Traditional Japanese Theater

An Anthology of Plays

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Japanese Theater: A Living Tradition

Traditional Japanese theater is living theater. Although its roots go back a millennium and its forms have changed considerably over time, the major genres—noh, *kyōgen*, kabuki, and the puppet theater—can claim continuous performance traditions. The theatrical arts were, and continue to be, passed down from parent to child, from master to disciple, with each new generation learning by imitation the skills of the previous one and each preserving both performance practices and theater artifacts from earlier periods. Only after they have totally mastered traditional performance practices do players experiment with innovations, the most successful of which may then become part of the continuing tradition.

In addition to producing classical plays according to time-honored conventions, performers sometimes research and reproduce old works that have been dropped from the repertoire, or they participate in the production of completely new works. Many of these new plays use traditional practices to dramatize nontraditional subject matter. For example, in 1956 the Japanese version of both *Hamlet* and Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* were produced in the puppet theater (Jones 1976, 1983), and in 1991 a new noh play about heart transplants, written by Dr. Tomio Tada and scored by noh actor Cumas Hashioka, premiered in Japan. Three years later, noh performers presented it in the United States.

Experimentation is not limited to traditional performers. The author Mishima Yukio remade thirteen noh plays into modern theater, and Suzuki Tadashi, one of the best-known modern directors, developed a training regime based on traditional theatrical practices. The work of both men has achieved international acclaim. In the West, playwrights, choreographers, directors, and performers—such as William Butler Yeats, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Sergei Eisenstein, Max Reinhardt, Berthold Brecht, Benjamin Britten, George Balanchine, and the Théâtre du Solei—have experimented with practices and materials from the Japanese theater. There also are

groups that produce traditional plays in English. Two of the translators of plays in this anthology are leaders in this field: Don Kenny leads an international kyōgen troupe that performs in both Japanese and English, and James R. Brandon regularly produces English kabuki with students in Hawaii, often with the assistance of professional kabuki actors. Traditional Japanese forms and performers are now active players on the world stage.

The traditional Japanese theater troupes, which perform at the Vatican, in London theaters, and in New York's Central Park, as well as in Japan, are composed almost entirely of men. Throughout Japanese history, most performing arts groups have been limited to a single sex, and although female performers have played crucial roles in the development of all types of theater, the major professional stages have been largely the preserve of men. Women perform most often in the more informal settings of teahouses, banquets, and recitals. In addition to professional actors, many men and women practice the arts of traditional theater as hobbies and, long before the advent of karaoke, would entertain one another with a bit of noh chant or a short kabuki dance. These amateurs, including many non-Japanese, are an important part of the economic backbone of traditional theater; they provide support by taking lessons with actors and regularly attending professional performances.

Theater as a distinct performance genre with well-developed texts appeared in Japan only after poetry, narrative literature, and a sophisticated poetics had flourished for more than six hundred years. During the early, pretheater period (ca. 700–1350), both religious and secular performing arts prospered. In addition, many of the early literary arts had performance aspects: stories, for example, were often read aloud in conjunction with displays of illustrations, or they were proclaimed from Buddhist pulpits as part of elaborate ceremonies. Court poetry was frequently recited aloud and sometimes composed in the voices of figures in screen paintings. Music and dance were important parts of both sacred and secular culture, and troupes of entertainers—acrobats, monkey trainers, puppeteers, and comic mimes—traversed the countryside amusing people of all classes. When a full-fledged theater did develop in the fourteenth century, it was, as one might expect, quite unlike its counterparts elsewhere in the world.

The introduction to this book traces the development of theater in Japan, suggests some of its general characteristics, and describes the stages on which the major genres are performed. More detailed descriptions of the genres, particularly of their performance aspects, are given in the introductions to parts 2 and 3.

Historical Perspectives

The earliest recorded Japanese performance, a sacred event depicted in the *Kojiki* (712) and the *Nihonshoki* (720), occurred in the mythological age of the deities. To induce the Sun Goddess to come out of a cave where she had hidden herself in anger at her brother's misbehavior, a female deity named Uzume put on a costume, stamped on an overturned bucket, became possessed, and, according to one version of the story, revealed her genitals. The divine audience roared in appreciative laughter, and the Sun Goddess, her curiosity aroused by this merriment, emerged from

FIGURE 1.1. A shrine priestess (*miko*) performs kagura before the inner sanctuary of Ima Hiei Shrine in Kyoto on November 14, 1991. The dancer holds bells (*suzu*) and a sword. (Photo by David Boggett.)

FIGURE 1.2. Bugaku dances continue to be presented to the deity and the public at Imagumano Shrine in Kyoto, where Kannami and his son Zeami performed noh for the shogun Yoshimitsu in 1374. Folded strips of paper (*gohei*) and straw ropes mark off sacred space. (Photo by Karen Brazell.)

the cave, thereby restoring light to the universe. This heavenly performance has long been proclaimed the origin of theater. Uzume later descended to earth to prepare the way for Ninigi, the mythological ancestor of the imperial family, and became the progenitor of a line of female shamans. These shamans and their successors, especially those known as *miko* and associated with Shinto shrines, were central to the ritual performance events generally known as *kagura*. Many types of kagura, which include music, song, dance, and some mime, are still in ritual use at Shinto shrines today (figure 1.1).

Performing arts imported from the Asian continent by way of China and Korea were popular in the imperial court during the Nara (710–784) and Heian (794–1186) periods. *Gigaku*, known today only through surviving masks and a few documents, was first introduced as a performing art in the sixth century by an immigrant from the Korean peninsula who had studied in China. It flourished under the patronage of the Nara court. The performances, which were held at Buddhist temples, consisted of a procession of masked figures followed by dances and mimes accompanied by flutes, drums, and cymbals. The lion dance (*shishi mai*), which remains popular today, was a featured part of the performances. *Bugaku* largely replaced gigaku in the Heian period and became the ceremonial music of the court.[1] This form of music and masked dance included elements from China, Korea, and even India and Tibet. The dances were sometimes performed by Heian aristocrats, who placed a high value on acquiring artistic skills. The hero of *The Tale of Genji* (Genji

1. Bugaku refers to the dance that is accompanied by *gagaku* music. I use bugaku as a generic term.

monogatari), for example, is praised for his splendid performance of a bugaku dance as well as for his poetic and musical skills. Although its continental prototypes have disappeared, bugaku is preserved today by shrines, the imperial household, and amateur groups in Japan (figure 1.2).

Another entertainment imported from China, known as *sarugaku* or *sangaku*, included acrobatics, magic, music, dance, comic pantomime, and trained animal acts, especially those using monkeys. The well-known scholar Fujiwara no Akihira (d. 1066) wrote *A Record of New Sarugaku* (Shinsarugakuki), which describes a rich variety show including solo sumo wrestling, rice-planting songs, puppets, lion dances, and what appear to have been comic sketches of various types of people, such as an aged local magistrate putting on airs, a respectable older woman blushingly covering her face with a fan, someone pounding his belly after having overeaten, a reverend monk coveting a gaily colored stole, and a respected nun seeking diapers for her soon-to-be-born infant. Sarugaku performers were usually itinerants, who often had connections with religious institutions. Many of them lived as social outcasts in segregated areas (*sanjo*), along with other entertainers (puppeteers, dancers, storytellers) and various other social pariahs (such as butchers, prostitutes, and undertakers).

The second half of the twelfth century was a time of social and political disruption. Civil wars, which provided a rich source of material for later dramatists, ripped apart the basic fabric of Japanese life. In the ensuing medieval society (ca. 1185 to 1600), the warrior replaced the aristocrat at the center of power, and high-ranking women lost their economic independence and the prominent role they had occupied as both writers and readers of elite literature. Areas outside the capital grew in economic and political importance, with the result that travel increased markedly. Sharply increased communication with the continent accelerated the importation of ideas and artifacts. The literary language for prose narratives evolved from the women's style of the classical period, which used mostly Japanese diction and grammatical forms, to a mixed style that included many Chinese loan words and grammatical constructions. New sects of Pure Land and Zen Buddhism gained popularity, and large religious complexes that combined Buddhist and Shinto practices prospered as cultural centers. Services centering on the chanting of the *nembutsu* (the invocation *namu Amida Butsu*, "Hail Amida Buddha") became popular and increasingly included performance elements, some of which developed into long-lasting folk traditions. The Mibu Temple in Kyoto, for example, traces its performance tradition (called *Mibu dainembutsu kyōgen*) back to a nembutsu service held in the third month of 1300 (see figure 2.62).

In the medieval period, some of the performing arts that had been on the periphery of court culture moved toward center stage. Interaction increased between folk and aristocratic entertainments, religious and secular arts, and male and female performers. One good example is the popular song known as *imayō*. In the Heian period these were sung by lower-class female performers who were sometimes summoned to court to entertain the aristocrats. In the twelfth century the retired emperor GoShirakawa (1127–1192) became so intrigued by this art that he studied under a woman singer named Otomae (1085–1169), sponsored imayō events at court, and compiled an anthology of the songs and practical imayō criticism

(*Ryōjin hishō*). His efforts paid off: the songs remained so popular at the imperial court that a century later *The Confessions of Lady Nijō* (Towazugatari) depicts two emperors singing imayō. Unfortunately, GoShirakawa's anthology survives only in fragments, so our knowledge of the nature of these songs is limited.

Another type of song called *sōka* (or *sōga*) was created in Kamakura, headquarters of the military rulers between 1185 and 1333. Especially popular with the warrior class, the lyrics of these songs drew on past literature as well as contemporary activities. Some of them consist of lists of the virtues of almost anything—from blossoms to hawks and gambling; some feature interwoven strands of images and phrases from classical literary works; and others are poetic travel accounts enumerating the major sights along popular routes. The songs served as cultural mandalas for the Kamakura elite and remained popular for a century or more—even the noh actor and playwright Zeami (1363–1443) mentions them in his works. They probably influenced the development of the noh theater by providing precedents for its poetic language, and they may also have influenced its music and rhythms, although we cannot be sure of this because we know little about how sōka were performed.

Female dancers were crucial to the flowering of the performing arts in the medieval period. The *shirabyōshi* donned male court caps and white (*shira*) robes, danced to percussion accompaniment, and sang songs, including imayō. Although little is known about the nature of their performances, the dancers themselves figure prominently in the life and literature of the period. Shizuka Gozen, Giō, and Hotoke are immortalized in *The Tale of the Heike* and in the noh plays *Yoshino Shizuka*, *Futari Shizuka*, *Futari Giō*, and *Hotoke no Hara*. In his treatise entitled *Three Elements* (Sandō), Zeami places the artistic accomplishments of the shirabyōshi Giō, Gijo, and Shizuka alongside those of the famous Heian-period poets Lady Ise and Ono no Komachi. Other noh plays, such as *Dōjōji* (included in part 2), feature unnamed shirabyōshi, and the heroines in plays like *Izutsu* (part 2) and *Matsukaze* are modeled on the shirabyōshi figure, as the women dance wearing the caps and gowns of their lovers.

The successors of the shirabyōshi were the *kusemai* dancers whose art integrated song and dance more closely and had a lively rhythm. It so impressed the noh actor Kannami (or Kan'ami, 1333–1384) that he himself studied with the kusemai performer Otozuru (dates unknown) and incorporated into noh the rhythms and structures of her art. This innovation was an important step in the development of the classical noh theater, but it also hastened the demise of kusemai as an independent art. The kusemai texts preserved today were probably heavily influenced by the noh. The performers, however, were immortalized by the depictions of kusemai dancers in such noh plays as *Hyakuman* and *Yamamba* (in part 2). These and other plays also appear to have incorporated earlier kusemai into their structures.

In addition to these song (*utaimono*) and dance (*mai*) genres, recited narratives (*katarimono*) had an important place in medieval entertainments. These narratives were recited to the rhythmical accompaniment of a closed fan tapped against the palm of the hand, a hand drum (*tsuzumi*), the plucking and striking of the harsh lute-like *biwa*, or, later, to the sounds of *shamisen* (also pronounced *samisen*). The first popular performers of recited narratives were biwa priests (*biwa hōshi*), men who were generally blind and may have taken the Buddhist tonsure. These biwa priests

probably were originally ritual specialists who placated unsettled spirits, especially the malignant spirits of the dead. By the eleventh century there were at least two general types of biwa priests: those who followed military troops and sang battle songs and those who chanted Buddhist pieces at temples, especially those around Kyoto. These two aspects of the biwa priests' art were combined in battle tales couched in Buddhist terms. The most successful was *The Tale of Heike*, which wove the stories of hundreds of men and women who lived and died during the civil wars of the late twelfth century—wars that the Heike lost—around Buddhist themes of impermanence, karmic retribution, and salvation. The first version of this tale, now lost, was written between 1219 and 1222 and was followed by various reciter's versions, the most influential of which was dictated by the talented biwa priest Kakuichi (d. 1371) to his disciple Teiichi a few months before his death. Zeami thought highly of this work and broadened its dissemination and its fame by treating it as a "classical" source to be drawn on in composing noh plays. *The Tale of the Heike* (whose recitation came to be called *heikyoku*) provided a rich mine of materials for later theater and literature, including the plays about the plight of Shunkan and the death of Atsumori translated here.

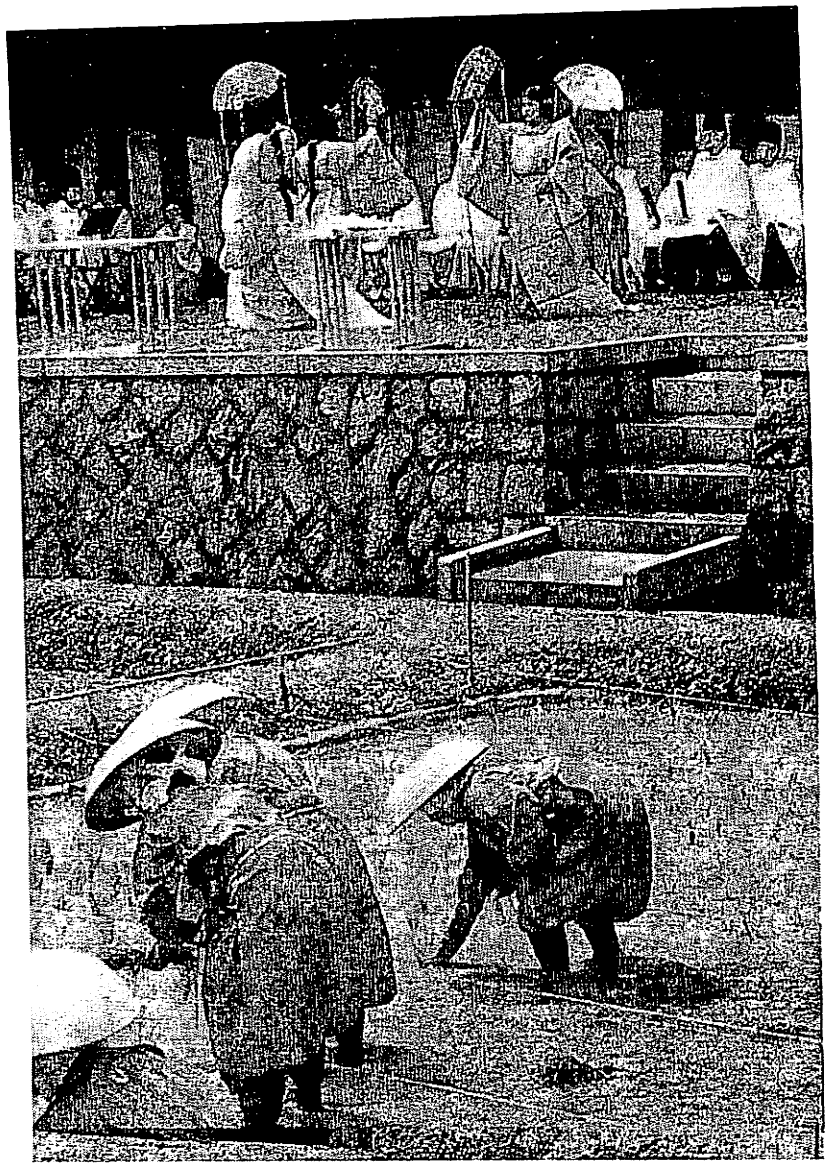

FIGURE 1.3. Rice-planting songs (*taueuta*), a component of early *dengaku* (literally, "field music"), are still performed each spring. In June 1992, at Fushimi Inari Shrine in Kyoto, festively clad women transplant rice as priestesses dance behind them. (Photo by David Boggett.)

After 1333, when the shogunal headquarters moved from Kamakura to an area of Kyoto called Muromachi, military patronage of the arts increased as these leaders attempted to prove that they, like the aristocrats who had ruled before them, were a cultural elite and therefore had a legitimate right to power. Under the patronage of the Muromachi military rulers (1333–1574), the first major theatrical genres developed. In the mid-fourteenth century *dengaku*—a performance art that, like sarugaku, combined song, dance, and mime—was enthusiastically supported by the first Ashikaga shogun, Takauji (1305–1358) (figure 1.3). A performance attended by the shogun in the summer of 1349 on the broad riverbed in the center of the capital has been vividly described. At one point, a child actor wearing a monkey mask, a gold and red brocade robe, and fur slippers entered the arched bridgeway to a lively beat and leaped gracefully up onto the handrail. At this, the audience rose

up with stamps and cries of appreciation, which caused the stands to collapse, killing and injuring scores of people and inciting others to loot and fight. A quarter century later, the reputation of the actor Kannami, the head of one of several sarugaku troupes, attracted the attention of the third shogun, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358–1408). Kannami and his son Zeami performed for the shogun at the Imagumano Shrine in Kyoto in 1374. Yoshimitsu's admiration for Kannami's artistic skill and his attraction to the young Zeami led the shogun to patronize their art. Thus sarugaku noh became part of the cultural life of the capital.

The literary aesthetics of the capital's elite culture was based on the classical poetic tradition of *waka* and included the newer linked verse (*renga*). Zeami, who must have received more education than the average poor actor, proved talented at poetry, and he soon attracted the attention of litterateurs and arbiters of court taste such as Nijō Yoshimoto (1320–1388). The plays that Zeami composed and performed furthered the poetic and cultural ideals of the time. The concept of profound and refined beauty known as *yūgen*, which first emerged as an important aesthetic ideal in twelfth-century poetics, achieved three-dimensional representation on the noh stage, and the poetic techniques of imagistic association (*engo* and *yori-ai*) and allusive variation (*honka dori*) were expanded in noh texts.

Although Zeami incorporated into his noh many techniques and much material from the poetic tradition, he did not limit himself to that legacy. The classical works that he used as sources were often filtered through medieval commentaries, handbooks, and legends. In addition to classical literature, Zeami and succeeding playwrights also drew heavily on more recent works, most notably *The Tale of the Heike*, but also tale literature (*setsuwa bungaku*) and sacred texts. Religious practices and beliefs also influenced the structure of Zeami's plays. The two-act noh play in which a spirit or ghost appears in the form of an ordinary person in act 1 and in its "true" form as a deity or a dead person in act 2 owes much to shamanistic practices, memorial services, and records of dreams and visions. Plays featuring the ghosts of dead people often include depictions of suffering in a Buddhist-style purgatory, and when demons take center stage, exorcism is almost sure to follow. Some of the main characters in noh plays are ordinary, living people, but even then the experiences enacted are usually extraordinary, with altered states of consciousness caused by obsessive grief, love, loyalty, or devotion, a favorite subject.

Kyōgen plays are normally interspersed between noh plays in a day's program. Quotidian experiences are the stuff of these plays, which feature husbands and wives, masters and servants, merchants, blind people, *yamabushi* (mountain priests), and even animals and plants. Popular songs of the period (*kouta*) were worked into kyōgen plays, and conversely, songs sung in kyōgen became popular outside the theater. Noh and kyōgen have common origins, and it is easy to see the beginnings of kyōgen in the comic mimes performed in the Heian period. Although the two theaters developed as companion arts, the early history of kyōgen is shadowy. Zeami's holographs of several complete noh texts have survived, although the earliest extant kyōgen scripts, the *Tenshō kyōgen bon* of 1578, are simply brief plot outlines. Full kyōgen texts were written down only in the Edo period (1600–1868); consequently, some of what is claimed to be an expression of Muromachi society may in fact be more typical of a later period. It is clear, however, that in the century after Zeami, kyōgen

enjoyed growing popularity in the numerous public performances typical of that period. In the late fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, noh and kyōgen were performed by both male and female professional troupes as well as by amateur and semi-amateur (*te sarugaku*) actors. Teaching amateurs quickly became an economic factor in preserving the theater, as it continues to be today.

Late medieval records mention noh plays staged with puppets. Although both string marionettes and mechanical dolls were known in Japan, hand-operated puppets have been the focus of most of the artistic development. Puppets served as mediums in Shinto rituals to express the words and perform the actions of the gods, and puppet performances were presented as offerings to please and petition the deities; any humans who happened to be around could also enjoy the performances. Puppeteers (*ebisu kake*) connected with the Ebisu Shrine at Nishinomiya (between modern Osaka and Kobe) and specializing in plays about the deity Ebisu were particularly well known. This troupe staged noh plays in 1555 and was invited to play at the imperial palace. Other puppeteers (*hotoke mawashi*) were connected with temples and presented tales about Buddhist deities and related themes. Not, however, until puppeteers joined forces with *jōruri* chanters and shamisen players was the puppet theater truly established.

To trace that development, we need to return to the history of recited narratives. The recitation of *The Tale of the Heike* to the accompaniment of the biwa (heikyoku) gradually declined in popularity and was partially replaced by a genre called *kōwaka*. The performers of kōwaka might be viewed as male successors to the kusemai entertainers. They also danced to the rhythmic accompaniment of a drum or fan, but their recitations were mostly battle tales, among which episodes from the *Heike* played a major role. Nothing is known about the movements accompanying this recitation, for only remnants of the performing art have survived. Dance, however, seems to have been secondary to the telling of the tales. Kōwaka gained prominence in the fifteenth century, and by the sixteenth century its popularity sometimes rivaled noh among warrior audiences. But thereafter, its decline was swift, and its performance practices have largely been lost, although some fifty texts remain. As the kōwaka *Atsumori* (translated in part 2) exemplifies, the plots of these tales suggest an intermediary stage between noh and the kabuki and puppet theaters, with the focus having moved from the individual warrior, his memories, and his search for salvation to a larger web of social relationships and obligations.

Other recited narratives attained broad popular appeal. One such genre, *sekkyō bushi* (literally "sermon ballads"), consisted of stories recited by itinerant entertainers accompanied by a variety of musical instruments, initially a bamboo instrument called the *sasara* and gongs (*shō*). In one type of tale popular with these reciters (*honji mono*), the main character was revealed to be a manifestation (*suijaku*) of a deity, the honji or true form. These stories also included their share of human emotions, especially grief caused by separation from a loved one. As these entertainers attracted more urban audiences, they added new musical instruments and finally puppets to their presentations, but their art was eventually overshadowed by the popularity of the livelier music of jōruri performances.

The most popular recited narrative in the sixteenth century was a piece entitled A *Tale in Twelve Episodes* (Jūnidan sōshi), which relates the story of Lady Jōruri and

during an obon festival. His successor, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598), proved to be the most enthusiastic thespian. Not only did he sponsor and participate in ostentatious furyū events, but he was also passionately fond of noh. In 1593 he celebrated the birth of a son by acting in sixteen noh plays in front of the emperor GoYōzei. His eventual successor, Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616), joined him in presenting a new kyōgen play. The next year Hideyoshi performed at the imperial palace again. This time in addition to doing traditional pieces, he starred in five plays about his own life, which he had commissioned. Besides celebrating his military exploits, the plays expressed his mother's claim that she owed her salvation to the prayers of her filial son! Such self-aggrandizement did little to further Hideyoshi's eternal fame, however, as the plays were never staged again after he died four years later without leaving a secure heir.

Tokugawa Ieyasu laid the groundwork for both the perpetuation of the Tokugawa shogunate and the role of noh as the ceremonial "music" (*shikigaku*) of the military rulers, a function similar to that of bugaku in the Heian period. Immediately after he became shogun in 1603, Ieyasu ordered three days of celebratory noh and kyōgen performances, a practice that his successors continued. Although Ieyasu himself performed in his earlier years (his earliest recorded performance was in 1571, when he was twenty-nine), later he preferred to remain a spectator and earned a reputation as a discerning and appreciative critic. He carried on Hideyoshi's policy of supporting the four schools (*za*) of noh—Kanze, Hōshō, Komparu, and Kongō—with relatively generous grants of rice stipends and estate rights, which were continued until the Tokugawa shogunate was overthrown in 1868 and which made government-sponsored actors the equivalent of members of the warrior class. Under Ieyasu's immediate successors, the most famous noh actor of the seventeenth century, Kita Shichitayū Osayoshi (1586–1653), was patronized and permitted to found the Kita troupe, the fifth and last of the official noh schools, all of which are still active. In addition to noh actors, these schools originally included musicians, kyōgen players, and semiamateur performers (te sarugaku); all were male.

In 1603, the year in which Ieyasu was named the first Tokugawa shogun, a woman known as Okuni starred in an epoch-making event: she performed what was referred to as "kabuki dance" (*kabuki odori*) on the dry riverbed of the Kamo River in Kyoto. Although this is the first time that phrase appears in extant records, the word *kabuki*, which literally means "to tilt" or "to slant," was commonly used to refer to unusual or outlandish behavior or dress.[2] This seems an apt description of Okuni's performance, as early pictures show her dancing in Portuguese-style trousers, wearing a "southern barbarian" (that is, foreign) style coolie hat, with a gong in her hand and a Christian cross around her neck. An early-seventeenth-century source (*Kabuki zōshi*) claims that Okuni's performances included scenes depicting the more kabuki-like aspects of a samurai dandy, alleged to be Okuni's recently deceased lover, and a nembutsu odori (perhaps dedicated to her lover's ghost).

2. The way of writing the name of the theater was soon changed to the more felicitous ideographs for "song, dance, and art" (*ka-bu-ki*).

Kabuki odori excited the popular imagination, and troupes of female performers proliferated. The settings of these performances included teahouses and public baths, and the shamisen was soon added to the flute and drum accompaniment. Ranking members of the samurai class vied to become patrons of the actresses. On at least one occasion there was a serious riot as rival warriors thronged the kabuki stage seeking favors from the actresses. Declaring such behavior improper for members of the ruling class, the shogunate took action against the actresses and, in 1629, prohibited women from appearing on the stage. This prohibition effectively ended the direct participation of women in the major theatrical genres, although female dancers continued to perform in the more private settings of the banquet hall and the teahouse.

The prohibition against female performers brought new visibility to troupes of young men (*wakashu*), who had been competing with the women. These youths made major innovations in the rapidly developing art of kabuki, including the introduction of acrobatic skills and juggling known as *hōka* and kyōgen-like scenarios developed with the help of independent noh and kyōgen actors. The third Tokugawa shogun, Iemitsu, was a particularly active patron of young men's kabuki. Like the women kabuki dancers, however, the youths were displaying themselves as available for prostitution, and once their protector Iemitsu died, they too were banned.

After 1652, only adult males could appear onstage. The passage between youth and adulthood was marked by shaving the front part of the head, an act usually undertaken in the late teens. Not surprisingly, however, some young kabuki actors became adults prematurely. To hide their bald spots, actors playing female roles covered the front part of their heads with purple cloths; remnants of this practice still appear in modern costuming (see figure 1.29). Males playing female roles had to register with the government to ensure that women did not appear onstage, a practice that helped speed role specialization, particularly that of female impersonators (*onnagata*). Eliminating women and young men from the stage reduced the direct sexual allure of the performances and led to significant innovations designed to attract wider audiences. The actors created more sophisticated, dialogue-oriented scenes to supplement the song and dance and depicted contemporary events onstage, the most popular of which were prostitute procurement, love suicides, scandalous murders, and fights among warriors.

The Tokugawa clan chose Edo (present-day Tokyo) as its headquarters, and early in the seventeenth century many entertainers decided to try their luck in this new city, among them several well-known jōruri chanters. The audiences they found in Edo—somewhat rougher than those in Osaka and Kyoto—were part of a growing class of urban dwellers, mostly merchants and artisans, who were eager to assert their own cultural identity. One early reflection of this was the creation of a bombastic martial hero named Kimpira, whose lively exploits in several popular puppet plays exemplify the frontier spirit of this new city. In 1673 a young kabuki actor, Ichikawa Danjūrō I (1660–1704), made his debut in Edo playing the role of Kimpira, and his bravura style (*aragoto*) of acting—performed with vivid red and black makeup (*kumadori*)—created a sensation. Danjūrō developed his acting style in some fifty plays he wrote under the name Mimasuya Hyōgo. Two of these, *Saint*

Narukami (1684) and *The God Fudō* (1697), became sources for the play *Saint Narukami and the God Fudō*, a section of which is translated in this volume. Danjūrō died in a manner befitting the creator of the bold aragoto style: he was stabbed to death onstage by a fellow actor.

Danjūrō lived during the Genroku era (roughly 1680 to 1720), one of the liveliest cultural periods in Japanese history and a time of prosperity for noh and kyōgen and of rapid progress in the development of the newer genres. The shogun from 1680 to 1709 was Tokugawa Tsunayoshi (1646–1709), an eccentric leader who was something of a noh "fanatic." By his time noh had been established as the official ceremonial music (shikigaku), with formal performances regularly scheduled to ensure prosperity for the country and long life for the rulers. Tsunayoshi's involvement with noh, however, went well beyond any official relationship. He was an impassioned performer; in 1697 alone he was the main actor (*shite*) seventy-one times in twenty-three different plays and performed independent noh dances 150 times! Furthermore, Tsunayoshi insisted that his retainers and the feudal lords (*daimyō*) also practice noh and sponsor players and performances. He granted dozens of actors the status of samurai and made some of them quite wealthy, but he would also banish performers or reduce their stipends if they displeased him, and his abrupt summons to actors to serve in his castle sometimes disrupted orderly lines of succession in the schools. His taste for unusual noh (which was shared by his immediate successor) resulted in the revival of many old plays, more than one hundred of which still remain in the repertory of at least one school. Some of these plays (like *Kinuta*, *Semimaru*, and *Ohara gokō*) are now highly valued pieces. The publication of five hundred noh plays and 150 summaries of kyōgen also encouraged the appreciation of the plays as literature. Noh's popularity spread far beyond Edo, the shogunate, and the five official schools. Many daimyō—even in places as distant as Sendai—were active noh supporters, and provincial members of the warrior class and their families (including wives and daughters) would take up noh chanting or drumming. In Nara, temple performers (*negi*) were increasingly active; subscription noh (*kanjinnō*) performances, open to the public for a fee, were particularly popular in Osaka, and the imperial palace in Kyoto sponsored competitive performances. A document published in 1687 (*Nō no kimmōzui*) lists 274 noh and kyōgen performers residing in Kyoto. Noh had become a nationwide success.

The popularity of noh, however, was mostly limited to members of the warrior class, which left the majority of the townspeople of Osaka, Kyoto, and Edo open to newer forms of theater. A disastrous fire in 1657 destroyed most of Edo and its theaters and encouraged some of the leading jōruri chanters to return to their roots in Osaka, which remains the home of the puppet theater even today. An outstanding kabuki actor in Kyoto, Sakata Tōjūrō (1644–1709), enhanced a category of plays about prostitutes (*keisei goto*) by creating a gentle, amorous, and humorously ineffective male lover. *Love Letter from the Licensed Quarter* (Kuruwa bunshō, 1712) is a good example of a prostitute play featuring Izaemon, the role that Tōjūrō created, and the courtesan Yūgiri. Tōjūrō's gentle, understated acting style is called *wagoto*, in contrast to Danjūrō's bold and exaggerated aragoto. In the kabuki version of the play *Love Suicides at Amijima* (1721; translated here), Jihei is played in wagoto style (see figure 3.15). Sakata Tōjūrō's ideas about his art and comments on

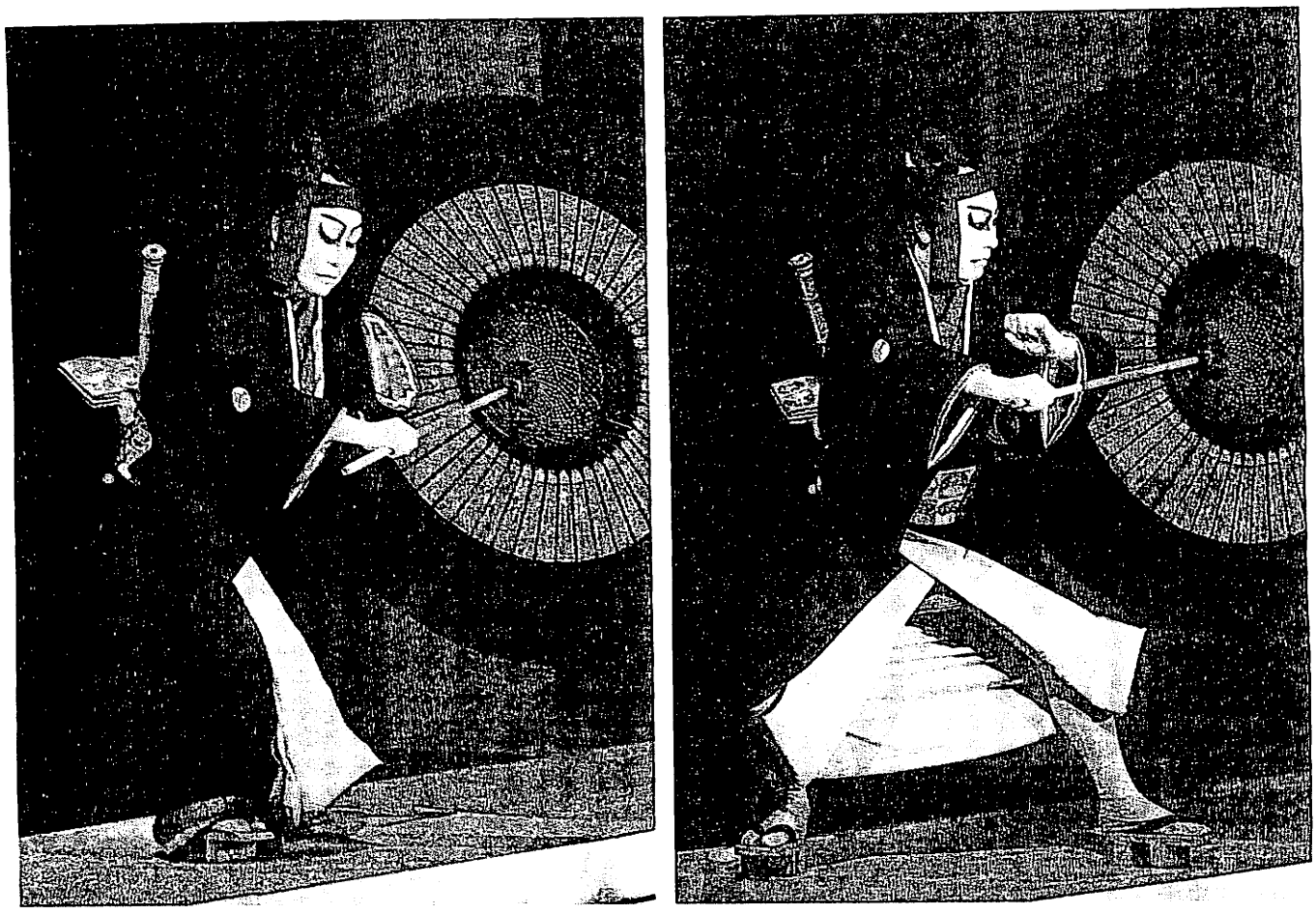

FIGURE 1.4. The role of Sukeroku, as defined by Danjūrō II, combines the gentle chic of the wagoto style in the costume and the pose on the left, with a hint of the aragoto style in the makeup and the glaring pose (*mie*) on the right. The purple crepe headband (*hachimaki*) rakishly tied is a symbol of the dashing man about town. (Photos by Aoki Shinji.)

the life of a female impersonator by the famous onnagata Yoshizawa Ayame (1673–1729) are recorded in *The Actor's Analects* (Yakusha rongo), the best Tokugawa work on acting.

The interplay between the Kyoto and Edo styles of kabuki is well illustrated by the history of the play *Sukeroku* (the full name is *Sukeroku yukari no Edo zakura*). The love suicide of the courtesan Agemaki and her lover Sukeroku was depicted in kabuki plays in Kyoto in the late seventeenth century. In 1713, an Edo play—with Ichikawa Danjūrō II (1688–1758) in the role of Sukeroku—ignored the suicide and concentrated instead on Sukeroku's rivalry with another samurai, named Ikyū. The gentle Kyoto lover takes on a decidedly Edo air swaggering about, bragging, and using Edo colloquialisms and bantering insults. Three years later, Danjūrō revised the play, adding a long entrance scene performed with a large umbrella, possibly to take advantage of the development of the rampway (*hanamichi*), which at about this time was extended to reach from the stage to the rear of the audience. Danjūrō, skilled in both the aragoto style his father had developed and the Kyoto wagoto, combined the two in this Sukeroku. Instead of the padded aragoto costume, Sukeroku wears a chic black kimono and ties a purple silk band around his head. His makeup includes narrow black and red lines over his eyes, alluding to the aragoto style (figure 1.4).

As the preceding comments may suggest, kabuki is very much an actor-oriented

theater, which accounts for the actors' rather cavalier treatment of scripts, especially in the early days of the theater's history. Although playwrights were first listed in theater programs as early as 1680, their function was more limited than this recognition might imply. Some parts of the play were left to the actors to improvise, and other sections appear to have been freely reworked by them. Since no kabuki scripts from the Genroku period have survived, it is impossible to know what they contained. It is clear, however, that the role of the playwright was not to create a literary masterpiece; instead, his task was to provide a vehicle for the actors' art.

The puppet theater, in contrast, centered on the chanter and his text. In 1684 the celebrated jōruri chanter Takemoto Gidayū (1651–1714) opened a theater in Osaka. Gidayū's innovative style of chanting became the standard, called *gidayū bushi* in his honor. Gidayū's influence goes deeper than his prominence as a performer, however; his understanding of music and theater, including his knowledge of noh, helped him create a new musical structure for puppet plays, which he developed in collaboration with the playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1724).

Chikamatsu, the first known playwright who was not a performer, wrote both kabuki and puppet plays. Among his early puppet plays was *Kagekiyo Victorious* (Shusse Kagekiyo), produced in 1686 by Gidayū in his new theater. From about 1688, however, Chikamatsu served mainly as a staff playwright for the kabuki actor Sakata Tōjūrō, creating some of his prostitute plays. In 1703 he returned to writing for the puppets. The reasons for this change are not known, although commentators hypothesize that he objected to the many liberties the kabuki actors took with his texts. Perhaps he realized that Tōjūrō would soon leave the stage (he died in 1709), or perhaps he was attracted to the rising popularity of Gidayū. Whatever the initial reasons for his switch, it became permanent with the resounding success of his *Love Suicides at Sonezaki* (Sonezaki shinjū), presented at Gidayū's theater in 1703. The kabuki theater had been producing love-suicide plays for at least twenty years, but the subject had been avoided in the more conservative puppet theater. Nevertheless, when Chikamatsu, who happened to be in Osaka, heard of the suicide of the shopkeeper Tokubei and the courtesan Ohatsu, he quickly produced a puppet play for Gidayū. Although *Love Suicides at Sonezaki* opened only three weeks after the actual event, a kabuki play on the subject had already premiered. Such rapid responses led to the nickname "overnight pickles" (*ichiyazuke*) for plays about current events.

Chikamatsu's "pickle" was so successful that it ensured the fortunes of the young Takemoto Theater and inaugurated the writing of domestic plays (*sewa mono*) for the puppet theater. In contrast to earlier pieces, which tended to depict historical events and feature superhuman characters such as Kimpira, these plays portray the tragedies of ordinary life. After this success Chikamatsu moved to Osaka and dedicated all his efforts to the puppet theater. He continued to write domestic plays, including his masterpiece *Love Suicides at Amijima* (Ten no Amijima shinjū, 1721; translated in part 3), but he did not limit himself to them. After Gidayū's death, when a successful play was needed to launch the career of Gidayū's young successor, Chikamatsu composed the period piece (*jidai mono*) *The Battles of Coxinga* (Kokusen'ya kassen; partially translated in part 3). It exceeded all expectations by running for a record seventeen months.

FIGURE 1.5. Three-man puppets with movable features were not created until the second quarter of the eighteenth century. In *Sugawara and the Secrets of Calligraphy*, Matsuomarō has a Bunshichi head with movable eyeballs and eyebrows. (Photo by Barbara C. Adachi.)

In the early eighteenth century, great strides were made in the development of puppets. The hand-held puppets of Chikamatsu's time were small enough to be operated by one person and were of relatively simple construction; only in the 1690s were they given functional arms. String marionettes and mechanical dolls sometimes were mixed with the hand-operated puppets for special effect. From 1705 on, the puppeteers performed in full view of the audience, and the chanter and shamisen player moved from behind a curtain to a platform at stage left. It was not until after Chikamatsu's death in 1724 that the puppets' eyes, mouths, and fingers were made to move, and only in 1734 did puppets operated by three men appear (figure 1.5). The early eighteenth century was the heyday of the puppet theater and probably the only time in theater history when, in Osaka at least, inanimate dolls enjoyed greater fame than live actors.

In Chikamatsu Monzaemon's day, the chanter reigned supreme in the puppet theater. But by the mid-eighteenth century that too had changed, thanks partly to a puppeteer named Yoshida Bunzaburō (d. 1760), who introduced the three-man puppet and began using an extension rod to operate the puppet's left arm. Bunzaburō gained considerable influence in the Takemoto Theater, then managed by the playwright Takeda Izumo II (1691–1756), who was particularly interested in the visual aspects of performance. A crisis occurred one day in 1748, when Bunzaburō requested that the chanter prolong a passage so the dolls would have more time to act. Considering the request an insult, the chanter refused. Izumo, uncertain how to adjudicate this dispute, finally ruled in favor of the puppeteer, precipitating the departure of the chanter to a rival theater.

Izumo and his fellow playwrights clearly wrote for the puppets. Although they were less literary than Chikamatsu Monzaemon, they had an unerring sense of the theatrical. They normally worked in groups. Izumo, Namiki Senryū (1695–1751; also called Sōsuke), and Miyoshi Shōraku (1696–?) together produced what are considered the three greatest works for puppets: *Sugawara and the Secrets of Calligraphy* (Sugawara denjū tenarai kagami, 1746), *Yoshitsune and a Thousand*

Cherry Trees (Yoshitsune sembon zakura, 1747), and *Chūshingura* (Kanadehon chūshingura, 1748), scenes of which are anthologized in part 3. After the death of a somewhat younger colleague, Chikamatsu Hanji (1725–1783)—an admirer but not a relative of Chikamatsu Monzaemon—no other great playwrights wrote for the puppets, and their popularity declined. The two major puppet theaters in Osaka folded in 1765 and 1767, handing over their facilities to kabuki actors, and for a century the puppet tradition was kept alive only in small urban theaters and in the countryside.

Shogunal authorities, who kept a close watch over the activities of the urban classes, did not hesitate to regulate the theater. As we have seen, two important governmental decisions had already greatly affected the growth of theater: the prohibition of women onstage and the decision to make noh and kyōgen the official performing art of the warrior class. Suspicious of the possible adverse effects of theater on behavior—arguments that are familiar even today—the government also censored the content of plays. In 1722 the love-suicide theme, a staple of both the kabuki and the puppet theater, was proscribed, and performers were not allowed to portray members of leading families or important current events. In order to circumvent the censorship, playwrights disguised current events by setting them in the past. Accordingly, *Chūshingura*, which enacts a vendetta carried out in 1703, was set in the fourteenth century, and the names of the characters were altered just enough to avoid problems with the law but not enough to prevent recognition by the audience. Various historical periods and people were selected as conventional settings or worlds (*sekai*), and the employment of these worlds—even when it was not really necessary—became increasingly popular, particularly in Edo, the castle town of the shogun.

During the peak of the puppet theater's success, kabuki borrowed heavily from it, especially in Osaka and Kyoto. (The influence actually went both ways, as is described in the introduction to part 3.) Popular puppet plays were often reproduced on the kabuki stage within a month of their premieres, with puppeteers and jōruri musicians sometimes assisting in the preparation of the kabuki versions. Gidayū-style music was adapted wholesale, sometimes used even for plays written originally for kabuki, and this in turn affected the movements of the actors. One playwright influential in kabuki's adaptation of puppet techniques was Namiki Shōzō (1730–1773), who became a disciple of Namiki Senryū for a year or so before Senryū died in 1751. After his teacher's death Shōzō returned to writing for the kabuki theater, but the puppet influence is clear in his later plays, in which he incorporated gidayū-style narrators. He is best known, however, for his employment of elaborate stage machinery. Starting in 1753 he began to make extensive use of stage traps (*seri*), which had been around for almost half a century, and he is credited with the first effective use of the revolving stage (*mawari butai*) in 1758, almost a century and a half before it appeared in German theater. These mechanisms, along with the already existing rampway (hanamichi) through the audience, played a large part in developing kabuki's spectacular aspects.

Meanwhile in Edo, the local culture was making itself felt in the theater. One good example is the history of the piece *Sukeroku*. In the 1716 Edo production, already discussed briefly, the play was set in the world (sekai) of the Soga brothers;

that is, the hero Sukeroku was revealed to be a disguise (*yatsushi*) for the historical and legendary figure Soga no Gorō (aka Tokimune, 1174–1193). The anachronistic identification of a typical Tokugawa-period dandy with a twelfth-century warrior was readily accepted. In a later revision (1753) the playwright Fujimoto Tobun (1716–1763) went a step further and inserted *Sukeroku* in a long play about the Soga brothers, an example of the Edo practice of combining domestic pieces (sewa mono) and period pieces (jidai mono) within a single play. Danjūrō II performed Sukeroku for the third and last time in 1749 at the age of sixty-two. For that performance the original *itchū bushi* accompaniment, a Kyoto musical style with a dignified and elegant melodic line, was changed to *katō bushi*, a type of music especially popular among wealthy Edo townspeople who were fans of kabuki and Danjūrō. Katō bushi also has an elegant vocal line but uses a stronger shamisen accompaniment.

A variety of new musical styles emerged in Edo kabuki along with the development of dance plays (*shosa goto*), which in the first half of the eighteenth century were the specialty of onnagata and in the second half were written for male roles as well. *Nagauta*, now considered kabuki music par excellence, was created in the Osaka area, where it was used mostly in teahouses and private homes. In Edo, however, it became an essential part of kabuki music. *Bungo bushi*, a style created by the chanter Miyakoji Bungonojō (ca. 1660–1740), who moved to Edo in 1739, was used for passionate and suggestive love-suicide pieces. Indeed, this style of music achieved such great popularity that it was banned by censorious government authorities. Bungonojō's tradition spawned other styles as well, including *tokiwazu* and *kiyomoto*, both of which continue to be used today, especially for dance pieces. Some of the dance plays, like the example in this anthology, *A Maiden at Dōjōji* (Musume Dōjōji), were derived from noh but became so imbued with the characteristics of kabuki that they are now considered an essential part of that theater.

The 1796 move from Osaka to Edo by the playwright Namiki Gohei I (1747–1808) marks the triumph of Edo as the theatrical center. In Edo, Gohei introduced some of Osaka's more successful dramaturgical practices. For example, he encouraged programs made up of two separate pieces, a period piece and a domestic piece, rather than continuing the earlier practice of combining the two modes. He himself is credited with more than 110 plays of both types.

Tsuruya Namboku IV (1755–1829), one of the greatest kabuki playwrights, was born in Edo, the son of a dyer. Although he became an apprentice playwright when he was twenty-one, he is best known for the domestic plays he wrote after he turned fifty. His *Osome and Hisamatsu* (Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri, 1813) includes seven roles for the same actor, which makes it a popular showpiece for versatile actors such as the current Ichikawa Ennosuke (b. 1939). The open eroticism of Namboku's *Scarlet Princess of Edo* (Sakura-hime Azuma Bunshō, 1817) harks back to early plays like *Narukami*, and his best-known work, *Yotsuya Ghost Stories* (Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan; partially translated in part 3), with its skillful blend of the supernatural and the quotidian, portrays the world of petty villains and corrupt samurai as well as the wretched lot of women. Namboku's depictions of the lower strata of society led to the growth of a new genre called "raw-life pieces" (*kizewa mono*). Plays of this type, which combined the sentimental, the grizzly, and the grotesque, influenced popular novels of the time.

During the first few decades of the nineteenth century, kabuki and kabuki-related arts prospered. Dance plays derived from noh and kyōgen (*matsubamme mono*) were particularly popular in this period. The first such piece, *The Subscription List* (Kanjinchō), based on the noh play *Ataka*, premiered in 1840 and is still one of the most popular plays in the repertoire. The cast of eleven, headed by Danjūrō VII in 1840, includes no female roles. Unlike earlier borrowings from noh, which were completely redone as kabuki (such as *A Maiden at Dōjōji*), the matsubamme mono adapted elements of noh performance as well as the story. They borrowed the music, costumes, props, and the pine-tree background, considered an audacious act when noh was the preserve of the samurai class. *Henge mono* (transformation piece), another dance genre, also reached the height of its popularity in the early nineteenth century. In these pieces the leading dancer changed costume and character from three to as many as twelve times. *Rokkasen* (Six saints of poetry) is the only one of these dances performed in its entirety today, but parts of other henge mono, such as *Fuji musume* (Wisteria maiden), remain popular.

The publication of illustrated kabuki playbooks designed for reading and of woodblock prints depicting actors and scenes from plays prospered in the early 1800s, and kabuki-style dances (*buyō*) were regularly performed in teahouses and at private homes by both male and female dancers. Kabuki also flourished outside the major urban centers; permanent and semipermanent stages were built in villages and religious centers throughout Japan. Traveling groups of actors (and puppeteers) performed on these stages, and local amateurs produced their own plays. Rural performances proliferated when the government banned farmers from attending urban theaters. The popularity of kabuki became so broad-based that the government threatened to ban it totally, a threat it fortunately did not carry out. In 1842, however, the authorities forced theaters in Edo to move from the center of town to the outskirts near the Yoshiwara pleasure district, proscribed all performances within the precincts of shrines and temples, and prohibited the publication of theater-related woodblock prints. Individual actors were also punished for breaking the very restrictive laws that governed their lives: Onoe Baikō was manacled for appearing without a sedge hat, Nakamura Utaemon was jailed for going to a sumo match, and Ichikawa Danjūrō VII (1791–1859) was exiled for his opulent lifestyle (Shively 1978:44).

Despite the overwhelming popularity of kabuki after the mid-eighteenth century and the government's censorship of theater in general, the puppet theater managed to survive. Sometime in the 1780s a puppeteer from the Inland Sea island of Awaji, Masai Kahei (d. 1810), better known by his stage name Bunrakuken, took his troupe to Osaka and began performing on the riverbanks. His skill revived interest in the puppet theater, and in 1811 his daughter and her husband were allowed to set up a theater at the Inari Shrine. The troupe prospered there until the edicts of 1842 forced it to close. Fortunately, the ban on theaters at religious institutions was lifted the following year (after its promulgator died), and the puppet theater continued performing at the shrine until 1872, when it moved to the western part of Osaka and was named the Bunraku Theater (Bunraku-za) after the troupe's founder. The theater was so successful that *bunraku* became widely used as a generic term for Japanese puppets; it is used today in the name of the National Bunraku Theater (Kokuritsu bunraku gekijō) in Osaka.

Although noh and kyōgen were largely the preserve of the warrior class during the Tokugawa era, there were some opportunities for others to attend performances. Selected commoners were admitted to some of the ceremonial performances sponsored by the shogun and the feudal lords. For example, the farmers of Kurokawa, who trace their still-active tradition of amateur noh back to the fifteenth century, saw noh at the Tsurugaoka castle of the Sakai family. Subscription performances open to the public for a fee were also held occasionally, more frequently in Osaka than elsewhere, and now and then the government sponsored large public performances by members of the five official schools. Records of such performances in 1750 and in 1848 show that approximately four thousand people attended each day for fifteen days (Omote and Amano 1987:153). Contemporary accounts reveal that it was difficult to hear or see the performers, that some of the audience drank or slept, and that the kyōgen pieces were more popular than the noh plays. Small groups of independent noh and kyōgen performers roamed the countryside, playing in empty lots or temple grounds, and occasionally attracting enough notice to arouse the ire of the five government-supported schools of noh actors. The chanting of noh texts was a popular pastime and spread beyond the warrior class to the public at large. Small sections of plays (*ko-utai*) were even included in the textbooks used by the temple schools. Publishing chantbooks (*utaibon*) was a profitable business, and some performers were even able to earn their living by giving chanting lessons to townspeople.

As the Tokugawa period drew to a close, the last great kabuki playwright, Kawatake Mokuami (1816–1893), portrayed life in his native Edo. Continuing in the tradition of Namboku, Mokuami wrote raw-life pieces (kizewa mono) about murderers, thieves, and lowlifes, including the famous *Benten the Thief* (Benten kozō, 1862; excerpted in part 3) and *The Love of Izayoi and Seishin* (Izayoi Seishin, 1859). His plays are often unwieldy, but individual acts, especially extortion and murder scenes, are extremely effective and still very popular. They, too, encountered bouts of official censorship, such as the 1866 edict that forbade excessive realism in the portrayal of thieves and prostitutes to avoid tempting people to enter these professions. Mokuami also adapted some plays from the noh theater, most notably *Tsuchigumo* (The monstrous spider) and *Momijigari* (Hunting for autumn leaves; the names of the kabuki pieces and the noh plays are the same).

The opening of Japan to the West in the mid-nineteenth century and the establishment of a new form of government after 1868 brought changes to all forms of traditional Japanese theater. Noh and kyōgen, which had depended on the patronage of the defunct Tokugawa shogunate, were the most radically affected. Most actors entered new professions. Despite the overwhelming craze for new and foreign things, however, one stubborn actor, Umewaka Minoru I (1828–1909) was determined to preserve noh and was able to convince another actor, Hōshō Kurō XVI (1837–1917), to join him in his struggle.

Foreign relations contributed to their eventual success. In 1869 the Duke of Edinburgh had to be entertained, and even though noh was out of favor, it was deemed the only form dignified enough for the occasion. When Iwakura Tomomi (1825–1883) led a delegation of high-ranking government officials to the West in 1871, he saw similarities between noh and opera, the theatrical form most often used to entertain state dignitaries. Consequently, in 1876 Iwakura entertained the imperial family with noh

performances by both Umewaka and Hōshō, and thereafter the imperial family, especially the Meiji emperor's mother Eishō (1833–1897), began to patronize noh. The first head of state (actually former head) ever to visit Japan, U.S. president Ulysses S. Grant, arrived in 1879 and was entertained with performances of both noh and kyōgen. Grant reportedly admired the noh and urged that it be preserved. As a result Iwakura established the Noh Society (Nōgakusha), which built the first permanent noh stage for the general public at Shiba Park in Tokyo. It opened to great acclaim in 1881, and its success helped ensure the viability of noh in the modern world.

The puppet theater was able to thrive in the early Meiji period thanks to several excellent performers, including Toyozawa Dampei (1827–1898), one of the greatest shamisen players of all times and co-composer with his wife of the popular play *The Miracle of the Tsubosaka Kannon* (Tsubosaka Kannon reigenki; part 3), and the puppeteer Yoshida Tamazō I (1828–1905), who introduced many new puppet techniques. There was also a resurgence of popular female chanters, who had been relegated to amateur status but who now reappeared in the theaters for a brief period. The poor management of the Bunraku Theater, which housed the major troupe, led to its sale to the Shochiku Company in 1909. Then the theater building burned down in 1926, destroying most of the valuable old puppets. Dedicated and talented performers continued to struggle, but it was an uphill battle until the 1930s when the government began to encourage bunraku as a traditional Japanese art.

For kabuki, the end of the Tokugawa rule meant a reduction in government restrictions and a rise in the official status of the actors from outcasts to ordinary citizens. A modern kabuki theater was constructed in the heart of Tokyo in 1872 (the Morita-za), and the following year the metropolitan government licensed ten theaters—there had been only three during most of the Tokugawa period. In 1887 the emperor went to see a kabuki play, a historical first, and other members of the upper classes followed suit. A concerted effort was made to "modernize" kabuki. The theater buildings adapted more Western features: the original Kabuki-za (1889) had a Western-style exterior, and the Teikoku-gekijō (Imperial theater), which opened in 1911, was Japan's first purely Western-style theater.

New types of plays were also created. Ichikawa Danjūrō IX (1838–1903) produced living history plays (*katsureki geki*), which emphasized historical accuracy and often dealt with the recent past, and his rival Onoe Kikugorō V (1844–1903) produced "clipped-hair" pieces (*zangiri mono*), domestic pieces depicting contemporary men who had cut off their now forbidden topknots and wore Western clothes. Plays of both sorts were written by Mokuami, who also wrote for the third of the great Meiji kabuki actors Ichikawa Sadanji I (1842–1904). These plays, however, were still steeped in the old traditions and soon came to seem old-fashioned.

A somewhat different attempt to modernize kabuki and compete with the influx of Western plays resulted in "new kabuki" (*shin kabuki*), written by such scholars and litterateurs as Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859–1935), Mori Ōgai (1862–1922), and Okamoto Kidō (1827–1939), the most successful writer in this genre. Composed according to modern European dramaturgical norms, these plays were performed in kabuki style, often by Ichikawa Sadanji II (1880–1940), who in 1910 also revived some of the old Eighteen Kabuki of the Ichikawa family (*kabuki jūhachiban*), including *Narukami*. The efforts to make kabuki into a "modern" theater were, fortunately, unsuccessful.

When it became clear that other styles of theater could better present twentieth-century life onstage, kabuki returned to a more traditional repertory. Although many more "new" plays have become established in kabuki than in the other traditional theaters, the older plays remain the perennial favorites.

World War II left the theater world in disarray: the destruction of Osaka and Tokyo severely damaged or leveled most of the theater buildings, and poverty reduced the audience to a handful. In addition, censorship was reversed. The Occupation authorities prohibited the very classics that were almost the only plays allowed during the war. *Chūshingura*, for example, was alleged to glorify the feudal mentality that had led to war. The traditional theaters were thus slow to regain their audiences, but by the mid-1960s they were nearly back to their prewar levels.

In the 1960s, when the Japanese economy was expanding rapidly, the government once again began to support the arts seriously. Perhaps, like the shogun Yoshimitsu in the fourteenth century, the government felt a need to prove (this time in an international context) that Japan also had a culture.

Whatever the motivation, the policy continues to benefit the traditional performing arts: the government selects performers to name as Intangible Cultural Assets or National Living Treasures and awards them stipends; it encourages and underwrites foreign tours, supports international conferences of theater scholars, and, most important, builds and maintains new facilities. The National Theater (Kokuritsu gekijō) opened in Tokyo in November 1966. Its large auditorium seats 1,746 spectators and is used chiefly for kabuki; a smaller theater holds 630 and is equipped for puppet plays and other traditional forms, such as buyō (kabuki dance). In September 1983, the National Noh Theater (Kokuritsu nōgakudō), seating 591 people, opened in Tokyo, and the following April the National Bunraku Theater (Kokuritsu bunraku gekijō) was inaugurated in Osaka. These national theaters are more than performance places; they provide research facilities, archives, training schools, and opportunities for performers to revive older works and to create new ones. Their existence helps ensure the vitality of traditional theater in Japan today.

General Characteristics

It is impossible to generalize accurately about theatrical forms as diverse as noh, kyōgen, kabuki, and the puppet theater. But because these genres share the same historical background and a relatively isolated geographical context, it is instructive to try. In attempting to isolate and describe some of the characteristics shared by these genres, I usually have refrained from making comparisons with other types of theater, but the informed reader will discover many; none of the attributes discussed is unique to Japanese theater. Nevertheless, the particular ways in which these characteristics have been combined and emphasized in Japan's performing arts may be what makes its theatrical tradition distinctive.

The Text Speaks Itself

The scripts of Japanese traditional theater are not solely, or even primarily, concerned with reproducing ordinary dialogue. That is, in addition to dialogue, they

Minamoto Yoshitsune, the warrior who helped the Genji win the twelfth-century wars and who was then attacked by his brother Yoritomo, the first Minamoto shogun. This tale was probably first recited to biwa music, but by about 1570, the shamisen had been introduced from the Ryūkyū Islands, and the nature of recited narratives underwent a radical change. This new instrument, with its sharp, almost percussive sound, was deemed better suited to accompany narrative chanting than was the more melodious biwa. When shamisen accompaniment was added to the recitation of *A Tale in Twelve Episodes*, jōruri chanting was born, the name attesting to the popularity of the story's heroine. At some point, probably around the turn of the seventeenth century, this type of narrative recitation and the art of puppetry were combined, and the puppet theater, which also came to be called jōruri—or more formally, doll (*ningyō*) jōruri—was on its way to becoming a fully developed theatrical form.

Another element involved in the creation of new theatrical forms was the growth of group dances called *odori*. In contrast to the term *mai* (literally "turning" or "circling"), which was used for the dance forms described thus far, odori (literally "jumping" or "leaping") refers to a style of dancing in which the feet maintain less constant contact with the floor. Odori-type dancing as a religious practice was advocated by the priest Kūya (903–972) and was popularized by Ippen (1239–1289). This activity, called *nembutsu odori*, involved group dancing to the chanting of the nembutsu and the singing of Buddhist hymns with drum, gong, and rattle accompaniment. First performed by groups of priests and then by masses of parishioners as well, it was particularly popular during the summer festival of the dead (*obon*) as a ritual to pacify malignant souls. It continues to be a popular part of these summer festivals.

A parallel art called decorative dancing (*furyū odori*) consisted of mass processions of dancers in fancy costumes with masks and decorated props—typically, enormous umbrellas, elaborate floats, and the music of drums, flutes, and gongs. The popularity and ostentatiousness of these processions led to periodic government prohibitions, but they continued to be held well into the Tokugawa period and linger today in more sedate forms such as the Gion Festival held each July in Kyoto. These two performance types were sometimes combined into a syncretized form known as decorative nembutsu (*nembutsu furyū*). In this combination, popular songs joined religious ones, and costumes and masks added to the pleasure of the event and the effectiveness of the ritual propitiation of the deities and the souls of the dead. The nembutsu furyū tradition led directly to the development of the kabuki theater.

The second half of the sixteenth century, like the late twelfth century, was a period of major transitions and prolonged civil war. The three consecutive military leaders of this tumultuous period were patrons and devotees of the performing arts and used these arts to promote their own personal and political agendas. Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582), the first of the three, was particularly partial to kōwaka. Before an important battle in 1560, he reportedly danced a felicitous section of the kōwaka *Atsumori*, and in 1582 he sponsored a competition between kōwaka and noh, which was won by the former group. On another occasion he is said to have dressed up as a celestial maiden and danced with the masses in a furyū nembutsu