the Bylaws or be assigned by the Yoriai.

Election of members of the Yoriai shall take place at the Annual Meeting; each person attending shall cast one vote.

Each candidate for office must be a member in good standing of the Association for Asian Studies and must conduct the major part of his professional activities in teaching and/or research associated with the field of early modern Japanese studies.

Any office vacated by its holder shall be filled by appointment by a majority vote of the Yoriai; any Yoriai member so appointed shall stand for election to the unexpired portion of his term at the next Annual Meeting.

##### Annual Meeting:

**Procedure:** Procedure in all Meetings of the Early Modern Japan Network shall be governed by the latest edition of *Robert's Rules of Order*, unless otherwise specified in the Bylaws.

**Agenda:** An agenda shall be prepared for the meeting by the Chair, in consultation with other members of the Yoriai; the agenda shall include provision for elections to the Yoriai, reports from the Chair, the Secretary-Treasurer, the editors of Early Modern Japan Network publications, for discussion of specific Network proposals, and for "other business" from the floor.

**Periodical Publications:** The periodical publication of the Early Modern Japan Network shall be *Oboegaki* and any other publications the Yoriai may determine to establish.

**Editors:** The editors of the periodical publications shall edit and manage their respective publications, prepare annual reports and budgets, and may have authority to make contracts and other necessary arrangements subject to review or direction by the Yoriai. They shall nominate for Yoriai approval the editor and assistants who are to be associated directly with them in preparing their publications.

**Pricing of Publications:** The price of periodical publications of the Early Modern Japan Network shall be determined by the Yoriai and in consultation with those present at the annual meeting.

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### Using Electronic Mail

To register with the Early Modern Japan Networks electronic bulletin board, send a brief message to:

EMJNET-REQUEST@MAGNUS.ACS.OHIO-STATE.EDU  
or  
OWNER-EMJNET@MAGNUS.ACS.OHIO-STATE.EDU

(Note: these addresses are each a single, continuous line)

To make a contributions and send a message to everyone on the list, address it to:

EMJNET@MAGNUS.ACS.OHIO-STATE.EDU

### Subscriptions and Back Issues

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Issues 2.1, 3.1 and 3.2 are available for \$3.00 each. make checks payable to THE ASSOCIATION FOR ASIAN STUDIES.

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## Guidelines for Contributors

*Oboegaki* welcomes contributions on any topic relating to early modern Japan. Contributors retain all copyrighting privileges. Please contact Mark Ravina with any queries or questions of suitability.

Electronic contributions (diskettes or electronic mail) are a welcome addition to hard copy, but not a substitute. Please send both. Mention the word processor used when submitting files on disk. If possible, include a copy of the file as ASCII text. (If you do not what ASCII is, do not bother). Both Mac and DOS formats are acceptable, but 3.5" inch diskettes are preferably to 5.25" disks. For electronic submissions, please keep formatting to a minimum. Do not use columns or elaborate headers or footers. Use footnotes when necessary. For macrons, use any consistent symbol, such as the circumflex (ô), the umlaut (ö), or the tilde (õ). If you are also using a European language, please note if these symbols are used with their original meaning. To show macrons via electronic mail, follow with a circumflex (o^). Kanji are desirable for all proper nouns and any unusual Japanese words. Kanji need not be included with initial queries or submissions.

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## 覺 OBOEGAKI 書

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