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# New Directions for Kabuki Performances in America in the 21st Century

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New Directions For Kabuki Performances in America in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

by

Narumi Iwasaki

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in  
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Portland State University  
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## Abstract

Transitions from the first kabuki performance abroad in Russia in 1928 to the recent performances around the world show various changes in the purpose and production of kabuki performances overseas. Kabuki has been performed as a Japanese traditional art in the U.S. for about 60 years, and the United States has seen more kabuki than any other country outside of Japan. Those tours were closely tied to national cultural policy of both Japan and the USA in the early years (Thornbury 2–3). The first kabuki tour to New York in 1960 helped to reestablish the U.S.-Japan relationship after the war (Thornbury 60).

However, recently kabuki performances in the US have shifted into entertaining and educational events with regional rather than national import. This thesis will investigate productions of large scale Grand Kabuki (Shochiku corporation performers and management) and small scale kabuki related events in the United States, demonstrating how the purposes and the productions have changed throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century as compared to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The investigation will focus on (1) event management (2) program selection (3) technology (4) audiences' knowledge and experience.

After Chapter Two introduces international kabuki tours in the early stage, Chapter Three will explore the two large-scale U.S. tours in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the first U.S. tour in 1960 and the 1990 tour which covered widest area in the USA. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, three large scale productions came to the U.S. over six times. Heisei Nakamura-za (troupe) visited New York in 2004, 2007 and 2014. Chikamatsu-za came to three cities in 2005. Kabuki joined the Japan kabuki festival in Las Vegas in 2015 and 2016 with two different productions. Chapter Four will investigate these large-scale tours and Chapter Five will look into small scale Shochiku-related kabuki events using Portland, Oregon as a sample city. Shochiku organized kabuki events in Portland in 2002, 2009, and 2017. These events included dance performances, make-up demonstrations, and in 2017 a costume exhibition. Research on small scale events is also important to understand new ways to present kabuki abroad.

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## **Chapter One – Introduction**

Transitions from the first kabuki performance abroad in Russia in 1928 to the recent performances across the world show various changes in the purpose and production of kabuki performances overseas. Kabuki has been performed as a Japanese traditional art in the U.S. for about 60 years, and the United States has seen more kabuki than any other country outside of Japan. Those tours were closely tied to national cultural policy of both Japan and the USA in the early years (Thornbury 2–3). The first kabuki tour to New York in 1960 helped to reestablish the U.S.-Japan relationship after the war (Thornbury 60).

However, recently kabuki performances in the US have become entertaining and educational events with regional rather than national import. This thesis will investigate productions of large-scale Grand Kabuki (Shochiku Corporation performers and management) and small-scale tours in the United States, demonstrating what changes and innovations have been made throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century as compared to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Why have been these changes taken place and what about future tours? The investigation will focus on (1) event management (2) program selection (3) technology (4) audiences' knowledge and experience.

Chapters Two and Three provide historical context for the study of kabuki tours to the USA during this century. International performance began early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and whenever kabuki was performed abroad, governments sought to use these events to support national policies. This was the case whenever kabuki was performed in the Soviet Union in 1928 and 1961, China in 1955, and the U.S.A in 1960 (Leiter, "Kabuki at the Crossroads Years of Crisis" 382-405). This situation pertained through the first kabuki performance in the U.S.A. in New York City in 1960. Chapter Three will explore the two large-scale U.S. tours in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the first U.S. tour in 1960 and the 1990 tour which covered widest area in the USA. Analysis of kabuki tours to the U.S.A. in the last century will help us understand how kabuki was used to build the U.S.-Japan social and cultural relationships over four decades.

In the main body of the thesis, large scale tours and tour series by three major troupes, and three small-scale kabuki events will be introduced to see how kabuki has been promoted as entertainment and education in the U.S. in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The large-scale performances analyzed are Nakamura-za in Lincoln Center, New York in 2004, 2007, and 2014, Chikamatsu-za in Seattle, Berkeley and Los Angeles in 2005, and Japan Kabuki Festival in Las Vegas in 2015 and 2016. These three large-scale productions and

performance series are the subject of Chapter Four. My study of small-scale performances by Shochiku performers in Chapter Five will focus on three performances in Portland, Oregon in 2002, 2009, and 2017 as case studies.

In these major tours and small kabuki events, American audiences are very different from those who go to see kabuki regularly in Tokyo or Osaka. American audiences' knowledge about kabuki and their expectations and assumptions about kabuki and theater are not the same as native Japanese kabuki fans. Also, the producers organize kabuki tours in the USA under different circumstances than produced in Japan, either in regular Shochiku owned theaters or when touring domestically. In Japan Shochiku owned and managed theaters have facilities and staff specializing in kabuki. They can efficiently stage different kabuki plays monthly, while in the U.S. theaters are unaccustomed to the requirements of kabuki productions. This Master's Thesis examines the differences in audience and event management of kabuki events, and its findings can be considered for future events. In order to understand the conditions and challenges involved in producing successful professional kabuki events in the USA, this thesis focuses on the following detailed investigations.

1. Event management including fund-raising and promotion

What was the goal of the performance for actors, Shochiku, and American producers respectively? Were the goals artistic, for cultural exchange, financial, political, for career enhancement, or others? How was the performance financed? By private companies, public organizations, the Shochiku Corporation or a combination of these? What aspects of the events did promoters use as sales points: spectacle, kabuki stars, exotic entertainment, authentic historic art, *onnagata*, cutting edge technology, education? What were the new venues and approaches used in the United States?

## 2. Program selection

What kind of plays and stories did the traveling troupe choose to present and why? How did play selection support artistic and financial goals? What helped to engage and educate audiences, such as printed programs and use of English on stage?

## 3. Technology

What were particularly useful electric tools or devices to facilitate communication with audiences such as audio guide and projected subtitles? How was technology used in the actual productions?

## 4. Audiences' knowledge and reception

Did the event offer educational programs such as workshops and symposia? Did

media or publicity have to explain what kabuki is? Who was the targeted audience?

The answers to questions above will demonstrate the differences between kabuki events in Japan and the US, and among the various touring kabuki events that have taken place in the U.S.A. this century. Especially, the goals of both Japanese presenters (actors and Shochiku) and American hosts changed considerably in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. How and why did they change? The successes and failures of the tours can be understood when they are analyzed using the criteria above. If Shochiku or American producers have been able to achieve success in their productions, what were the elements of the success?

Studying how the process of event planning worked will elucidate three things. First, if a kabuki event in the USA is run by careful and knowledgeable planners, and they understand and can manage the differences well, kabuki can be successful in the US, providing both education and entertainment. Second, kabuki is a remarkably flexible and universally relatable medium. It can even entertain American audiences as a blockbuster spectacle in a non-theater venue, such as the performances in hotel shows in Las Vegas in 2015 and 2016. In 2017 a small outdoor presentation in the Portland Japanese Garden, along with a costume exhibition and educational workshop entertained a specialized art connoisseur audience. The Las Vegas and Portland kabuki events were entirely different,

but neither would have been conceivable in the last century. These two productions differed with each other in terms of the mood, the scale, the audience, the promotion, and the purpose. Third, if new types of performances presented in the United States were appealing to Americans, then inbound tourists to Japan and even Japanese audiences new to kabuki will enjoy similar shows in Japan. That is, if event planners can effectively manage the differences between domestic productions and international tours, and recognize the differing goals of the specific productions at home and abroad, kabuki events can be successful in a variety of places and forms.

When kabuki tours in the current century haven't achieved success in one or more of the major goals of the tour, how could they improve their results in the future? Shochiku and collaborating American producers can identify causes of failure and change practices in order to increase the likelihood of success. I hope the analyses in this essay will be useful to understand how kabuki abroad can succeed in the future.

## Chapter Two – Pre-war Kabuki Tours Abroad

### 2-1. History of Kabuki and Shochiku (a stock issuing corporation)

Kabuki started in Edo period (1603-1868) when people in high social status—the samurai ruling elite—patronized and monopolized noh<sup>1</sup>, and merchants and urban commoners (*chônin*) enjoyed kabuki. The social status of kabuki actors was low in the Edo Period and the government sought to suppress its commercial success and cultural impact (Shively 1-53). However, this began to change after the Meiji Restoration in 1868 because kabuki could serve important educational and ceremonial functions as a national showcase. Japanese learned of the utility of prestigious national theaters when they visited Western countries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The *Engeki Kairyô-kai* (Society for Theatre Reform) established in 1886 arranged a special kabuki performance in April, 1887 (Iezzi 128-129). About three hundred audience members of high social status, including the Meiji emperor, attended kabuki for the first time, and they loved it. This event changed dramatically the status of kabuki and kabuki actors for the better (Iezzi 129). For the next decade major kabuki actors lobbied the new government and sought special status and financial support as Japan's "National Drama." Kabuki became one of Japan's

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<sup>1</sup> Noh is a form of classical Japanese musical drama that has been perfected during the Muromachi Period (1333-1568).

representative types of traditional drama, but they were unsuccessful in getting financial support from the government and private companies began to take control of kabuki theaters (Iezzi 130).

Since the establishment of Shochiku Company Limited in 1895, kabuki in Japan has been controlled by this private company, which owns all kabuki venues and contracts all of its actors since 1929<sup>2</sup> (Shochiku, "History of Shochiku"). Today Shochiku owns and directly manages four theaters which regularly produce kabuki; Kabuki-za and Shinbashi-enbujô in Tokyo, Osaka-Shochiku-za in Osaka, and Minami-za in Kyoto (Shochiku, "Theatre"). They manage many more theaters that produce kabuki some of the time. In 2008, kabuki was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by United Nations in 2008 (UNESCO, "Kabuki theatre").

Currently, Shochiku's two goals in operating kabuki in Japan are to preserve and nurture one of the world's Intangible Cultural Heritage performing arts, and to earn profits for its shareholders (Shochiku, "Message from CEO"). Shochiku's primary sales in the field of kabuki are in its own theaters. Unlike performance in Japan large-scale

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<sup>2</sup> Toho Co., Ltd. is another company that produced kabuki and competed with Shochiku between 1955 and 1983. However, it did not succeed in the long term, and Shochiku has controlled the kabuki world until now.



kabuki tours abroad are not realized without invitations. Since international tours cannot make profits for Shochiku Corporation, the primary reason kabuki tours abroad is to fulfill the needs of the inviting institutions, and to showcase the artistic quality of kabuki to the world (Nakano 2017).

Shochiku kabuki troupes did not tour overseas until 1928, but kabuki-related performances had already been staged outside of Japan. Kawakami Otojirô and Sadayakko's *Shimpa*<sup>3</sup> troupes had visited Europe and the USA in 1899 and 1902, and Ôta Hanako, a former *geisha*, performed in 1909. All were part of the Japonism boom in the USA and Europe (Kitamura 92; Malikova 156; Nagata 8; Ueda 39). Kabuki related troupes also traveled to Manchuria in August, 1924 (Shochiku, "Kabukiza hyakunenshi" 152; Ueda 39). However, these were not official big-scale kabuki events managed by Shochiku.

## **2-2. The Soviet tour in 1928**

The first performance overseas officially managed by Shochiku took place in Moscow and Leningrad (currently St. Petersburg), in the Soviet Union in August, 1928.

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<sup>3</sup> *Shimpa* ("new wave") was a theater form born in the 1890s. Its conventions are a hybrid of kabuki and modern Western-style theater.

The troupe consisted of forty-eight members including 20 actors, 10 musicians and 18 staff members (Shochiku 3). It all started when Osanai Kaoru, a Japanese director and producer of contemporary plays, went to Moscow to attend the tenth anniversary founding of the Soviet Union in 1927 where the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS) asked him to help bring kabuki to the Soviet Union (Nagata 15; Ueda 30–34). Even though Osanai was not working for Shochiku, he had collaborated in the writing and directing of new kabuki plays. VOKS's contact with him resulted in realizing the kabuki tour plan only seven months later. Osanai could not lead the tour because of his health condition and he died in December of the same year (Nagata 15). On behalf of Osanai, Ichikawa Sadanji II, Osanai's friend and also one of the leading kabuki actors, made an effort to realize the tour. Furthermore, two factors supported the plan; the political goals of both nations and artistic motivations (Kitamura 95; Uchida 66).

The political goal was the Soviet Union's communist propaganda about and directed toward Japan. The adversarial relationship between the Soviet Union and Japan since the Russian revolution, with the military invasion of Siberia and the Far East in 1917, ended in 1925 when the Soviet–Japanese Basic Convention was signed (Uchida

66). While diplomatic exchange had not been proactive between the Socialist Soviet Union and Imperial Japan, both countries thought to use cultural exchange to rebuild their relationship. At the same time, the Soviet Union sought to publicize the communist ideology to Japan through cultural exchanges (Uchida 66). In terms of the kabuki tour, the success of the diplomatic approach was more important for the Soviet government than were the artistic goals. Even though cultural events were usually led by VOKS, Alexander Trojanowski, the ambassador in Tokyo, and Ivan Maisky, Ambassador-Counselor in Tokyo became the contact persons for the kabuki tour and the preparation was left to VOKS later. This personal intervention by diplomats demonstrated that the event was treated as an important diplomatic initiative (Malikova 150; Uchida 81). This kabuki diplomacy between former enemies, the Soviet Union and Japan in 1928 is a forerunner to kabuki diplomacy between former enemies USA and Japan in 1960, to be introduced in the next chapter.

In addition to the political factors, artistic motivations pushed the plan forward. By the time Osanai suggested the plan for the Soviet tour, kabuki was in a wave of modernization inspired by Western style theaters in Japan. Also, with rapprochement in 1925 between the Soviet Union and Japan, both Osanai and Sadanji stated their interest in

performing in the Soviet Union after traveling to Europe. Sadanji visited Europe in 1906 and Osanai traveled there in 1912 (Ueda 33). At the same time, the demand for Japanese drama theories had grown in the Soviet theater world since the late 19th century (Kitamura 92–93).

Returning to the Soviet tour, since the Soviet government was supposed to pay all of the costs as the host, it turned out that the cost was extraordinary expensive. The unexpectedly expensive cost made the Soviet government conclude that this project would not meet political and even cultural goals (Kitamura 103). However, at this point, the project had already come to the final stage (Kitamura 104). While the Soviet government negotiated slowly, Sadanji worked fast, supported by media reporting (Kitamura 98; Uchida 83). The Soviet government could not cancel this event because it would lead to big confusion between two countries still in an insecure relationship (Kitamura 104). In the end, Trojanowski, the ambassador in Tokyo, decided to reallocate the money for renovating the embassy in Tokyo and signed the contract with Shochiku officially on June 1st, 1928 without Soviet government approval (Uchida 83). Without Trojanowski's decisive step, the event would be cancelled and there would have been a diplomatic crisis. The Soviet government granted retroactive approval for Trojanowski's

act, which covered freight charge and promotion costs. However, 30% of the total expenses for labor costs were still short (Uchida 83–84). Therefore, Shinpei Gotô, a Japanese politician who made an effort to build the relationship between the Soviet Union and Japan, asked Tsutsumi Seiroku, a Japanese businessman, to pay the rest of the budget (Uchida 66–69, 84). Due to selling tickets with discounts and stage sets made in the Soviet Union, the total expense of the event was not recovered and the Soviet Union lost money in the end (Malikova 150–51).

In terms of the program selection, Shochiku and the Soviet embassy selected the programs together in Tokyo according to the contract. They created programs with more dance, and less dialogue drama (Kitamura 109). The run time was within three hours and four programs were prepared for the Moscow performances (Kitamura 110). Program A included *Kanadehon Chûshingura (The Treasury of Loyal Retainers)*, and *Kyôganoko musume Dôjôji (The Maiden at Dôjôji)*. Program B included *Banchô sarayashiki (The Broken Dish)*, *Ayatsuri Sanbasô (Puppet Sanbasô)*, and *Narukami (The Thunder God)*. Program C included *Danmari (Groping in the Dark)*, *Sagi musume (The Heron Maiden)*, *Shuzenji monogatari (A mask-maker's story)*, and *Genroku hanamiodori (Flower Viewing Dance of the Genroku Period)*. Program D included *Toribeyamashinjû (The Love*

*Suicides at Toribeyama*), *Narukami*, and *Ayatsuri Sanbasô*. *Danmari*, *Ayatsuri Sanbasô*, and *Kyôganoko musume Dôjôji* were performed as an alternative program D on just one night (Shochiku 2-3). Program A was performed only in Leningrad. Plays such as “*Banchô sarayashiki*” and “*Toribeyamashinjû*,” are romances between people of different social statuses (Ueda 42). The very traditional feudal drama, *Kanadehon Chûshingura* was especially popular (Kitamura 109).

These programs contrasted with the audience’s expectations because at the time of the tour the working class was nominally leading the Soviet Union due to the proletarian revolution. The equal value of life among all statuses was promoted and communist ideology should have been the core idea of all art works presented in the Soviet Union (Ueda 42). In order to justify the presentation of kabuki plays dealing with hierarchy or feudal systems, and to avoid any political disputes and recoup as many expenses as possible, an efficient and appropriate PR campaign was required (Malikova 151).

Therefore, the Soviet government took the lead role in the promotion. The PR amounted to 20% of the total cost (Malikova 151). Maisky, Ambassador-Counselor in Tokyo, educated the mass media in some ways. For instance, his idea of separating actors’ skills from feudal and religious drama of kabuki helped the audience to ignore the

ideology and focus on the actors' artistry (Malikova 152–53). Moreover, Maisky requested VOKS to spread information about the characteristics of Japanese theatre to the Soviet mass media beforehand. In addition to the radio and movie commercials, a committee was established to promote the kabuki tour and Japanese culture in print media (Malikova 154). Publicity in various media helped to educate audiences about kabuki before the show.

Paper-based media such as the national newspaper, local newspapers, pamphlets and magazines, played an important role thanks to over 80% of literacy in the cities (Ueda 43, 47). Newspaper articles gave information about the shows, the troupe's itinerary, information about the art of kabuki, and reviews of performances after they took place (Ueda 43). The media foregrounded orientalist images to get the interest of people who were unfamiliar with Japanese culture (Malikova 156). For example, they posted photos of the kabuki troupe in kimono when they arrived at the Moscow station in the Soviet Union (Ueda 44). Also an art critic, Davit Alkyne, a play critic, Grigory Gauzner, and Japanese studies scholar, Nikolai Konrad wrote about how to enjoy kabuki (Ueda 45). In particular, Alkyne's theory that contrasted popular features of kabuki for normal people with aristocratic features of noh<sup>1</sup> was cited frequently, appealing to readers

by suggesting proletarian opposition against the bourgeoisie. His theory was useful to keep the troupe's visit from seeming to oppose communist ideology (Ueda 46). In addition to the media in the Soviet Union, the troupes also joined the cultural outreach program organized by a research group at Moscow University (Nagata 10).

Moreover, the development of research of Japanese theaters in the Soviet Union provided prior education for the audience (Malikova 168). Especially, theater directors, Meyerhold, Solovyov, and Radlov experimented by directing plays using Japanese forms and conventions (Malikova 161; Nagata 15). The biggest institution in the Soviet researching the Oriental studies was in Leningrad where the audience was more educated than those living in other areas (Malikova 168).

This multifaceted strategic campaign prepared audiences to enjoy kabuki before the shows (Malikova 154). One performance day was reserved for dignitaries and organizers in Moscow, but most of the tickets, especially 80% of them in Leningrad, were sold with discounts to the audience via labor unions (Kitamura 113; Malikova 150, 178).

Thanks to many preparations discussed above, big political confusion did not happen. As for the concern with ideology, Maisky's strategy successfully hid the feudal ideology of kabuki (Malikova 153-154). Because this was the very first time to tour



official Shochiku kabuki, even Sadanji and Ôtani thought it would be hard to succeed (Malikova 106). However, the tour was successful overall (Ueda 48–57). The Moscow run was extended by 5 days by shortening the Leningrad run because of the extraordinary popularity in Moscow (Shochiku 2).

Moreover, the tour impacted the theatrical and cinematic world (Kitamura 121).

Film director, Sergei Eisenstein later said that the montage techniques<sup>4</sup> he used extensively in his film-making were influenced by the dramatic and emotional *mie* poses of kabuki (Shochiku xxiv). However, this enthusiasm contrasts with drama critics. In 1928 in the Soviet Union, artists were evaluated based on how much their works were dedicated to the working class, not on how good their skills were. Therefore, some drama critics concluded that they “did not need kabuki” because kabuki actors showed off old forms of theatrical skill (Malikova 153).

Even though many Soviet critics disagreed about the kabuki tour’s success, the government redefined the tour’s purpose as a contribution to performing arts in order to justify its exceptional expense, and downplayed its political and diplomatic purposes (Kitamura 121–122). After the tour, the attention to the kabuki performances faded out in

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<sup>4</sup> Montage is a technique in film editing in which a series of short shots are combined into a sequence to one scene. Sergei Eisenstein was the first to introduce montage to cinema.

Russia (Kitamura 124; Malikova 177; Uchida 85). This was the only official kabuki tour abroad before 1955 in China according to Shochiku's official record. However, in fact, international tours took place during the war.

### **2-3. International tours during the war**

Kabuki was performed almost continually outside of Japan during the imperial period, from the 1920s until 1943. The extensive book, *Kabuki's Forgotten War 1931-1945*, written by James R. Brandon has revealed the fact that at least fifteen kabuki shows toured abroad, all in Asia during the war (Brandon 197). By mid-1942, there were some two million Japanese, such as military personnel and businessmen, living and working in occupied areas. Many kinds of performing arts took international tours to entertain this Japanese diaspora. A couple of thousand *geisha* singing and dancing to *shamisen* music, a Japanese instrument, were performing in Manchuria and occupied areas of China. Nôh teacher-performers were teaching in Shanghai and Manchuria (Brandon 196).

Regarding kabuki, big-scale commercial tours were not easy to realize overseas because those troupes needed extraordinary costs to move stage sets and staff between locations. It was also risky for actors to abandon their established audience at home and

go into a foreign environment (Brandon 196). Therefore, government agencies assisted in sending most of kabuki tours to the occupied area such as Manchuria, cities in China, the Korean Peninsula, Taiwan, and Manila between 1924 and 1942 (Brandon 197–203). At the same time, at least two performances out of fifteen were managed by a private commercial company, Fuji Entertainment Company (Fuji) (Brandon 199; Ozawa 477).

The government supported tours were intended to foster patriotism and nationalism, and inspire people to serve the nation. Most kabuki tours abroad that the government assisted officially were consolation or comfort performances for the troops, or entertainment for people living in Asian countries. The consolation tours were offered to soldiers and suffering family members. The tour paid tribute to sacrifices that both civilian and military personnel were making to win the war (Brandon 191-193).

Those tours received good reviews (Brandon 197; Ôsasa 391–392; Ozawa 482). For instance, the tour in China and Korea in 1938, led by Nakamura Kichiemon I, received a red-carpet treatment (Brandon 197). In terms of the front lines tour in China in 1941, when the Shochiku Citizens' Drama Touring Troupe organized in November 1940 performed, The troupe was divided into two teams to cover a broad area - ten districts of China (Brandon 198; Shochiku "kabukiza hyakunenshi" 291). Murasaki Toshirô wrote

this in his book, titled *Idôengeki to sono eikyô*, “After the soldiers got news about the troupe coming to perform, they created the stage and had been waiting one month before. Even in the rain or snow, the soldiers stood to watch during the play enthusiastically. We performed [...] hearing gun fire as the soldiers watched the play (Ôsasa 392)”. The touring troupe including non-kabuki companies like Toho Company and Takarazuka, which were created during the war as part of the national agenda. They performed in the countryside, military sites, and factories actively inside and outside of Japan (Ôsasa 386; Shochiku "kabukiza hyakunenshi" 201).

Among the government supported tours, at least two tours were sent for the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the founding of the Manchukuo Empire in June to September of 1942 (Amakata, “Theatrical Notes”; Amakata, “What of the Rialto?”). Kikugorô VI and Shochiku President Ôtani Takejirô, along with members of the Bureau of Information, were designated “Artistic Envoys to the Tenth Anniversary of the Founding of Manchuria” (Brandon 198). Kikugorô and President Ôtani made formal and patriotic speeches on June 6, the day Japan's Imperial Navy lost the Battle of Midway. Because this defeat was never publicly revealed, the performers and audience in Manchuria were unaware of the news (Brandon 198). These tours attained great success

according to articles on June 25th and July 30th in *Japan Times* and *Advertiser* (Amakata, “What of the Rialto”).

In addition to the government led consolation tours, there were profit-making tours throughout China in 1939 organized by Fuji, a commercial company. The conditions differed depending on the location. Especially the gap between the front lines and Manchukuo was big. Near the front lines, the Fuji-led tour was not appreciated well. The troupe promoted the tour as primarily as consolation for military audiences and secondarily as commercial performances. This way their plans proceeded smoothly despite strong military oversight. However, their actual purpose was primarily commercial (Ozawa 477). On the other hand, Ichikawa Ennosuke, the leading actor, toured mainly because he wanted to entertain the military troops. Even though Fuji accepted Ennosuke’s original purpose later, owing to poor planning, the audience criticized the tour as not motivated to “comfort“ and “console” the troops (Ozawa 478). Soldiers under the severe battle pressure would appreciate a more patriotist and altruistic attitude (Ozawa 481). Drawing on this experience of unsuccessful arrangements, in the following year Fuji sponsored a tour that succeeded thanks to the appropriate promotion (Ozawa 480). They honestly promoted the tour as commercial performances but were

willing to do consolation performances as long as the time allowed.

Despite the poorly planned first tour, the audience was looking forward to seeing the performances (Ozawa 482). When staging a play, some people did not understand the traditional play, “*Taikôki Jûdanme*” (*Illustrated Chronicles of the Regent (Act10)*), but were familiar with “*Hasibenkei*” (*Benkei on the Bridge*) since many people had enjoyed the story when they were kids (Ozawa 482). The troupe also performed military dramas and the audience enjoyed them (Ozawa 479). Based on this audience reaction, Ozawa concluded that universal, simple, and local based programs would be able to entertain audiences (Ozawa 482–83).

On the other hand, the situation of Fuji’s tours in Manchukuo was different. Because of the booming economy and convenient location from Japan, Fuji tried to earn profit. Ticket prices were set too high for working-class viewers, and instead targeted a celebrity audience (Ozawa 485). Over 75% of the audience was *geisha* or related celebrities (Ozawa 490). The purely traditional program was selected based on the audiences’ preference (Ozawa 485). The targeted viewers appreciated the actors’ skills, music and stories thanks to their prior knowledge of Japanese traditional performing arts. Accordingly, reviews were good overall. However narrowing audience and plays that

only a specific audience would understand or enjoy failed to develop new kinds of kabuki and a new potential audiences like young working-class groups (Ozawa 487).

Regarding the programs in war time, kabuki playwrights were encouraged to compose pro-war and pro-military plays in order to support the imperial mission at home and in all of Asia. The plays were censored to suppress artistic expression that might challenge the imperial mission. Theatrical entertainment could sugarcoat government messages, so it was considered as an especially effective propaganda medium (Brandon 193). As the articles in 1933 *Japan Times & Mail* says, kabuki performance was a useful tool to spread propaganda because “real harmony between the two nations depends upon mutual goodwill and interest” (“Army Officials Intend to Send Actors and Other Entertainers to Amuse Manchurians”). The Japanese government also established a Propaganda Corps and recruited a thousand Japanese, including writers, performers, scholars and art presenters, and sent them all over Asia (Brandon 193).

As the war reached its climax, overseas tours became too dangerous because American submarines and aircraft were beginning to attack overseas areas and the homeland and cut supply lines to the continent (Brandon 155–256). The number of kabuki troupes decreased from seventy to eighty members in 1942, to just six actors a

year later. The last kabuki troupe traveled to China in mid-July 1943 (Brandon 255–56).

Also, in Japan, most theaters started being closed. The major kabuki venues of the Meiji-za, Kabuki-za, and Shinbashi Enbujo, were destroyed in air raids in 1945 (Brandon 304–307). Kabuki was available only in Kyoto in June of 1945 and it was also closed down in July (Brandon 305). Kabuki had almost died when Japan signed unconditional surrender in August of 1945 in the Potsdam Declaration.

As introduced above, kabuki could continue performing in the homeland and outside throughout the war thanks to the government's financial and political support. However, the themes of the plays were censored by the government and kabuki was used as a propaganda tool to encourage people to serve the nation.

In conclusion between 1928 and 1943, kabuki tours were sent abroad when the power of the central government was strong and kabuki was perceived as a useful policy tool. However, kabuki was almost deceased in August 1945 when the Allied powers of Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the Republic of China, and the U.S. defeated Japan.



## **Chapter Three – America and Kabuki: Post-war Censorship & US Touring in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

### **3-1. Kabuki during the Occupation**

Soon after Japan's defeat, the U.S. occupied and ruled Japan. The US occupation lasted until April 1952. General Douglas MacArthur was the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) led the General Headquarters (GHQ) in Japan and had the final authority to make all decisions about occupation policies. From 1946 until 1949, US military bureaucrats were involved in a complex relationship with Shochiku kabuki. This relationship would lead directly to the first Grand Kabuki tour to the USA in 1960.

On August 21 1945, a week before the first American soldiers arrived in Japan, Shochiku's President Ôtani made a speech about his attitude toward postwar kabuki: Shochiku must preserve kabuki against Western suppression. The day after his speech, only seven days after the surrender, Shochiku produced a kabuki program at Kabuki-za in Osaka and several days later in Tokyo at the Tôgeki Theater (Brandon, "Myth and Reality" 8). American censors did not pay attention to theatre banning initially (Brandon, "Myth and Reality" 5). Therefore, during the first three months from August through November, Shochiku could stage whatever plays they liked including nationalist plays

without interference by SCAP (Brandon, “Myth and Reality” 9). Luckily, American censors were not put on Shochiku’s board of directors to control the company from inside (Brandon, “Myth and Reality” 5).

However, SCAP realized that there was militaristic patriotism and anti-American propaganda in postwar Japan (Brandon, “Myth and Reality” 5). On September 10, 1945, GHQ released five articles consisting of instructions on speech and expression in a “free and responsible press” to control freedom of speech (Okamoto 44-45). However, this did not apply to other media and the performing arts at first. In addition to these five articles, on September 22, 1945, the “United States Initial Post-Surrender Policy for Japan” was announced, expressing America’s basic ideas on the Occupation. In this policy, two main goals of the Occupation were set forth; democratization and demilitarization of Japan. In order to achieve these goals, SCAP created many sections responsible for specific missions (Okamoto 47).

Among them, especially two sections affected the theatre industry: the Press Pictorial and Broadcasting Division (PPB) within the Civil Censorship Detachment (CCD) to suppress feudalist, militarist and ultra-nationalist messages, and the Civil Information and Education Section (CI&E) to introduce democracy, freedom, and

individual liberty (Brandon, “Myth and Reality” 9-11; Okamoto 90). CI&E consisted of two units, a Motion Picture Unit and a Theatrical Unit. They had responsibility for promoting democratic themes in films and live theatre. PPB had authority as a part of the army structure, while CI&E did not (Brandon, “Myth and Reality” 11). The tasks of these two teams overlapped and they were supposed to cooperate with each other. However, in fact, it was an ineffective structure to realize their goals. CI&E asked for Shochiku to create new, democratic kabuki plays but lacked the powers to enforce this request, while PPB suppressed plays but could not interrupt the direction of the plays (Brandon 79). Even though PPB and CI&E complemented each other initially, they moved in different directions eventually. CI&E was trying to get kabuki to create new and democratic plays, while PPB initially banned or censored plays, but later freed kabuki from censorship in the middle of the Occupation period (Brandon, “Myth and Reality” 16).

On September 22, 1945, the first head of the Motion Picture and Theatrical Division of CI&E issued directives to film and theatre companies, which aimed at making anti-feudal and pro-democracy plays (Brandon 18; Okamoto 47). This regulation targeted kabuki in particular. Okamoto says, “kabuki’s themes of loyalty toward one’s master, *seppuku*, head inspections, revenge, and other manifestations of administration of

feudal virtues could be nothing but taboo in Occupation eyes” (Okamoto 50). It is interesting to note that censorship of kabuki during war-time and postwar exemplified opposing values. The censorship by the government of Japan during the war encouraged using feudal plays for military purposes while the postwar censorship by GHQ banned the feudal plays and aimed at creating a democratic Japan.

The Theatrical Division of CI&E was led by four men during the Occupation: Naval Lt. Junior Grade John Boruff (October 1945–January 1946), 1st Lt. Harold (Hal) Keith (January 1946 –July 1946), WDC Edward (Eddie) Kaneshima (August 1946 –June 1947), and WDC Willard Thompson (July 1947–August 1950). The unit was small compared to PPB and usually staffed by three or four people (Brandon, “Myth and Reality” 15).

The first chief CI&E theatrical officer, John Boruff graduated from Yale University in 1932 where he was the president of the Drama Club. He was also a young actor-playwright on Broadway (Mayo 276). His strong interest in learning Japanese theatre led him to appreciate kabuki, but Boruff realized later that it had deeply rooted feudal ideology. In addition to the ideology of the plays, Shochiku’s conservative stance troubled him. Because of Shochiku’s resistance to democratizing the content of kabuki,

Boruff threatened to close down productions unless Shochiku presented democratic new plays for 30% of production content. Shochiku did not show any intention of obeying the policy in the meetings with Boruff. However, CI&E lacked legal powers to enforce this order and in the end, agreed for Shochiku to stage new plays in one out of six plays, not 30%, with summaries of all plays to be provided in English (Brandon, “Myth and Reality” 22-27; Mayo 277). Following this policy, Shochiku got approval of *Banchô sarayashiki* (*The Mansion of Broken Dishes*) and *Terakoya* (*The Village School*).

However, in fact Shochiku concealed the feudal parts of both plays in the submitted translation and Boruff found this out when he attended both plays in November 1945.

This betrayal by Shochiku disturbed Boruff and hardened his attitude (Brandon, “Myth and Reality” 29; Mayo 276). Shochiku’s disobedience caught the attention of theatre officers in SCAP.

Next, Boruff tried to ban the “inappropriate” traditional plays and he suggested Shochiku to have meetings on December 4-7 1945 in order to review the list that Shochiku made (Brandon 348; Okamoto 59). Shochiku’s list of approximately 500 plays categorized them into traditional kabuki and *shin jidaigeki* (new historical plays written between 1920 and 1940), and labeled them either possible or impossible plays to perform

(Brandon, "Myth and Reality" 37). The meeting members included Boruff representing CI&E, Earle Ernst, a chief censor in PPB, Joseph Goldstein, another censor in PPB, and an interpreter on the GHQ side and a seven member group of Japanese (Brandon, "Myth and Reality" 39). Ironically, the same Japanese had selected suitable war plays several months before for the Japanese military government during the war (Brandon, "Myth and Reality" 37). The meeting evaluated the plays based on the thirteen points used in the CI&E movie code. The codes were mostly prohibitions of feudalist and militarist themes prepared for film writers and directors such as feudal ideology and suicide (Brandon, "Myth and Reality" 36). The meeting ended with only one-thirds of the existing repertory allowed (Brandon, "Myth and Reality" 40; Mayo 279; Okamoto 63). Among those plays, three-fourths of the traditional kabuki plays were approved as suitable to perform. Most of the not-possible plays were feudal plays written during the war or revisions of feudal history plays (Brandon, "Myth and Reality" 48). Boruff in CI&E wanted to publish the approved list, but Ernst in PPB turned down his request because the existence of a published list of banned titles would make it difficult to ease theatre censorship at a later date (Brandon, "Myth and Reality" 45). If the information was open to the public, it would be hard to prove that plays which had once been treated as dangerous plays were

now safe to perform.

On January 20, 1946 *Tokyo Shimbun* published articles about kabuki censorship and the situation became public (Okamoto 68). This article disturbed Faubian Bowers, a personal secretary of General MacArthur, an interpreter, and a kabuki lover. Bowers' background in kabuki was unique. After he studied piano in the U.S. and Europe, he got interested in Javanese *gamelan* music. On his way to Indonesia in 1940, he stopped in Japan, where he became fascinated with kabuki. Bowers stayed in Japan for one year and became proficient in Japanese and knowledgeable about kabuki. His superior Japanese ability led him to enroll in intensive Japanese language training during the war. He was sent as a military translator and interpreter to New Guinea, Australia, and the Philippines and finally Japan under MacArthur (Okamoto 71). Personally Bowers criticized banning kabuki plays in an article that appeared in the *Tokyo Shimbun* published on January 23 1946, which included his picture and a brief biography (Okamoto 71-73). His article spread through the kabuki world and Bowers got to know leading kabuki actors such as Nakamura Kichiemon I and Matsumoto Kôshirô VII (Okamoto 75-76).

After the article was published, Bowers wanted to help kabuki and tried various approaches. When Bowers asked General MacArthur directly about kabuki, MacArthur

stated he had no interest in kabuki and agreed with banning militaristic kabuki plays (Okamoto 78). Next, Bowers set up educational kabuki events presenting to GHQ personnel for over a year, and distributed explanatory articles and translations in English at the shows (Okamoto 79). Regarding how to explain kabuki, Bowers asked a kabuki scholar, Kawatake Shigetoshi for his advice about how the kabuki play could be interpreted in a non-feudal way (Okamoto 83). Moreover, Bowers held dinner parties between censorship personnel and kabuki actors at Bowers' spacious house in the American embassy (Okamoto 80). His devotion to kabuki interfered with his job as MacArthur's secretary, especially since MacArthur supported banning kabuki. Finally, Bowers decided to leave his position as MacArthur's aide sometime in late 1946 (Okamoto 89-90).

In January 1946, Boruff's position at CI&E was succeeded by Lt. Hal Keith who adopted a stricter stance (Mayo 279; Okamoto 66). Right before Boruff left, he had failed to get Shochiku to play 50% new plays, but now Keith demanded it again (Brandon 345; Leiter "The Good Censors" 96). CI&E thought more new plays would lead to more democratized theatre. Simultaneously, Keith also intended to increase kabuki actors' employment that had been reduced by following SCAP's policy (Mayo 282). Shochiku



paid wages on an actual performance basis and the numbers of performances affected actors' livelihoods (Mayo 282). However, Shochiku adhered to traditional plays, following by Ôtani's policy and the number of the performances still stayed low. Also, the financial incentive for writing new plays was too small to attract playwrights (Brandon, "Myth and Reality" 60). Due to the lack of authority to force the demands of CI&E, Keith shifted to focus on *shingeki*. While censorship in kabuki by CI&E continued, PPB became the principal occupation authority dealing with kabuki around early 1946 (Leiter, "The The Good Censors" 96).

In PPB, officers were posted in three district offices- District I: Tokyo; District II: Osaka; and District III: Fukuoka. Even though general policy was set in Tokyo, censors in each district carried out their work independently (Brandon, "Myth and Reality" 12). Six men directed theatre censorship in two locations: District I, Tokyo, Captain Charles B. Reese (September–October 1945), 1st Lt. Victor Ehlers (November 1945), 1st Lt. Earle Ernst (December 1945–May 1947), War Department Civilian (WDC), Faubion Bowers (May 1947–May 1948), WDC Stanley Y. Kaizawa (May–December 1948), and WDC John Allyn Jr. (January–November 1949). Between late 1945 and 1947, 2nd Lt. Seymour Palestin, 2nd Lt. Joseph Goldstein, and 2nd Lt. Alexander Calhoun were theatre

censors in Tokyo under Ernst. In District II, Osaka, 2nd Lt. Royall Zuckerman and 2nd Lt. John Allyn Jr. collaborated theatre censorship duties in the beginning. Between late 1945 and 1947, WDC Teshima Takeshi and Tada Takeo were authorized to censor plays in Osaka. Staff in Tokyo and Osaka of PPB included several Nisei supervisors and twenty-to-thirty Japanese national translators and script examiners (Brandon, “Myth and Reality” 12).

The main censor of PPB since December 1945, Earle Ernst, also had a severe attitude toward kabuki even though he recognized kabuki as a major international art form (Brandon 351). During Ernst’s term, kabuki producers continually submitted feudal dramas for approval and only three democratic kabuki scripts had been created<sup>5</sup>. Even though new kabuki scripts were written, most of them were dance performances or borrowed from traditional themes (Brandon, “Myth and Reality” 69). The continued resistance by Shochiku led Ernst in January 1946 to issue a decision allowing “Special Permission”. The decision authorized staging some banned plays on the condition that the major actors performed on the basis of their artistic merit and infrequency of performance (Brandon, “Myth and Reality” 68). PPB had this authority as a part of the military

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<sup>5</sup> See page 38

powers, while CI&E did not. This key decision led to releasing additional disapproved plays, which improved major kabuki actors' employment situations (Mayo 290). Since Ernst thought Bowers shared his views on kabuki censorship, Ernst hired Bowers in CCD in late 1946 and supervised him for six months (Brandon, "Myth and Reality" 70; Okamoto 91). Ernst and Bowers wrote a joint memo that released *Sugawara Denju Tenarai Kagami*, (*Sugawara and the Secrets of Calligraphy*) including the *Terakoya* (*The Village School*), in April 1947 (Brandon, "Myth and Reality" 66).

After Ernst left Japan in May 1947 to resume his teaching job at University of Hawai'i. Bowers became a senior theater censor (Brandon, "Myth and Reality" 70; Mayo 290; Okamoto 95). Following the path that PPB predecessors already achieved, on June 26, 1947, Bowers wrote "Censorship of Kabuki: Policy Regulations No. 5-408" and lifted the prohibitions gradually (Brandon, "Myth and Reality" 71). In his regulation, withheld plays were permitted only when the best actors performed them in their full-length complete original form after deletion of the non-democratic passages by censors. Since kabuki actors did more ad-libbing than their Western counterparts who played according to script, the permission limited the number of actors who speak on stage and actors who had techniques to correctly express the original text were selected. This was intended to

control or reduce the risk of subversive interpretations such as gestures, nuances, grimaces, and improvisations (Mayo 290). On top of that, only the theaters in Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka, where audiences were thought to be more knowledgeable and also wealthier in a still depressed economy, were allowed to stage the controversial plays (Mayo 290).

Only one play, *Kanadehon Chûshingura* (*The Treasury of Loyal Retainers*), was excluded from Bowers' policy issued in June 1947 since its theme is full of feudalistic loyalty and revenge, and was considered the biggest hindrance to democratization (Brandon, "Myth and Reality" 72; Okamoto 112). However, in the next month, Bowers' campaign to release *Chûshingura* began. In his arguments to his superiors he reasoned that the play was safe to stage. In his request memo he wrote, "if we permit *Chûshingura* while censorship is in full force, then the performance will be credited to the Occupation's understanding efforts to preserve Japan's classic arts [and] engender lasting gratitude toward the Occupation for its understanding censorship policies" (Brandon, "Myth and Reality" 72). Finally all eleven acts were performed in September 1947 (Mayo 291). In November, Bowers revised his 1947 policy to include *Chûshingura* (Brandon, "Myth and Reality" 73).

According to Brandon, many Japanese still believe that Faubian Bowers was the only person who saved kabuki. However, there were four other censors who played important roles in ending censorship. Brandon proved this in his essay. Between January 1946 and May 1948 when Faubion Bowers left Japan, censors approved 140 kabuki productions on the disapproved list: John Allyn 71, Bowers 43, Ernst 17, Royall Zuckerman 6, and Seymour Palestin 3 (Brandon, "Myth and Reality" 67).

As the Cold War heated up in 1947-1948, the Occupation redirected its basic stance away from blocking undesirable rightist messages to countering communist ideology. Also, MacArthur was thinking to run for the American presidency, and wanted to keep the Occupation benign. So censorship weakened gradually and slowly. The four-year long censorship of kabuki ended in November 1949 (Brandon, "Myth and Reality" 2).

Brandon concluded his essay by asserting that "*kiwamono* [plays set in contemporary times dealing with current events,] disappeared and kabuki became a "classic theatre" (Brandon, "Myth and Reality" 82). "Kabuki in the twenty-first century is not a living theatre. [Kabuki] is a gloriously flamboyant fossil, an artifact of a past world that has nothing to say about today" (Brandon, "Myth and Reality" 83). In fact,

Shochiku's strategy with the support of Kawatake and Bowers was to classicize kabuki to preserve the tradition (Brandon 350–51; Mayo 285). That is, kabuki was not solely a classical theater in early 1946. Four pro-democracy *kiwamono* were written. They were staged from November, 1945 to February, 1946 (Brandon, "Democratic Kabuki" 106-118). After February, 1946 Shochiku decided to define kabuki written in the past as timeless traditional, classical kabuki, beyond criticism based on real social events and politics, and notwithstanding any feudalistic or militaristic contents (Brandon 351). Following this strategy and also Ôtani's policy, Shochiku gained approval for many originally disapproved plays and staged them repeatedly throughout the Occupation era.

However, in fact, kabuki continued as a living theater. In the 1950s until about 1965 playwrights wrote many new kabuki works every year (Leiter, "Kabuki at the Crossroads Years of Crisis" 383–84). They were not realistic plays set in a contemporary Japan, but were original and creative works. From the late 1960s through the turn of the century, only a few new plays were written. But today again we are in a new kabuki boom period with many new plays every year, either set in Japanese history or in fantastic worlds. These details will be discussed in Chapter Four.

After kabuki censorship ended, in September of 1951, in San Francisco, the

Treaty of San Francisco was signed between Japan and 48 nations. The treaty came into force on April 28, 1952. The enforcement officially ended the American-led Allied Occupation of Japan. The impression lingers that during the Occupation everything traditional in Japan was suppressed severely, including kabuki, but in fact, kabuki flourished (Brandon, “Myth and Reality” 63–64). As discussed above, Shochiku kept producing kabuki during the Occupation. Many Americans, including performers, scholars, writers, and producers attended kabuki in Japan and many of them were impressed with it. It was inevitable that these Americans would want to bring kabuki to the USA.

### **3-2. Post-war Tours to The USA**

After the Occupation, Shochiku kabuki resumed performing overseas. The U.S. was the most frequently visited country in the post war era (Shochiku 416-419). Shochiku troupes visited the U.S. 16 times and performed more than 350 performances in 21 cities across the country between 1960 and 1996 (Shochiku 23-404). This section will analyze two Shochiku kabuki postwar tours to the USA to analyze the trends in the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s kabuki performance in America. This in turn provides historical context for the changes

made in kabuki touring to the USA in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **3-2-1. Azuma Kabuki**

Many Americans who saw kabuki in Tokyo during the Occupation, were fascinated by new and exotic kabuki and wanted to bring it to the U.S. Three Pulitzer Prize winners –playwright-novelist Paul Green, producer-director-playwright Joshua Logan, and novelist-journalist James Michener–led the campaign for a kabuki tour to New York (Thornbury 32; Wetmore 80). In New York, Bowers started his career as a writer on Japan, Japanese theater, and the arts in general. Since Green, Logan and Michener did not know Japanese and its culture in depth, Bowers’ contribution was seminal (Thornbury 38). The Information Section of Japanese embassy and UNESCO also published reference materials about kabuki in 1954 (Wetmore 81). Thanks to these supporters, major publications about kabuki were issued actively from 1952 to 1956 in America (Wetmore 80–81). The writers admired kabuki’s artistic quality and created motivation for Americans to see it (Thornbury 32–38; Wetmore 82–83). These activities were good introductions, helping general American audiences become informed about kabuki and the conventions and the cultural contexts of Japanese drama.

Thanks to these efforts, Azuma Kabuki Dance and Music Company (Azuma



Company) came to the U.S. before actual kabuki managed by Shochiku was presented. They performed in New York, Chicago, and Washington in 1954, two years after the end of the Occupation, and came back to the same places in late 1955 (Leiter, "Kabuki at the Crossroads Years of Crisis" 383–84). Azuma dance was not kabuki, but a major step toward bringing kabuki to the U.S. later.

The Azuma Company was not a kabuki company, but a *nihon buyô* troupe, a school of kabuki dance and directly related to professional Shochiku kabuki with roots dating back to the Edo period (1603-1868). *Nihon buyô* incorporates dance pieces from kabuki but is an independent traditional Japanese dance form (Wetmore 85). Azuma Tokuho, the lead performer in the tour, was the head of the company at the time of the performance and also a daughter of Ichimura Uzaemon XV. Uzaemon was a kabuki actor originally from a famous school of *nihon buyô*, the Fujima School, and he became Founding Grand Master of the Azuma Company. Azuma Tokuho succeeded Uzaemon as the second-generation Grand Master in 1942 (Wetmore 81).

Azuma Company performed in more than forty cities in over ten Western countries in the early to mid-1950s (Azuma-ryû). In 1954, in the New York performance, the Azuma Company was made up of only female dancers and had no actual kabuki

actors. They performed only dance pieces including traditional kabuki dance such as *Kyôganoko musume Dôjôji* (*The Girl at Dôjôji Temple*), *Tsuchigumo* (*The Earth Spider*), and *Hashi Benkei* (*Benkei on the Bridge*), and newly created pieces for the company (Wetmore 87). When they returned in the following year, kabuki actor, Bandô Tsurunosuke, a son of Azuma Tokuho, played both male and female (*onnagata*) roles (“Kabuki Dancers to Open Dec.26”). His participation was first introduction of *onnagata* to Americans. His *onnagata* role became a major point of the company’s press campaign (Leiter, "Kabuki at the Crossroads Years of Crisis" 385).

The Azuma Company tour was sponsored by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Japanese Ministry of Education, and Prince Takamatsu, a brother to Emperor Hirohito (Wetmore 86). Even though the company needed to ship some twenty-four tons of scenery and props, the Azuma Company was smaller and less expensive than kabuki (Thornbury 44). Therefore, Azuma Company tours were sensible experiments to see how Americans reacted to a performance similar to kabuki (Wetmore 90). Even though there was some criticism of the unfamiliar music which is different from the Western music, the reviews were enthusiastic overall (Thornbury 49). Their visits were judged worthy of wide attention, and were covered in national magazines such as *Newsweek*, *Saturday*

*Review, the New Yorker, and the Nation*. People praised Tokuho's skillful performance, the beauty of kabuki and Japanese culture (Thornbury 47–49).

In fact, the Azuma Company's performances were markedly different from real kabuki for Bowers, Michener, and Green who had seen kabuki in Japan, and their hard work eventually led to a kabuki tour to New York. However, because they wanted to keep the attention of audience in New York to the Azuma Kabuki performance and Japanese culture, a clear statement about the difference between kabuki and the Azuma performances was never made (Wetmore 91). In 1958, Azuma Tokuho visited New York again on her own, under the sponsorship of Ballet Arts, and offered a month of lecture-demonstrations in Japanese folk and classical dance (Leiter, "Kabuki at the Crossroads Years of Crisis" 386). Thus, the Azuma Company paved the way for the later first kabuki performance in the U.S. in 1960.

After the tour to the U.S. in 1960, kabuki visited the Soviet Union in 1961. Prior to those tours, the U.S. and the Soviet Union reached out to kabuki troupes around the same time in the face of the Cold War division of the world into communist and democratic societies. The U.S. needed an anti-communist partner in Asia, where China, Korea, and Southeast Asia were already communizing after 1952 (Wetmore 79). Also, in

order to reimage the former enemy Japan as an economic and military ally, both the Japanese government and the American government were happy to use kabuki (Wetmore 90).

In addition to the approach from the United States, in early February 1955, the Soviet Union sent an invitation for a month long tour, to Matsuo Kunio, an artistic event promoter, offering to bring sixty kabuki players as state guests. Matsuo had organized a kabuki China tour in 1955 (Leiter, "Kabuki at the Crossroads Years of Crisis" 392). This approach by the Soviet Union was part of the Soviet Union's political policy, seeking to normalize Soviet-Japanese relations after the conflict over the San Francisco Treaty took place. In the treaty, the Soviet Union disagreed with Japan's independence and did not sign the treaty of San Francisco in 1951 even though 49 countries including the U.S. and Japan signed it (Leiter, "Kabuki at the Crossroads Years of Crisis" 392; Thornbury 53). *Newsweek* reported that "[the invitation] was one sign of the thoroughness with which the Communist world has begun to woo Japan" ("Japan: Invitation to Dance"). *New York Times* also introduced the kabuki invitation as state guests to Japan by the Soviet Union ("Russia Invites Kabuki Troupe"). The USA was competing with the Soviet Union to see which country could bring kabuki to its country first.

### 3-2-2. Grand Kabuki Tour to the USA in 1960

While the influence of the Cold War had increased, Japan's anti-Soviet and anti- People's Republic of China stance had strengthened the political and military alliance between the U.S. and Japan. Showing this attitude to the Soviet Union and the world, the kabuki troupe visited the U.S. before the Soviet Union presented kabuki in 1961 (Thornbury 33). Finally, in 1960, the first fully professional kabuki in the United States took place at City Center in New York between June 2 and June 22, in San Francisco between June 27 and July 10, and in Los Angeles between July 12 and 16 (Shochiku 24). Even though the tour had diplomatic implications, no explicit political events, such as speeches by political leaders, were held (Kawatake, "Tobei Kabuki Zaturoku" 27).

The plan was initiated in 1951 before the end of the Occupation when Logan visited Japan and suggested a U.S. tour to Shochiku's President Ôtani. *The New York Times* aired the idea of bringing kabuki to America for the first time, in January 1952 (Leiter, "Kabuki at the Crossroads Years of Crisis" 391). In Barbara E. Thornbury's recent book, *America's Japan and Japan's Performing Arts*, she argues that the process of producing kabuki in New York for the first time, which took nine years to accomplish [1952 -1960] was a microcosm of the U.S.-Japan cultural relationship at that time

(Thornbury 29). It reflects the essential improvement of the U.S.-Japan political relationship after the war. It is interesting to note that the event was successful while anti-American feeling was rising in Japan over the US-Japan Security Treaty, which was renewed in the same year, including the article agreeing on the stationing United States forces in Japan. Thousands of Japanese rioted in Tokyo against the renewal. On the other hand, Japanese artists were welcomed with appreciation wherever in the U.S. they performed (Leiter, "Kabuki at the Crossroads Years of Crisis" 395).

Another big hindrance was financial shortfalls, which subjected the plan to possible cancelation several times. The previous tours (the Soviet tour in 1928 and the China tour in 1955) kabuki was invited and sponsored by the Soviet government and Chinese government, but this time Shochiku had to negotiate and contract with American impresarios (Sanuki 60). In order to get the government's financial support, Matsuo chose the year of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the relationship between the U.S. and Japan for the tour as the celebration 100 years of US-Japan amity (Kawatake, "Hikaku engekigaku" 130; Sanuki 61). In the end, the expenses (about ¥27,000,000, approximately \$75,000 in 1960 ("U.S. To See Kabuki by Japanese Troupe" ) for travel and transport were covered

by the Foreign Ministry of Japan and Japan Society of New York<sup>6</sup>, the leading producer and presenter in the United States of Japan-related performing arts. The costs (about ¥63,000,000, approximately \$175,000) for lodging and salaries were paid by the American side (Leiter, "Kabuki at the Crossroads Years of Crisis" 393; Sanuki 63). The Rockefeller Foundation also underwrote the project (Kawatake, "Hikaku engekigaku" 130). However, Sanuki Yurito, a critic, questioned the necessity of the total cost of 90,000,000 yen, even considering all of the expenses (Sanuki 63). It is likely that he was implying that Shochiku made a profit from this tour. After the financial problem was settled, Matsuo Kunizo and President Ôtani signed a commercial contract with Lincoln Kirstein, an American impresario, who was a General Director of the New York City Ballet and had brought Japan's *gagaku* (ancient court music) performers to New York in 1959, aided by Bowers (Sanuki 61–62; Thornbury 59).

The next big problem was casting. Whatever the political uses of the tour might be, an initial artistic goal of the tour was to bring the authentic kabuki to the U.S. The American promoters requested the authentic kabuki performed by the best actors. On the other hand, Shochiku could not send many leading actors abroad because of the

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<sup>6</sup> Japan Society is a non-profit organization that organizes events of all sorts that foster mutual understanding between the U.S. and Japan.

scheduled upcoming domestic performances. Shochiku also believed that the lack of the stars decreased sales at its domestic productions. Even though the tour was sponsored by the national budget, the tour could not make enough profit to cover the potential loss of the domestic performances. Regarding the selection of actors going, some actors were rejected from joining the troupe since there was discord among various actors and management from past quarrels. Taking into consideration the American promoters' request, Shochiku's situation, the leading actors' schedules, and relationships among people concerned, Matsuo and Shochiku on the Japanese side, and Kirstein on the American side, negotiated about casting performers and staff (Leiter, "Kabuki at the Crossroads Years of Crisis" 394; Sanuki 63). In the end, 64 people were allotted to the project: 24 actors, 18 musicians, and 22 staff members. The members included Ôtani Takejirô as Troupe Director, Matsuo Kunizo as Deputy Director, Nagayama Takeomi as managing director, leading actors such as Nakamura Kanzaburô, Nakamura Utaemon, and Onoe Shôroku, with Kawatake Toshio as the literary adviser (Leiter, "Kabuki at the Crossroads Years of Crisis" 395; Shochiku 25).

The fourth problem was the limited time of performances abroad, which affected program selection. In the U.S., the running time was specified within two and half to



three hours. Even though a three-hour long performance was permitted after the negotiations, most plays had to be shortened (Kawatake, “Kabuki no tobeini saishite” 30-31). Also, the content should have cohesive plots and present a high context story, avoiding just following the outline. Taking into consideration the basic kinds of kabuki repertory- historical dramas (*jidaimono*), people’s daily life (*sewamono*), and dance pieces (*shosagoto*)- three programs were created (Kawatake, “Kabuki no tobeini saishite” 31). Program A included *Kanjinchô* (*The Subscription List*), *Tsubosaka Reigenki* (*The Miracle At Tsubosaka Temple*), and *Kagotsurube Sato no Eizame* (*Awaking from the Intoxication of the Pleasure Quarters*). Program B included *Kyôganoko musume Dôjôji* (*The Girl at Dôjôji Temple*), *Kanadehon Chûshingura* (*The Treasury of Loyal Retainers*) (Acts I, II, IV), and *Migawari Zazen* (*The Zen Substitute*). Program C included *Musume Dôjôji*, *Kanadehon Chûshingura*, and *Takatsuki* (*The Takatsuki Tray*). Program C was not staged in Los Angeles and San Francisco (Shochiku 24). The production tried to keep the plays as original as possible, with the intention of showing authentic kabuki to American audiences. That was the primary intention of the American leaders when they started planning to bring kabuki to the United States after the Occupation. Ôtani Takejirô told the actors that “All you need to do in America is act Kabuki as in Japan” (Shochiku xxv).

Finally, Americans could learn the difference between kabuki and Azuma Company's performance.

The name "Grand Kabuki" was created on this tour (Shochiku 24). It was inspired by the English term, Grand Opera and coined with the Japanese term used by Shochiku: "Ô Kabuki" (Leiter, "Kabuki at the Crossroads Years of Crisis" 394). "Ô" means "big" or "large" in Japanese.

Even though the plan was well prepared, bringing authentic kabuki to foreign countries was very hard. Japanese traditional performing arts have unique stage settings, which are different from the Western theater, so it is difficult to transfer kabuki to a different place. Kabuki needs unique stage devices such as *hanamichi* (runway) and *mawari-butai* (revolving stage) (Kawatake, *Kabuki* 33–74). Therefore, the troupe has to transport these settings from Japan every time they perform in foreign countries, which costs exorbitant sums. Props also have to be transported. For example, silk curtains for the stage were shipped from Japan, divided into 73,000 small sheets. The assembly curtain measured 24 by 60 feet, and took a weaving company in Kyoto six weeks to make ("That Glitter in Cartain for Kabuki Is Gold Foil"). The difficulties of the transportation have not seemed to change very much until now. I will compare the situation with recent

tours in the fourth chapter.

Also, the troupe found working abroad with Americans different from working in Japan both in positive and negative ways. Managing director Nagayama reflected how businesslike the American theatre system was. American workers worked only during their contracted hours. Moreover, Nagayama mentioned that there was a clear line of the division of work, while in Japan some jobs overlapped among several persons (Nagayama 92-93). Kawatake mentioned this was a great lesson learned on this trip and convinced him that a more rational system should be introduced to Japan. However, the difference sometimes hampered smooth technical procedures backstage. Especially, the regulations of the Japanese stagehands' crew conflicted with the American crew and its union regulations. For instance, the kabuki curtain must be opened from stage left to stage right by a trained Japanese stagehand who measures the time to the beating of wooden clappers. However, American stagehands needed cues like how many beats there are before opening the curtain. Even though they agreed that a Japanese stagehand would grab the curtain on the third beat, an American would pull it using a rope. Figuring this out caused a three hour delay in rehearsal (Leiter, "Kabuki at the Crossroads Years of Crisis" 397). This sort of difficulty continues even now, as we see in chapter Four.

Regarding the preparation for the event, before the tour enthusiastic kabuki experts wrote many articles and pamphlets educating American audiences and bolstering sales. An average of ninety percent ticket sales was made (Kawatake, “Tobei Kabuki Zaturoku” 23). Kawatake, the literary adviser, made a pamphlet about kabuki and sent it to people related to theaters through the Foreign Ministry of Japan beforehand (Kawatake, “Kabuki no tobei ni saishite” 32). Also the Japanese Consulate General in New York provided the pamphlet written in English (Kawatake, “Hikaku engekigaku” 130). Many publications continuing from the end of the Occupation contributed to enhancing audience knowledge. Kawatake also made questionnaires and conducted surveys for program A and B with the support from the Foreign Ministry of Japan and Tanaka Mitsuo, the Consul General in New York (Kawatake, “1960nen no tobeikabuki” 2). The total number of the collected questionnaires was 186. According to the survey, about 80% of the audience at the theater on the performance days had been interested in kabuki before they knew about the tour. Some viewers were familiar with the stories beforehand: *Kanadehon Chûshingura (The Treasury of Loyal Retainers)* (68), *Musume Dôjôji (The Girl at Dôjôji Temple)* (37), *Kanjinchô (The donation list)* (34), *Kagotsurube Sato no Eizame (Awaking from the Intoxication of the Pleasure Quarters)* (25), *Tsubosaka*

*Reigenki (The Miracle At Tsubosaka Temple)* (16), *Migawari Zazen (The Zen Substitute)* (16) in cumulative total. On the performance days, the theatre provided programs. Also, audience was able to purchase the special program about the details of the plays and a pamphlet with scripts in English for one dollar (Kawatake, "1960nen no tobeikabuki" 95).

A new technology helped the communication between the stage and audience. The audience could rent audio simultaneous translation receivers, called earphone guides, for one dollar (Leiter, "Kabuki at the Crossroads Years of Crisis" 397; Shochiku 24). This system was a wireless device, which provided the audience with a running commentary of the play in English and partial translation of the dialogue through earphones. The idea came from the simultaneous interpretation system provided in conference rooms of United Nations. For the tour in 1960, Matsushita Electric Company, currently known as Panasonic Corporation, developed the system and it was gifted by the Joseph Martinson Memorial Fund to New York's City Center in order for the theater to be able to use it for other future foreign-language attractions (Calta). Thanks to this development, the language barrier problem had improved compared to the previous non-real time methods such as having an interpreter stand at the side of the stage as had been done at the Azuma

Company show. However, the quality of the earphone guide was still low at this point. Sometimes it missed the timing and did not match the audio with the staging (Leiter, "Kabuki at the Crossroads Years of Crisis" 397). Also since this tour was the first time to introduce it, the procedure for the distribution of earphone guide receivers was not smooth, which caused a delay in the start of the performance (Kawatake, "tobei kabuki zatsuroku" 25).

Regarding the reviews, even though there were some critical opinions about the lack of consideration of the tastes of foreign audiences, the general audience appreciated kabuki well overall (Leiter, "Kabuki at the Crossroads Years of Crisis" 398). According to the Kawatake surveys, 96% of the audience said it was very good or good. The plays in order of popularity were *Chûshingura (The Treasury of Loyal Retainers)* (69), *Tsubosaka Reigenki (The Miracle At Tsubosaka Temple)* (49) *Kanjinchô (The donation list)* (37), *Kagotsurube Sato no Eizame (Awaking from the Intoxication of the Pleasure Quarters)* (24), *Kyôganoko musume Dôjôji (The Girl at Dôjôji Temple)* (22) and *Migawari Zazen (The Zen Substitute)* in cumulative total (16). Thornbury interprets the popularity of *Chûshingura (The Treasury of Loyal Retainers)* as a clear sign of the postwar improvement of the US- Japan relationship (Thornbury 60). The plays reflecting feudal

values that American authorities had suppressed during the Occupation were popular with the U.S. audiences. Donald Keene reported that Japanese critics were always concerned with what American audience would think about Japan when they saw feudal plays.

Sacrificing children or the beauty of suicide in a kabuki play were seen as separate from current Japanese culture. Contrary to Japanese anticipation, American audiences did not discredit the Japanese level of civilization. In other words, Americans did not think

Japanese today still lived by the same values as Japanese in the Edo Period (Thornbury

61) In fact, these human dramas were popular in other international tours based on

Kawatake's survey. With 6,575 questionnaires from previous 11 international tours he concluded in his book, titled *Kabuki*, that dramatic plays are more popular with foreign audience than dance pieces. Human drama is of universal interest to people, and

monotonous dance is not attractive to many audiences (Kawatake, *Kabuki* 1–29). This

was true during the 1960 tour and other big tours that will be discussed later. However,

current tours show that a dance performance can entertain American audiences, which

will be introduced in Chapter Five. For the question in the survey about the best aspects

of the plays, in the 1960 tour the audiences responded: acting (144), form/ beauty (88),

costume (72), color (47), setting (41), picturesque (33), plot (29), music (27), *onnagata*

(21), elocution (17), exoticism (13), lighting (10) in cumulative total (Kawatake, “1960nen no tobeikabuki” 95-96).

Regarding the conventions of kabuki, the audience accepted these too. About 92% of the audience could follow the progress of the plots. Approximately 96% felt that accompanying music was pleasant and in keeping with its purpose of creating appropriate moods of the plays. Also, as for the difference of the stage, 97% of the viewers thought that the *hanamichi* was an effective stage device. On top of that, the audience defined kabuki in various ways, drama (65), folk art (59), spectacle (38), others (33), opera (23), entertainment (17), dance (15), musical (10), operetta (7), and stage show (6) in cumulative total (Kawatake, “1960nen no tobeikabuki” 96-97). Kawatake determined that audience reception depended to some extent on the location. In New York, the audience was educated about seeing theater and appreciated the details of the plays, the viewers in Los Angeles sought the sort of entertainment elements they enjoyed in Hollywood or Las Vegas, and in San Francisco kabuki was treated as high culture since the troupes performed at Opera House (Kawatake, *Hikaku engekigaku* 132). Many celebrities also appreciated kabuki. Star actors like Kirk Douglas and Tony Randal came to see the rehearsals, and on the performance days, famous movie stars such as Greta



Garbo visited the backstage to praise kabuki and actors' skills. Well-known performers brought their autographed pictures as gifts (Leiter, "Kabuki at the Crossroads Years of Crisis" 396).

Kawatake concluded that three big steps in kabuki international touring history were achieved thanks to this U.S. tour: Kabuki was seen by normal Americans, authentic kabuki was performed in the U.S.A for the first time, and Americans showed respect for kabuki as a traditional art form. After the 1960 tour, authentic kabuki has continued to be introduced frequently to American audiences, affording them opportunities to understand Japan's culture through kabuki (Kawatake, "tobei kabuki zatsuroku" 23). The cultural exchange between the United States and Japan has continued to foster better relations. Japan's presence increased as it became America's most important trading partner (Thornbury 68). According to Kawatake, the experimental international tours peaked in the mid-1980s during Japan's economic boom (Kawatake, "Zoku Zoku Hikaku engekigaku" 287-289) Between 1964 and 1984, there were nine kabuki tours, visiting coastal U.S. cities and Hawaii (Shochiku 415-419). The troupe touring in 1982 was invited to the White House (Shochiku 167).

Finally, the U.S. tour in 1985 was when Kawatake realized that kabuki

performances overseas had established its position as one of the world's great artistic forms. Appreciation abroad had changed from experiencing an exotic, unique, and beautiful art to appreciating recognized plays reflecting Japanese intelligence and culture (Kawatake, "Zoku Zoku Hikaku engekigaku" 267-268). Thornbury supports his stance saying that in the 1985 tour, the standard preview article was no longer necessary to introduce what kabuki is. This tour was the biggest troupe ever organized in kabuki's international touring history with a total number of 94 people and a name-taking ceremony took place for the first time outside of Japan (Thornbury 71).

### **3-2-3. The Twelve Cities Tour in 1990**

After the 1985 tour, One Reel, an American event producing company based in Seattle, organized 1986 and 1988 kabuki tours in the U.S.—the West Coast and Hawaii. The company is a non-profit organization which produces international and domestic shows and festivals, kabuki and many other Japanese cultural events. Their goal is cultural exchange based entertainment and education. The president, Norm Langill, wanted to bring kabuki to other cities where kabuki troupe had never been. Until then, kabuki troupes went to major theater cities such as New York, or cities with Japanese communities like Los Angeles, Seattle and Hawaii, but not other areas. At the same time,

when Norm Langill watched Japanese drama, he thought the leading actor of the drama and also a kabuki actor, Nakamura Kichiemon, was very charismatic. Therefore, Norm Langill met Mogi Chikashi, the international tour coordinating manager at Shochiku, and proposed a tour going to many untapped places in the U.S. specifically with Kichiemon as a leading actor. One Reel already had built a relationship with Shochiku from the previous tours and Mogi trusted him and agreed with his idea (Langill).

After a kabuki troupe came to the U.S. in 1989, the third One Reel produced tour visited 12 cities across the U.S.A. in June to July in 1990, including many cities in the heartland. Ten out of twelve cities saw kabuki for the first time in this tour; Columbus, Ohio, San Antonio, Texas, Atlanta, Georgia, Indianapolis, Indiana, Iowa City, Iowa, Lincoln, Nebraska, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Costa mesa, California, Berkeley in California, and Portland, Oregon. This tour covered the widest range of cities in the U.S. in Shochiku history. The members of the troupe amounted to a total of 74 people: 15 actors, 18 musicians, and 41 staff (Shochiku 352).

In order to realize this plan, One Reel needed huge sponsorship no matter how many tickets they sold. At the time of the 1990 tour, Japanese construction and engineering company, Shimizu Corporation [Shimizu] was rebuilding the Kabuki-za in

Tokyo and became a sponsor for the event with support by Japan Foundation<sup>7</sup> (Shochiku 349). Regarding coordinating the event, One Reel selected the cities where Shimizu had projects in the U.S. and cities where One Reel had organized other Japanese cultural events before. One example of the cultural events that One Reel had organized previously was a Watanabe Misako one-woman make-up show, in 1987 (Langill). Since event producers needed to negotiate with local theaters, it was more reliable to organize the events in theaters or cities where producers already had connections.

Also since each theater in each city knows the local media the best, One Reel collaborated closely with local theaters and the media to promote the event. In cities where kabuki had never been, the audiences' prior knowledge about kabuki was thin and many advance educational activities and promotions helped audiences to prepare to enjoy the show. One Reel got the materials needed for promotion from Japan, and provided them to local presenters in the U.S. (Langill). In every city, One Reel also organized a big reception with the Mayor and employees at Shimizu in cities where Shimizu Company had a project. Kichiemon was happy to do local interviews, local television spots, and local receptions in every city. He dressed in *montsuki-hakama*, Japanese traditional

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<sup>7</sup> See p.118

formal wear, at every reception. Jane Langill, chief coordinator of the event and also the wife of the President of One Reel, believes that all the cast and the staff recognized that they were there in the U.S. because they were cultural ambassadors. That was how the troupe collaborated well and successfully carried out all the hard work in a tight schedule (Langill).

Jane Langill also reflected that she helped with many Japanese cultural events in the 1980s, writing subtitles and preparing the programs. According to her, there was a huge growth of interest in Japan, and by then kabuki was known as a performing art on the same level as Royal Shakespeare or Bolshoi Ballet. However, back in 1990, kabuki was still something new to see for people in most cities in the U.S. (Langill) People wanted to see authentic kabuki, so everything in the performance was authentic and traditional rather than resembling Broadway or Las Vegas shows. One Reel consulted with Shochiku to decide the contents of the program, striving for authentic, classical plays that would best showcase the leading actors on the tour. They agreed that Kichiemon's *aragoto*, bravura style, would excite audiences. Sawamura Sôjûrô was a master of humorous and amorous male characters. So the program consisted of Kichiemon starring in *Narukami (Saint Narukami)*, and Sôjûrô in *Migawari zazen (The*

*Zen Substitute*), The Los Angeles producer at the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center wanted different plays and they negotiated directly with Shochiku. The same cast performed *Osome Hisamatsu Ukina no Yomiuri* (*The Scandalous Love of Osome and Hisamatsu*), and *Kanjinchô* (*The Subscription List*) in Los Angeles (Shochiku 353).

This tour also used earphone guide, English translation receivers with earbuds, and almost everyone rented them. When the company rented them to the audience, the company kept their credit card or asked for a deposit to make sure the audience took the receivers back. In 1990, the company had to check the radio waves in every theater because sometimes the device did not receive the waves well, resulting in noisy static. The technology still needed improvement, but it was very helpful for the audience to understand what was going on stage without interfering with the viewing experience (Langill). Freddie Brinster, a journalist, mentioned “without earphone guide, the performance was 90 percent strangeness and 10 percent meaning; with the guides it is the reverse” (Shochiku 357). In educational sessions or receptions, an interpreter translated for the company (Shochiku 357).

The reviews were good. Sylvie Drake, *Las Angeles Times*, wrote “the

extraordinary aspect of kabuki performance is its astonishing combination of elements and skills. Nothing more serendipitously addresses the dreamer and faker in us all” (Shochiku 360). Also, Phil Hunt, *The Oregonian*, the local major newspaper in Portland Oregon, says, “The sellout crowd at Portland Civic Auditorium appeared to like what they saw. The 2 1/2 -hour performance was eminently theatrical, the costumes elaborate and varying from subtle to brilliant in color, the makeup extreme, the acting broad and stylized, the music exotic, the plots relatively simple, the stories mildly humorous” (Hunt). The beauty of kabuki could entertain people all over the U.S.A.

The estate and stock market bubbles in Japan in late 1980s and the early 1990s helped to realize these big tours overseas. The downturns of the U.S. market and the bursting of the Japanese real estate & banking “bubble” were factors that prevented Grand Kabuki tours returning to the USA until 1993, and the frequency of tours decreased considerably (Thornbury 73). After the 1990 tour, there were only two tours in the U.S.A in 1993 and 1996 before the next century arrived.

## **Conclusion**

After Japan lost the war, thanks to the efforts of Shochiku and its supporters, and

American censors, kabuki did not die. Moreover, Americans who saw kabuki in Japan during the occupation were the leaders in bringing kabuki to the U.S. finally for the first time in 1960. The real estate and stock market bubbles in Japan in late 1980s and the early 1990s helped kabuki to keep touring abroad. These numerous performances abroad helped deepen understanding and knowledge about kabuki among American audiences. The slowdown of the U.S. market and the bursting of the Japanese banking and real estate bubbles decreased the frequency of kabuki tours in the U.S. toward the end of the century.

As examples of U.S. kabuki touring in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, let us compare the 1960 tour and the 1990 tour. Both tours served basically as cultural events, but costs were covered differently. The 1960 tour was realized because elite intellectual American kabuki supporters wanted to introduce a new exotic art form to the U.S. Even though the extraordinary costs prevented a kabuki tour from being realized for a long time, diplomatic factors generated by the Cold War pushed forward the tour plan and resulted in both governments' supporting the project financially. In the 1990 tour, the president of an American producing company wanted to bring kabuki to cities which had never seen kabuki before. The tour was sponsored mainly by Japanese private companies. Around



1980s, the Japanese economic bubble made it possible for private companies to raise funds, and kabuki became a feasible event for them to produce. The cost was still huge at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the number of the leading actors going in a troupe and the number of the programs decreased.

Moreover, both events were intended to show authentic kabuki to general audiences. Authenticity was the most important element in program selection in order to introduce kabuki to general audiences who had never seen kabuki. Also, the use of technology for communication started for the first time in the 1960 tour and was also used in 1990 in order to overcome the language barrier. However, the system still needed the improvement even in 1990.

Big differences are apparent in pre-war and post-war kabuki abroad. Regarding event planning, the 1928 tour and the war-time tours abroad were controlled by national governments for the national interest, while the 1960 tour and 1990 tour were cultural events strongly influenced by non-government organizers such as intellectuals and private companies. Without the financial support from the government, private companies devised ways to manage international kabuki tours financially, using various forms of fund-raising. The different purposes of the tours before and after the war required

different performance programs. The post-war programs were selected to present an authentic form of kabuki, not messages that the governments wanted to deliver through kabuki as in the pre-war era. The era of government driven kabuki tours was over for good. A new era of major corporations and non-profit culture organizations in partnership, with occasional government support, would create kabuki tours in the USA in the post 9/11 era.

## **Chapter Four - Large Scale Kabuki Tours in the USA - the 21st Century**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, three major companies came to the U.S. six times in total: Heisei Nakamura-za in 2004, 2007, and 2014, Chikamatsu-za in 2005, and the Las Vegas performances in 2015 and 2016. These large-scale tours required over seventy participants like the tours I discussed in the previous chapter. For example, Chikamatsu-za in the U.S. tour consisted of 22 actors, 20 musicians and 31 staff. This chapter will investigate respective unique attributes of three large scale kabuki tours to the USA this century.

### **4-1. The Heisei Nakamura-za tours**

#### **4-1-1. Heisei Nakamura-za and Nakamura Kankurô V**

Nakamura Kankurô V (later Kanzaburô XVIII) was the most talented actor of his generation. His collaboration with two modern playwrights, Kushida Kazuyoshi and Noda Hideki inspired Kankurô to redefine his own style of kabuki (Ôshima 134). He strove to distance his kabuki from elite status and move closer to the common people (Ôshima 135). In order to realize this goal, Kankurô founded Heisei Nakamura-za [troupe] in 2000. The company ordered the construction of a unique theater space, a

movable theater-tent partially reminiscent of an Edo theater building in which actors and audience had a close connection. The movable Heisei Nakamura-za tent has toured in Japan and overseas (Ôshima 134). After Kanzaburô XVIII died in 2012, the leadership of Nakamura-za was passed to his two sons, Kankurô VI (1981-) and Shichinosuke II (1983-) (Ôshima 135).

#### **4-1-2. Heisei Nakamura-za and Lincoln Center**

The plan for building the Lincoln Center for Performing Arts [Lincoln Center] in the Upper West Side of Manhattan of New York, began in 1955 (Lincoln Center). John D. Rockefeller III, who led this project envisioned the Center in part as a showcase for the performing arts of Asia (Thornbury 145). As an adviser to cold-war-era American policy makers, Rockefeller believed that the development of cultural relations with Japan would be a national priority and the arts, and artistic exchange would help to foster international understanding (Thornbury 77). The visits by the Azuma Kabuki Dancers and Musicians in 1955 and 1956 attested to New York's status at that time as cultural-exchange leader and destination for performing artists from around the world. However, kabuki did not have good local performing arts facilities in the city in the 1950s (Thornbury 145). Howard Taubman, a music and theatre critic, mentioned, in the *New York Times* in 1956,

“[v]isiting troupes from abroad, such as the Sadler’s Wells Ballet and the Kabuki Theatre, should have a fitting place for their New York appearance” and supported the construction of the Center (Taubman).

The Center finally opened in the mid-1960s one building after another, and contained major arts organizations and their associated theaters and concert halls such as the Metropolitan Opera which opened in 1966 (Lincoln Center). In the early 1960s, Rockefeller was president of Lincoln Center, and simultaneously served as chairman of the board of his family’s philanthropic Rockefeller Foundation, president of Japan Society<sup>6</sup>, and chairman of Asia Society. Because of these leadership positions, the press treated him as an expert on Asia (Thornbury 82). Even after the Lincoln Center was built, kabuki troupes in their New York tours, performed at other theaters such as City Center in 1960 and 1969, and at Beacon Theater in 1977 and 1979. Finally, about twenty years after the Lincoln Center opened, a kabuki troupe performed at the Metropolitan Opera House [MET] (in Lincoln Center) in New York in 1982 for the first time. This tour celebrated the seventy-fifth anniversary of Japan Society which has helped to build strong relations between the US and Japan with its cultural exchanges. The MET was used again in 1985 and 1989 for kabuki tours (Shochiku 211, 324).

Now, Lincoln Center describes itself as the “world’s leading presenter of superb artistic programming, national leader in arts and education and community relations, and manager of the Lincoln Center campus” (Lincoln Center). One of the ways to serve these roles was the Lincoln Center Festival where Heisei Nakamura-za performed three times.

#### **4-1-3. Heisei Nakamura-za and the Lincoln Center Festival in 2004, 2007, and 2014**

The Lincoln Center Festival was a new annual summer festival launched by the Lincoln Center starting in 1996 (Thornbury 146). The festival was designed as a different entity from other normal programming in Lincoln Center such as opera or ballet.

Specifically, for the festival management, Nigel Redden had been assigned to the Lincoln Center festival directorship from 1998 to 2017 (Cooper; Thornbury 146). The festival was intended to find ways to use Lincoln Center fully during the summer, off season of the theater, and to foster collaboration among Lincoln Center’s resident companies (Kozinn). Redden’s goal for this Festival was to provide a platform for non-Western art forms since the regular season was dominated by Western forms at the Lincoln Center (Cooper). Accordingly, many Japan-related events including kabuki took place featuring famous directors and companies over the next twenty years. Kabuki tours with Heisei Nakamura-za were invited three times in 2004, 2007 and 2014.

First, in 2004, Heisei Nakamura-za was invited to the Lincoln Center Festival for the first time, which was also the first international tour for the troupe. The Nakamura-za's presentation in a tent in Japan attracted notice by the Center which wanted to bring it to New York. The tent theater's uniqueness sparked Redden's interest in presenting this particular non-western drama (Nakano 2018).

In order to realize this event, Shochiku created a Heisei Nakamura-za planning committee to raise the necessary funds in Japan. At the same time, the Lincoln Center raised money for the theater fees, accommodations and other expenses. Shochiku and Lincoln Center combined their revenues and produced the event (Nakano 2018).

The entire kabuki tent-theater was transported from Japan and was erected on the grounds of Damrosch Park, inside the Lincoln Center campus (Thornbury 154). The tent theater was a big attraction for PR materials. The Festival promoted kabuki as a part of its total Festival PR campaign. Shochiku suggested that the Festival introduce kabuki as a traditional theater that is still popular among younger generations of Japanese (Nakano 2017). Along with promotional advertising, often an educational campaign such as a pre performance-lecture or workshop plays an important role to develop and educate audiences beforehand. This was important for the Chikamatsu-za tour on the West Coast

in 2005 which will be analyzed in the next section. Unfortunately, in the case of the Lincoln Center Festival, the schedule was tight and there was no time for pre-promotion programming even though Shochiku was willing to do an educational campaign to deepen the understandings of the audience and the New York community (Nakano 2018).

When it came to program selection, the organizers had to think carefully about the runtime, just as organizers had to do for all the other overseas performances in the past. On Broadway, the hours of performance are determined to be two hours to two hours and forty-five minutes long while kabuki is three and half to four hours long including two intermissions. Also, kabuki theaters usually show the performances two times a day in Japan. They run from 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM for the day performance and 4:30 PM to 8:00/8:30 PM for the evening performance. The runtime on Broadway averages 60% of the original play in Kabuki-za. This difference has not changed since the first U.S. tour in New York in 1960. Considering this shorter runtime, the troupe generally did not select a long play such as *Kanadehon Chûshingura (The Treasury of Loyal Retainers)*. If *Chûshingura* was put into the Broadway hours, it would become a fragmented patchwork, and the audience would not be able to follow the story easily (Nakano 2017).

In 2004, the run-time was also two hours and twenty minutes including twenty



minutes for intermission. The program included a full-length play, *Natsumatsuri naniwa kagami* (*Summer Festival: Mirror of Osaka*) in New York. In the same tour, the troupe visited Boston and Washington D.C with *Bôshibari* (*Tied to a Pole*) and *Renjishi* (*Two Lions*) presented in those two cities. With the aim of the innovative kabuki, which was a goal of the Heisei Nakamura-za, Kushida, the Japanese director, joined the New York production in 2004, while usually kabuki troupes do not hire directors. Kushida is one of the playwrights that led Kankurô to establish the Nakamura-za and he was expected to help make the play more entertaining for the American audience (Ikushima 112).

The direction by Kushida and Kanzaburô created local flavor for *Summer Festival* using four special performance elements for the New York shows. First, Kankurô V had actors walking in the aisles before the show, interacting with the audiences, and during the play, they performed in aisles in some scenes. Even though kabuki actors in other troupes rarely do this in Japan, this interaction got the audience intimately involved and met the aims of the Nakamura-za (Nakano 2017). Second, a kimono fashion show took place before the play to liven up the performance (Ikushima 115). Third, some stage hands were American staff who did not know how to handle some Japanese style props such as the furnishings in Japanese style houses. American stage assistants pretended to

disturb kabuki actors' movements when they manipulated the props on stage (Ikushima 114). Kabuki has often uses metadrama for comic effect in Japan, but this was the first time that stage hands "interfered" with actors to create humor. Fourth, the play included a murder in a swamp with real mud and water, and a chase scene across the rooftops. Near the end, twenty or more men and women actors in the uniforms of the New York City Police Department [NYPD], entered the production (Nakano 2018) and joined the chase. At the climax they removed the back wall of the tent to reveal the back lot behind the theater – a contemporary New York scene (Kominz). In the Edo Period, there were also policemen in cities who chased criminals, which is the same situation as now. This was one way Kanzaburô connected modern New York to Edo Period Osaka, and also the actors on stage and the audience.

When the troupe arrived in New York, they realized that organizing kabuki tours overseas had many difficulties. First, the ventilation fans built inside of the tent made too much noise, which would drown out the actors' voices. American theater usually uses microphones, while kabuki actors speak to the audience without amplification and the American staff had not paid much attention to the noise. The difference of the theater cultures caused these sorts of problems. Putting lids on exhaust ports fixed this particular

problem in the end. Second, the regulations of the labor union forbade American staff from working after 10:00 PM, so the kabuki company was told it might have to cut rehearsals short (Ikushima 114). These difficulties have not changed since the first U.S. tour in 1960, discussed in chapter Three.

In order to overcome the language barrier, earphone guide receivers were provided to the audience. However, the service was criticized because of the low quality of the English material (Thornbury 172). Only an English synopsis of the action was transmitted over the earphone system during the presentation according to Ben Brantley co-chief theater critic of *The New York Times* (Brantley).

The plays were well received and the reviews were positive. Ben Brantley applauded the production with the comment “provid[ing] thrills that *Spider-Man 2* can’t deliver” (Brantley). All the tickets of the tours were sold out (Komatsu 15). Also, American audiences enjoyed the tent theater, but also found the low seats excruciating for the most part (Louie).

After Kankurô V changed his name to Kanzaburô XVIII in 2005, the Nakamura-za returned to NY in 2007 at the invitation of the Lincoln Center Festival (Nakano 2018). Kushida joined the production again. Because of the uncomfortableness of the seats in the

tent theater, the Avery Fisher Hall in Lincoln Center was used (Gurewitsch). By the time of the 2007 tour, the Lincoln Center Festival was inviting artists who had already appeared in previous events, giving their audiences the opportunity to explore visitor presenters' work more deeply (Thornbury 159).

Kanzaburô reflected that the previous tour showed that kabuki was as enjoyable as other contemporary performing arts as in New York. The PR in 2004 had conveyed this impression, and it was true. His next step was to present an authentic humorous *sewamono*, a play dealing with the lives of ordinary people in the Edo period, which was the first time to bring this sort of play overseas. He chose 'Hokaibô (*Hokaibô*)' for six days, and *Renjishi (Two Lions)* just on opening night. Kanzaburô knew that *Hokaibô* could be a special challenge to present. Since *sewamono* is dialogue drama and most plays in New York are also dialogue dramas, *Hokaibô* would not be as exotic and different as a spectacular dance like *Two Lions* (Komatsu 16). Kanzaburô set his goal high and determined to try to speak one third of his monologue lines in English. His idea of using English came from his desire to compete on a level playing field on Broadway, to get even better reviews than in 2004 (Komatsu 16). During his visit to New York before the show, he worked to improve his pronunciation of English with an American

actor and an American producer. In Japan also, for the preceding five months Kanzaburô practiced English with an English teacher at home and even in the Green Room between performances (Ikushima 120).

Regarding the theater, the interior was modified to include a *hanamichi* runway, and *zashikiseki*, box seats. Paper lanterns (*chôchin*) were hung inside of the theater to change the decor from a concert hall to Kabuki Theater (Ikushima 121). However, when the company arrived, the same problems occurred as in the 2004 tour. Even when the schedule of construction was delayed, the American staff took mandatory breaks and could not work after 10:00 PM due to the Union regulations. Also, the instructions were delivered by interpreters, and communication took twice as long as in Japan (Ikushima 121). The important climax scene could not be checked before opening day. These situations were different from the expectation of Japanese staff. During the preparation, the relationships between American staff and Japanese staff got worse (Ikushima 122). However, on the performance day, the kabuki actors' enthusiasm and the excitement from the audiences won over the American staff. After the first performance ended up with standing ovations and the multiple curtain calls, the theater allowed the troupe to use the theater in the way they wanted to (Ikushima 123).

Regarding earphone guide, taking into account the criticism in 2004, the 2007 tour hired a professional actor to provide a better translation for the earphone guide service (Thornbury 172). Concerning Kanzaburô's decision to speak English on stage, it turned out that five months of practice was not enough to give him confidence, but his English was good enough to make the audience laugh (Ikushima 123). This effect was not necessarily the sympathetic communication that Kanzaburô desired, but at least he amused audience (Thornbury 172). However, Thornbury pointed out that some lines delivered in English may have unintentionally highlighted the foreignness of the production's language and culture, and making it lose authenticity (Thornbury 173).

Charles Isherwood commented in *The New York Times* that Kanzaburô “embodies a spirit of terrible force as powerfully as he did a man of comically fleshly appetites, a feat of the actor's art that ultimately does inspire something close to awe.” [Kanzaburô and Kushida] “have obviously taken steps to bridge the cultural gap between contemporary American sensibilities and the aesthetics of an art form steeped in firm adherence to performing tradition” (Isherwood, "Guilty Pleasures of Comic Kabuki"). These comments illustrate how their work successfully delivered *sewamono*.

The sudden death of Nakamura Kanzaburô XVIII in 2012 brought his son,

Kankurô VI to the stage as the leading figure in Nakamura-za and he accepted the third invitation by the Lincoln Center Festival to perform in 2014, this time at the Rose Theater, Lincoln Center. In respect to fund-raising, Japanese government records show that the Agency for Cultural Affairs provided JPY 28,532,000 in 2014 under the rubric, Nurturing Upcoming Artists with Potentially Global Appeal (Agency for Cultural Affairs). The rest of the fundraising and the promotion was the same as for other Nakamura-za tours (Nakano 2018).

The program included *Kaidan chibusa no enoki* (*The Ghost Tale of the West Nurse Tree*), which Kanzaburô XVIII had decided to stage in the next New York tour before he died. Kankurô honored his departed father's wishes and made it happen" ("Heisei Nakamura-za NY Kouen ni Kassai"). The troupe endeavored to connect the threads of the plot carefully since the play was shortened because of the shorter runtime than Kabuki-za. The runtime for the 2014 tour was also two hours and 20 minutes including the intermission (Shochiku, "Heisei Nakamura-za nyuuyookukouen staato"). In the play, Kankurô changed costumes quickly (*hayagawari*), and played three different roles. The troupe created spectacular effects such as a fighting scene, *tachimawari*, in a waterfall using three tons of water, just as they did in Japan for the same scene. The

theater provided raincoats only for people sitting in the front rows beforehand, and actors communicated with the audience in front and made jokes, saying things like “protect the PRADA” (Isherwood, “Hovering Ghost, Plunging Water”).

In 2014, English was not spoken on stage in order to keep the play authentic, even though they said a few words of greeting or jokes in English to help the audience relax. In 2014 none of the leading actors had time to practice English before going to New York. Also they were concerned that the use of English might result in staging the play in a less professional way (New York Biz). So the actors all decided to perform kabuki in Japanese as they usually do in Japan. Earphone guide was provided and there was no big criticism this time.

During these three tours, taking place over a decade, Nakamura-za tried two ways to overcome the language barrier: earphone guide service and the combination of earphone guide and actors speaking in the local language. Each way had advantages and downsides and it seems that it has not been concluded yet about the best way to improve communication between the actors and the non-Japanese audiences overseas. However, after the experiments over three tours, Nakamura-za decided to perform in Japanese in order to keep the play authentic, and provide earphone guide service to help the audience



understand what was taking place on stage.

In the theatre review of the 2014 tour, Mr. Charles Isherwood of *The New York Times* wrote” the Heisei Nakamura-za Company [...] can almost be regarded as a festival in itself” (Isherwood, “Hovering Ghost, Plunging Water”). Even though Kankurô had to lead the production suddenly because of his father’s death, he continued his father’s tradition and the audience enjoyed his show as well. Nakamura-za gained its third success in New York.

#### **4-1-4. The continuing relationship between Heisei Nakamura-za and the Lincoln Center**

Relationships between the troupe and the venue play an important role in the success of kabuki performances abroad. Nakano says that other sub troupes also can build relationships like the Heisei Nakamura-za did with Lincoln Center. He cites two reasons. First, Shochiku and sub-troupes trust venues where kabuki has visited before because they have developed a working relationship with facilities and staff (Nakano 2018). Looking at other tours, the three most visited cities (New York, Los Angeles, and Washington D.C.) have venues that are easy for kabuki tours to use. Among the 22 performance tours (407 days/evenings of performance) in the U.S. from 1960 to 2014,

New York is the most frequently visited city. About 35% of all big scale performances have taken place in New York. Kabuki has been presented in Lincoln Center since 1982 (Nakano 2017). The second most visited city is Los Angeles where about 20% of the performances have occurred. Since the opening of Aratani Theater run by the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center in 1983, kabuki troupes have often performed at the Aratani Theater (Nakano 2017). The third most visited city is Washington D.C. where about 12% of the performances have taken place - a total of 7 tours (Nakano 2017). The kabuki productions have been always performed at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Even though most of these tours have been organized by Shochiku on a per-tour basis, the Heisei Nakamura-za tours I analyzed in this section are unique in that a Shochiku sub troupe, Heisei Nakamura-za, has negotiated directly with a specific venue, the Lincoln Center.

Second, after 2004, the stage director at Lincoln Center contracted the leading kabuki actor, Kanzaburô, with whom the director had worked already (Nakano 2018). Therefore, the relationship between the stage director at Lincoln Center and Kanzaburô played an important role in building a good relationship between the troupe and the theater. The good communication will most likely lead to subsequent kabuki

performances in the future. Another advantage of casting the same actor is that the leading actor can learn about future tasks from the previous tour and improve production arrangements. Kanzaburô made improvements after the 2004 show based on reviews and audience response. For example, the venue was changed from the tent to an actual theater providing more comfortable seating, and better earphone guide service was provided in 2007. The establishment of a direct connection between a specific kabuki company with its leading kabuki actor and a specific theater with a stage director could become a model for other existing and potential Shochiku sub-troupes for future productions. Nakano agreed with this, saying that it can be pursued by other troupes (Nakano 2018).

#### **4-1-5. Future performances in New York**

The Lincoln Center Festival ended in 2018, in order to merge other festivals in the Lincoln Center, creating a single festival. I do not know how this will affect the future of Heisei Nakamura-za tours to New York. However, Shochiku has a special feeling for New York and London which are mecca for the performing arts. Nakano said that he wants to bring kabuki to those two cities to compete with other world level performing arts. This is matter of pride for Shochiku (Nakano 2018). If the Lincoln Center invites the Heisei Nakamura-za again in the future for its regular season or other events, the

company could return and continue its relationship with the Center which already has been built.

As discussed above, Heisei Nakamura-za's production includes numerous innovations in terms of its devotion to audience interaction, but at the same time, the company strives for authentic Edo period kabuki when it creates an intimate actor-audience connection. In the next section, I will demonstrate another type of authentic kabuki which tries to reflect the original intention of the great Edo Period kabuki and bunraku (puppet theater) playwright, Chikamatsu Monzaemon and his insights into the human condition.

#### **4-2. The Chikamatsu-za tour to the West Coast in 2005**

##### **4-2-1. Chikamatsu-za and Sakata Tôjûrô**

Chikamatsu-za is a partially autonomous company organized in November 1981 by Nakamura Senjaku II. Senjaku took the name Nakamura Ganjirô III in 1990 and he has been a living national treasure of Japan by governmental declaration since 1994 (Nakamura 160). In 2005, Ganjiro became Sakata Tôjûrô IV. Tôjûrô IV has wanted to understand the drama of Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653-1724) more deeply because

Sakata Tôjûrô I (1647-1709) founded *kamigata-wagotogei* (romantic-realistic acting) through performing Chikamatsu's works. Tôjûrô IV's purpose at Chikamatsu-za is to learn the skills and approaches of the Tôjûrô I by the actual performance of Chikamatsu's works (Nakamura 160-164). Therefore, when he performs in Chikamatsu-za, Tôjûrô IV creates the play as true to the original texts as possible after researching the background and the scripts. With this purpose, Chikamatsu-za's style sticks to classical kabuki and Tôjûrô IV tries to show authentic kabuki to people both in Japan and overseas (Kawashima).

#### **4-2-2. The Chikamatsu-za performance in the USA**

Ganjirô III (currently Sakata Tôjûrô IV) was supposed to visit New York with Chikamatsu-za in 2001. However, the event was cancelled because of the 9.11 terrorist attacks, and, was reorganized as a small-scale tour in March 2002 (Kominz) that I will examine in detail in Chapter Five. Finally, Ganjirô III visited the U.S. with his full-sized troupe in 2005 with a total of over seventy personnel. They toured the West Coast of the U.S.: Seattle, Berkeley, and Los Angeles.

Because of the mission of the company, Chikamatsu-za troupe did not change its performance convention or texts to appeal to its foreign audiences. The program

included, *Sonezaki shinjû* (*Love Suicide at Sonezaki*), and *Bôshibari* (*Tied to a Pole*).

These were selected by Sakata Tôjûrô as artistic director, and Akira Kawashima, Tôjûrô's manager and the president of Arrow Promotion, a kabuki actors' managing company (Kawashima).

One Reel, the same promoter that presented the 1990 tour produced this 2005 tour. The kabuki performance was held as a part of the Boeing Dreamliner Arts Festival which celebrated and explored the contemporary and traditional art scenes in Asia and the United States. Even though the tour was part of a cultural exchange program, it was also intended as an introduction of Tôjûrô's name changing event<sup>8</sup> according to Jane Langill (Langill). When Kawashima was approaching One Reel to plan this event, One Reel told him that they needed some major sponsorship on the Japanese side in order to make the event work financially (Langill). Following this advice, Kawashima gained sponsorship from Japanese companies. At that time, a Boeing factory in Seattle was making the 787 airplane, a new model. All Nippon Airways [ANA], a major Japanese airline, was the first

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<sup>8</sup> Kabuki is a hereditary art. Kabuki stage names are also passed down from father to son through the generations. When an actor does not have a child, a nephew or especially talented adopted student may be given a senior name. The process of taking a new, higher-ranking name is called *shûmei*. *Shûmei* happens when the position is open, and an actor's age and talent are considered appropriate enough to move to the next name. The stage name tells you how far any particular actor progress in the line of the family. *Shûmei* involves in a ceremony of a formal stage announcement called a *kojo*. Usually a senior actor introduces a name changing actor to the audience (senda 64).

company to buy it and in the end ANA and Japan Airlines [JAL] purchased about one hundred of the 787 aircraft. Mitsubishi Heavy Industries [MHI], a Japanese engineering company, was making their wings. Toray Industries [TORAY], a Japanese textile industry company, was making the carbon for inside of the plane (Langill). From those companies, Kawashima collected JPY 80,000,000 (USD 706,682 in 2005) on the Japanese side (Kawashima). One Reel got Boeing and United to contribute to the event on the American side (Kawashima; Langill). Also with the support of Japan Foundation<sup>7</sup>, the event was realized financially (Langill).

One Reel promoted Chikamatsu-za along with many other festival events such as the Boeing factory visit (Langill). Even though One Reel believed that kabuki was well-known in the three west coast cities, the audience would see a much more subdued play this time. It would be *wagoto*, *Kamigata* or *Kansai* kabuki, which is long, sad, quiet and delicate. This is different from the *Kanto* kabuki performed in the 1990 tour, which was dynamic and masculine. Therefore, they planned a much bigger educational campaign to help the audience enjoy the show (Langill). For example, in Seattle, One Reel's home city, *The Seattle Times* ran four articles, one article a week, introducing Chikamatsu and kabuki to readers. The newspaper communicated with school teachers

and some of them used *The Seattle Times* materials to teach about the play's content.

Teachers could arrange discount tickets for students. In the newspaper articles, Laurence Kominz from Portland State University, explained the history of kabuki, different styles of kabuki and the details of *kansai* kabuki. After the fourth article came out, One Reel held a special event at the Seattle Asian Art Museum in Seattle (Langill). It was a lecture and demonstration about make-up and costumes with Sakata Tôjûrô and his company, Professor Paul Atkins, University of Washington, and Laurence Kominz. This was free to museum members, or with museum admission (Berson). Through these programs, One Reel tried to educate Seattle audiences and at the same time stimulate their interest and increase their number (Langill). On the performance day, an extensive program was also provided, including six pages of background and synopsis of plays and one page of a stage photo.

Japan Foundation and Waseda University took a survey during this tour.

According to their results, the audience came from various backgrounds in a wide range of ages, occupations, and races. Regarding gender, 60% of them were women. By way of comparison, 72% of the audience were women in the 2014's pre-sale tickets at Kabuki-za in Tokyo (Watanabe). Compared to the audience in Japan, more men came to see kabuki



in the U.S. For the audience's background, 22.0% of them were Japanese or Japanese American, while 52.9% answered as others. This demonstrated non-Japan related people also were interested in kabuki. About 22.4% of the audience had seen kabuki before. For both plays, more than 60% of the reviews were very good and more than 20% of them were good, which shows more than 80% of people appreciated the plays (Hattori 42-55).

Earphone guide service was used in this tour as well, which helped to communicate between the stage and the audience. According to the survey, 61.7% of the respondents thought it was helpful and 11.4% thought it was partially helpful. 2.1% thought it was not helpful. Some people who thought it was helpful, said that it was a good tool to understand Japanese. Others said that they enjoyed the commentary about the stage. It is interesting to note about half the native Japanese speakers in the audience said that the English earphone guide was helpful or partially helpful in Seattle. Based on this, the survey institutions concluded that earphone guide was useful in helping audiences with cultural understanding as well (Hattori 42-55). The earphone guide service was also helpful to improve the environment for actors to perform. Kawashima said that some kabuki actors don't like people moving during the performance to check the subtitles. Regarding the negative feedback, many people criticized the low quality of

the earphone's broadcasting. Overall, over 90% of people would like to see kabuki again (Hattori 42-55).

The primary purpose of the event and Chikamatsu-za's goal was to show authentic kabuki to the world, specifically Chikamatsu works. Tôjûrô IV also wanted to demonstrate acting style of Tôjûrô I. However, the background of Tôjûrô I, the founder of *kamigata-wagoto*, is very remote from the current environment even in Japan. Moreover, *wagoto* is not as exaggerated, and visually impactful as bravura, *aragoto*. Despite the complexity of characterization, American audiences understood *Love Suicide at Sonezaki* and even enjoyed this gentle and tragic story thanks to broad pre-educational campaign and audio commentary at the theater. As the event was carefully organized and authentically and skillfully performed, Chikamatsu-za's mission was achieved and the event was successful.

#### **4-3. The Las Vegas tours with Ichikawa Somegorô VII**

The most recent kabuki performances in the U.S. were a series of two tours in Las Vegas. The pre-event was an outside show in 2015 and the main event was in the MGM hotel theater in 2016. Both starred Ichikawa Somegorô VII (currently Matsumoto

Kôshirô X). The final decision to stage the main event was made after Shochiku saw the success in the pre-event (Nakano 2018; Suzuki). The performance troupe was created by Shochiku just for the Las Vegas shows, which was different from Heisei Nakamura-za and Chikamatsu-za. They already existed and had a decade or more of performance tradition.

Shochiku celebrated its 120th anniversary in 2015, which encouraged the company to look for new markets. To enlarge the domestic market, Shochiku launched new *shinsaku*-kabuki, which are plays created after WWII (Shochiku, “Las Vegas kabuki kouen”). Historically, from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s few original kabuki plays were written. From 1985 until the 2000s, one kind of new play, Super kabuki was written and performed, about once every two years (Kominz 245-248). From 2014 until today, lots of new plays are being written and performed. Two new sub-genres of these new plays include *Super Kabuki II*, from 2014 and *Chô Kabuki*, from 2015. These are both highly spectacular sub-genres of kabuki. I will introduce *Super Kabuki* and *Chô Kabuki* first and later demonstrate what aspects of these sub-genres were applied to the Las Vegas tours.

#### **4-3-1. *Shinsaku* kabuki - *Super Kabuki* and *Super Kabuki II***

*Super Kabuki* stages new plays rather than adapting old plays, and employs special stage effects using technology such as flying through the air over the audience. This style of kabuki was created by Ichikawa Enô II (former Ichikawa Ennosuke III), which started in 1986 with the play, *Yamato Takeru* (Ôshima 133). While some at first criticized *Super Kabuki* as cheapening kabuki, the popularity of the new direction and subsequent *Super Kabuki* plays earned Ennosuke III authority within the production structure of Shochiku, which now supports frequent *Super Kabuki* staging by Enô II's troupe (Ôshima 133). The term, *Super Kabuki*, can be used only when it is a play that Ichikawa Enô directed or performed in. After 2014, *Super Kabuki* was upgraded to *Super Kabuki II*, which was created by Enô's nephew, Ennosuke IV. Ennosuke IV started *Super Kabuki II* in March and April 2014 with *Sora wo kizamu mono* (*A Man who sculpts the Sky*) directed by Ennosuke IV and supervised by Ichikawa Enô II at the Shinbashi Enbujo, the home theater for *Super Kabuki* (Shochiku "Ennosuke hoka").

Ennosuke's second play of *Super Kabuki II* in 2015, *One Piece*, was very popular and has been produced in kabuki every year for four years at four different theaters in Japan (Japan Actors' Association, "kabuki kouen deetabesu"). *One Piece*, a comic book, is about friendship among pirates traveling together and has been published serially since

1997. In that year Bandô Minosuke, a kabuki actor, was eight years old, and Nakamura Hayato, a kabuki actor, was four years old (Shueisya “One Piece”). They are the same generation as the target audience. When Minosuke and Hayato decided to participate in the *One Piece* production, Minosuke made a demo tape with a guitar for the sound that he wanted for the stage, and requested Dozan Fujiwara, the composer for *One Piece*, to make this the theme song (Ôshima). Ôshima said that he thought Minosuke was confused about what the spirit of kabuki was before this production, but it seemed like Minosuke understood how he can express himself with kabuki through his work on the *One Piece* play. Ôshima believes that kabuki production should introduce new stories and performance styles, following with the trends of the times since the audience and performers live in the current world (Ôshima).

Other productions also apply the frame of *Super Kabuki* and *Super Kabuki II* to recent *shinsaku* kabuki, such as *Naruto*. A popular comic book called *Naruto* was first published in 1999. It was a serial publication that ended in 2015 (Shueisya, “NARUTO”). Both leading actors were familiar with the story, like *One Piece*. The show was also led by Bandô Minosuke II and Nakamura Hayato, and performed by Ichikawa Ennosuke IV and other actors in August 2018. *Naruto* demonstrates friendship and also parent-child

love among ninja. Shochiku will present *Naruto* again in June 2019 in newly rebuilt Kyoto Minami-za (Shochiku, “NARUTO”).

*One Piece* and *Naruto* were both based on popular comic book series, published in over 40 different countries. *Super Kabuki* plays based on them are key productions in generating new young audiences’ interest in kabuki. The productions not only used spectacular cutting-edge technology but were also storytelling plays with themes of friendship and love. Shochiku successfully attracted new younger audiences using the appeal of manga.

#### **4-3-2. *Shinsaku kabuki* – *Chô Kabuki***

There is another new sub-genre, called *Chô Kabuki* that began in 2016. This kabuki also presents new plays and uses new technology, but specifically collaborates with Hatsune Miku, a virtual character or a *vocaloid*, a software making digital voices and using projection mapping<sup>9</sup>. This production was realized by the support of Nippon Telegraph and Telephone (NTT), a telecommunication company. Their technology made it possible for a virtual character Hatsune Miku to be projected moving on stage and interact with a live kabuki actor (Usui, et al. 29). The leading kabuki actor, Nakamura

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<sup>9</sup> Projection mapping is a projection technology used to turn all sorts of objects into display surfaces for video projection.

Shidô II was chosen because he often appears in public in TV programs and movies, and young people are likely to know about him. Also, Shidô himself frequently said that it is important for kabuki in the future to show both traditional kabuki and *shinsaku* kabuki. He has experimented in various ways with new *shinsaku* kabuki (Yamazaki).

Behind the collaboration with NTT, Shochiku was developing new prospects around the same time NTT was looking for a partner with whom to collaborate, aiming at providing new experiences through their information and communication technology [ICT] (Usui, et al. 26). Also, the president of Dwango, a telecommunications and media company, was amazed with *Super Kabuki II, One Piece*. In November 2015, the president approached Noma Ippei, an executive officer of Shochiku, and offered to collaborate to make a new kabuki for an event called *Niconico Chôkaigi*<sup>10</sup> together. Around the end of the year in 2015, they decided to use Hatsune Miku, a virtual character created by the

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<sup>10</sup> *Niconico Chôkaigi* was operated by Dwango, is an annual festival to recreate the virtual world of *niconico*, Japan's largest social video website, in real life. *Niconico* is a User Generated Contents (UGC) video sharing and live-streaming service that enables viewers to post comments on-screen over a video and converse with each other. *Niconico*'s service began in 2006 and over 70 million users have registered to watch the contents. In *niconico chôkaigi*, visitors enjoy face-to-face communication, having attracted 150,000 visitors each year since 2012. The event offers a wide variety of contents from *niconico*, such as game, anime, music, cosplay and politics. Online viewers who are unable to attend the event can also participate and share the excitement by leaving comments on *niconico* Live Streaming.

software company Crypton Future Media, to make a new kabuki (Yamazaki).

The goals of each company were in synch. Shochiku and NTT had collaborated to make new kabuki shows using *kirari*, NTT's product. Also, Shochiku and Dwango, had started working together since 2013 (Yamazaki). Dwango and NTT also have been a business partnership since 2013 in the field of images and social network services. Then, NTT supported *Niconico Chôkaigi* which Shochiku joined in April 2016 and showed *Chô Kabuki* for the first time to the public with technical support by NTT. *Chô Kabuki* has been presented for three years in a row from 2016 to 2018 as part of the event, *Niconico Chôkaigi*. *Chô kabuki* will be performed in *Chôkaigi* again in April 2019 (Dwango, "2019"). The runtime for *Chô Kabuki* in *Niconico Chôkaigi* is about one hour long (Usui, et al. 29). A live audience could watch the kabuki show at Makuhari Messe, a convention center, for free with the admission to the larger *Niconico Chôkaigi* event in 2016. Only the audience for the arena seats needed to purchase a ticket in 2017, 2018. Also, the online viewers could watch the live performance online and enjoy leaving comments on screen and sharing with the other viewers at the same time. All three events were successful, and Shochiku attracted a younger generation of viewers, different from those who regularly watch kabuki at kabuki theaters (Dwango, "2016", "2017", "2018"). The



new viewers are fans of Hatsune Miku and *Niconico* channel. The *Niconico* viewers were interested in Hatsune Miku, but didn't know much about kabuki. Their lack of knowledge about kabuki was equivalent to foreigners. It is interesting to note that Kawatake writes that young Japanese and young foreigners share the same ignorance about kabuki (Kawatake, "Zoku Zoku Hikaku engekigaku" 356). If *Chô Kabuki* was attractive to Japanese young people who are not interested in kabuki, foreigners also would love it. The exciting presentation of *Chô Kabuki* is equally attractive to young Japanese and young foreigners.

#### **4-3-3. The Las Vegas tours with *shinsaku* kabuki**

Turning its attention to new markets abroad, Shochiku planned the Las Vegas tours making use of the innovative staging practices that were already successful in Japan in *Super Kabuki*, *Super Kabuki II* and *Chô Kabuki*. Also, at the same time MGM resort international [MGM] was investigating new markets abroad and looking at a law legalizing casino gambling in Japan. With this business opportunity, MGM requested Shochiku to produce a kabuki show in Japan after the law officially took effect. During these discussions, the notion of a kabuki performance at the MGM Grand Hotel came up (Kanematsu; Nakano 2018). Through this event, Shochiku aimed at localizing kabuki

overseas and establishing kabuki as one of the premiere theater genres abroad (Shochiku, “Kabuki wa tabisuru taishikan”). The target audience was people who were not interested or knowledgeable about kabuki (Hosoda).

In terms of the direction, Somegorô arranged it with the support of Onoe Kikunojô for both shows. Somegorô also wanted to sell kabuki in Las Vegas as an entertainment show rather than traditional kabuki (Suzuki). The plays were produced using a technological and stage spectacle template developed in Japan for Somegorô to emulate for his Las Vegas plays. The show used the latest technology and projection mapping. Even though the play used modern technology, Somegorô still tried to keep the beauty, colors, and freshness on stage from traditional kabuki (Suzuki). In fact, this combination of new and traditional elements in Somegorô’s play broke fresh ground as spectacular entertainment kabuki in Las Vegas.

This was the first time for Shochiku to send kabuki to Las Vegas. Somegorô says “it is the best entertainment destination in the world” (Suzuki). However, Nakano thought Las Vegas was a difficult destination and personally recognized this by saying the main goal of visitors coming to Las Vegas was still the casinos (Nakano 2017). Jane Langill, chief coordinator of One Reel, also said that ‘Las Vegas is a totally different place’ in

terms of audience, production logistics and culture. The audience for the performances is visitors from all over the world unlike New York where local people often go to theater for fun. It is hard for the hotel to promote efficiently or do educational campaigns because they cannot target the audience and the potential audience until only a few days before the performance. This is inevitable for Las Vegas shows. As for production goals, profiting from productions always matters more than the quality of the show according to Jane Langill. Langill agreed with Nakano that in Las Vegas tourists' primary entertainment is gambling at casinos (Langill). From the perspective of these characteristics of show business in Las Vegas, Las Vegas was not an ideal destination for kabuki shows.

Turning to tour production, the two different hosting hotels for each year are both owned by MGM. MGM's public relations agency helped to promote both events in Las Vegas. The PR agency posted fliers at the airport and provided a promotional video on the monitors in the tram running between the terminals at the airport. Additionally, SNS began to be used for promotion starting with this Las Vegas tour (Nakano 2018), and in Japan, Shochiku created promotion homepages for both tours so people all around the world could access information about the shows. This was important because the hotel

could not predict the audience and the number of performance days was few. Also, it was not possible for the hotel to know how much the audience knew about kabuki.

In the first year, as the pre-event, the troupe presented their shows at the Fountains of Bellagio, at the Bellagio Hotel. There were five performances in all. The kabuki tour was sponsored mainly by Panasonic, an electronics company, with its technical cooperation, and by D.A.G. Inc, a visual effects production company, and was subsidized by Visual Industry Promotion Organization, a non-profit organization supporting digital content industries (Shochiku, “Kabuki Spectacle”).

The program was *Koitsukami (Fight with a Carp)* and was about 20 minutes long in performance. This was the first time Shochiku kabuki wrote a new play to be performed abroad. Because it was difficult to reach the audience beforehand, the troupe sought to create programs for which advanced knowledge was unnecessary to enjoy the shows. Kabuki has had big fight scenes in a water on stage since the late Edo Period. The selling point of this show was spectacular entertainment that used digital devices such as projection mapping (Kanematsu). However, there were difficulties with this new technology, as the Las Vegas tour technicians learned to their dismay. The biggest difficulty was to match the timing for all of the images, music and the performances with

a live performance. Even though Team lab, a software and digital content industries company, exhibited projection mapping reflected on a water sheet in Japan, this was the first time both for the hotel and the engineers to use projection mapping to reflect the images on the fountain that was 300 meters wide (Shinohara). Seventeen projectors were required to cover the width which made it more difficult to adjust the resolution. These issues continued until the morning on the performance day with all the staff, Somegorô, Kikunojô, the projection mapping technicians, and Shochiku struggling to make it work together (Suzuki).

The show was open to the public for free and the troupe performed in the fountain in front of the hotel for both the audience coming to see the performance and for general passersby. Also there were people staying at the hotel around the fountain viewing from the windows of their rooms. However, it turned out that only the audience seated at the very center could see the projection mapping as it was intended to look. All the rest had seriously distorted views (Kanematsu). But this was the first time that kabuki was performed out of doors in big fountains. Shochiku was being very progressive and experimental in this production.

Planning a series of tours, with a free performance for the first year was a

strategic move, allowing the producers to observe the reaction of people in Las Vegas. This experiment was also to develop potential audiences for future performances and promote Japanese culture for the general public. Regarding the reviews, there is no accurate data about how many people saw the show and how they liked it. However, according to Shochiku's report for stockholders about 250 media reported the event, 100,000 people saw and enjoyed the show (Shochiku, "dai 150ki chuukanhoukokusyo"). In spite of the unclear resolution of the projection mapping, people liked it, which shows that people may not have paid very much attention to the story. Considering this experiment to be a success, the decision was made to stage another kabuki performance in the following year (Nakano 2018; Suzuki).

When the troupe came back to Las Vegas, in the next year, 2016, they performed at David Copperfield Theater, in the MGM Grand Hotel. The main sponsor was Panasonic, which also provided their technical cooperation. Other sponsors included D.A.G. Inc, SECOM, a security company, SEIKO, a watch company, and Hakkaisan, a Japanese *sake* company. In addition, six other organizations supported the production, with additional technical support provided by NTT. To publicize sponsors' technology and educate people about kabuki, monitors were set up in the lobby that introduced

Japanese culture. The monitors were provided by PANASONIC and NTT. Also, an application was created by Team lab Inc on which people could play an interactive game, also introducing Japanese culture. Moreover, in Japan, Shochiku also had a remote press conference with Somegorô from Las Vegas after the first performance of six in order to promote the latest telecommunication technology of NTT (Shochiku, “SHISHIO”).

In the second year, the troupe performed at an actual theater, but the show was limited to about 90 minutes long. The runtime was about half of the length of Broadway performances in New York, and about 40% normal performances at the Kabuki-za. Even though the Smith Center for the Performing Arts in Las Vegas offers Broadway productions which are approximately 150 minutes long, the same runtime as Broadway in NY, hotel theater in Las Vegas usually runs 90 minutes long. Shorter runtimes overseas have often forced kabuki productions abroad to cut parts of the plays, but especially in Las Vegas the show was very short (Nakano 2018). Nakano was concerned about the short runtime in Las Vegas.

With the runtime issue and Somegorô’s goal of providing spectacular entertainment, the production team wrote a new script that would suit Las Vegas practices and appeal to the local audience: *Shishio (Shishio: The Adventures of the Mythical Lion)*.

This idea was different from Chikamatsu-za's West Coast tour which presented an authentic Edo Period play.

In order to make a visually appealing show, NTT collaborated and also sponsored the event. Because of NTT's connection with NAKED Inc. [NAKED], a software and digital content industries company, the company providing a projection mapping was different from the first year (Nakano 2018). In the second year, NAKED also struggled with the set-up of projection mapping just as had happened in the first year. In fact, the images were reflected on the wall of the theater in the second year, which was easier than reflecting on the moving water of the Fountains. The projection mapping worked well after all (Nakano 2018).

In his kabuki show Somegoro performed shticks familiar to the audience in Las Vegas. He did *the Moonwalk* (originated by Michael Jackson, a famous singer) and even imitated Marilyn Monroe using a portrait mask (NHK BS premium). These performances were intended to make connections with the audience, and Somegorô referred to current events as kabuki sometimes does in Japan as well. Moreover, the theater provided a *hanamachi* parallel to the stage--it is normally perpendicular. This was unusual, but was the most effective arrangement for that theater (Suzuki). Also, *Shishio* used water, fire,



*Chûnori* (flying through the air), and *hayagawari* (quick costume changes). In his *Chûnori* performances, Somegorou was suspended in the air for three minutes and audience was thrilled (NHK BS premium). Furthermore, there were many traditional elements included in this show. For example, Somegorô concluded the play with a three person, six minute long, *shishi* dance, wearing long-haired lion wigs (NHK BS premium).

From the language perspective, in Las Vegas, kabuki actors sometimes provided oral commentary, dialogue, and songs in English in the middle of the performance. English dialogue and lyrics totaled about seven minutes (8.7% of the total duration). The performance included a total of 19 minutes of Japanese dialogue and 13 minutes of narrative songs in Japanese by musicians. There were two minutes of bilingual dialogue. Roughly speaking, the performance included in total of 39.5% of Japanese only, 8.7% of English only, 2.2% of bilingual dialogue and about 50% of dance or *tachimawari* performances (NHK BS premium). Thus, the production created a visually appealing play and a less detailed plot. This is very different from *sewamono* plays, full of dialogue, that were presented in 2005 by Chikamatsu-za and in 2007 in New York.

Earphone guide service was not provided, but the audience understood and enjoyed the show without prior knowledge. 90% of the kabuki tickets were sold and

70,000 people visited the cultural event in the lobby of the hotel (Shinohara; Shochiku, “dai 151ki chuukanhoukokusyo”). Nakano did not say that the performance as a whole was successful because in recent tours in the USA Shochiku has experienced pre-show sellouts.

#### **4-3-4. The potential of high-tech *shinsaku* kabuki overseas**

A shared challenge for large scale kabuki tours abroad is transporting properties such as machinery and stage sets. Even in domestic tours, the traditional programs are more portable than new programs similar to *Super Kabuki* and *Super Kabuki II* according to Nakano (Nakano 2017). Traditional plays are easier to transport because they travel frequently within Japan and have fewer items to carry. On the other hand, new plays similar to *Super Kabuki* and *Super Kabuki II* have many new props and technological equipment that need more time to prepare. Usually it takes three days to prepare touring kabuki productions, but as for the new plays, it takes a week. In international tours, about two months before, the troupe has to ship all the equipment and the props to the theater abroad, which makes the schedule tight. Because of these reasons, Nakano said that “actual *Super Kabuki* plays cannot be performed abroad” (Nakano 2017). On the other hand, a projection mapping needs fewer physical props, so it is suitable technology for

international kabuki tours. Of course kabuki still needs props and stage sets for performances. Also if the production was created with only projection mapping, it would need much time to set up projectors and adjust the resolution at the theater. However, if the play partially takes in the modern technology, this would be an interesting direction and Shochiku is interested in making that sort of play (Nakano 2018). The Las Vegas tour was a good opportunity for Shochiku to try new technology abroad, make projection mapping spectacle kabuki a reality and see how it works overseas.

Somegorô said that “[the style used in the Las Vegas tours] has a potential to be one sub-genre [within *shinsaku*-kabuki]” (Suzuki). Somegorô is right. Projection mapping kabuki is already becoming sub-genre in Japan as well as abroad. Kabuki might not come back to Las Vegas because of the characteristics of the city, discussed above, but kabuki with modern technology will keep going abroad. Looking toward future performances, Shochiku and NTT decided to keep collaborating on *Chô Kabuki* and will stage it again in August 2019 with the support by Dwango for Hatsune Miku, the leading virtual actor, and with the technical support by NTT (Shochiku, “minamiza kaijô kinen”). Hatsune Miku is now in the world market and individual tours overseas have taken place. *Chô Kabuki* is scheduled to present during the next three years, from 2019 to 2021, at

Kyoto's Minami-za (Usui, et al. 30). It is one of the theaters owned by Shochiku, and was renovated and reopened in November 2018. They are thinking to develop *Chô Kabuki*, and to present in other theaters sequentially. There is also the potential for bringing it abroad in the future. In fact, in 2017, Nakano visited Paris with a representative from Dwango to look for a theater where *Chô Kabuki* could perform (Nakano 2017).

With the development of high-tech kabuki in *Super kabuki II* and *Chô kabuki*, Shochiku discovered a successful approach to attracting new young audiences in Japan. Somegorô and his company modified this new performance style for kabuki specifically to suit performance practices in a unique location abroad -Las Vegas. Moreover, in the inbound tourism market, Shochiku is planning to present kabuki plays with a shorter runtime and thinking to show Las Vegas style kabuki plays at amusement facilities in order to attract visitors coming from outside of Japan (Sugimoto).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter investigates large scale tours in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The tours were very different from one another in purposes, audience development, programs, audience expectations, languages, allowable runtime, and the relationship building between parties

involved. Depending on key factors, directors and event managers had to consider very different issues.

Compared to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there are several new developments in large scale kabuki tours this century. First, kabuki was performed at wider range of venues, such as tent theater, fountains, a hotel theater. Second, wider ranging plays were performed such as humorous, domestic plays, supernatural plays, and newly written plays. Third, much more sophisticated effects were presented on stage like projection mapping. Fourth, multiple performances over several years were presented by the same US producers. The One Reel collaboration is an example of a long-term relationship between a local producers and Shochiku. Fifth, sub-troupe management of tours developed, such as Heisei Nakamura-za and Chikamatsu-za. Moreover, the sub-troupe or its leading actor built a direct relationship with the local producer. Sixth, wider range of audience education can be offered depending on the audiences' knowledge and the performance goals. Seventh, multiple language communication strategies were tested, including earphone guide, speaking English on stage, and visual plays with no explanations.

There are two new trends found in kabuki tours in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. One is new promotional media including social networking. The other is producer partnering with

tech corporations. Shochiku continues to rely on local producers for PR since a big tour needs broad media coverage and attention in newspapers, radio, and TV. On top of those “old media”, SNS became a major tool to promote events starting with the Las Vegas tour. This allows Shochiku to deliver their messages from Japan to the whole world. Furthermore, in the new age of high-tech spectacle, collaboration with tech companies such as Dwango, Panasonic, Team Lab, and NTT is essential.

Each tour was designed or organized differently, but most were successful except for the problematic location selection of Las Vegas. It seems clear that carefully chosen and well-prepared authentic kabuki as well as experimental, spectacular high-tech original kabuki can succeed in the U.S.

In the next chapter, I will look into small scale kabuki events to see other trends that developed in the current century that moved kabuki productions abroad in new directions.

## Chapter Five – Small Kabuki Presentations - Portland in the 21st Century

In addition to large scale kabuki tours, there were small kabuki presentations coordinated by Shochiku. A variety of presentations were offered such as dance performances, make-up demonstrations, and costume exhibitions. The features of these small kabuki events will help to show new directions in kabuki related events overseas in this century.

Shochiku worked with local presenters to realize several small kabuki events in the recent past, especially in New York, on the West Coast, and in Hawaii. I will focus on small kabuki related events organized by Shochiku in Portland, Oregon as a representative sample in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I chose Portland because I live and study there and have more resources accessible than for any other city, including interviews with the local coordinators. Also, Portland is not a big city that can invite large scale kabuki often, but it is located on the West coast, and has a significant population of Japanese-Americans and citizens interested in Japan. These characteristics make Portland an attractive location for Shochiku when it plans small scale tours.

The presentations I analyze in this chapter are the *Fuji Musume (The Wisteria Maiden)* dance performance starring Nakamura Ganjirô III at the Portland Art Museum in

2002, a lecture and dance performance starring Nakamura Kyôzo and Nakamura Matanosuke in 2009 presented by Portland State University Center for Japanese Studies, and the costume exhibition with the Nakamura Umemaru dance performance at the Portland Japanese Garden in 2017.

### **5-1. The Nakamura Ganjirô III performance in 2002**

Nakamura Ganjirô III, a Living National Treasure kabuki actor, was supposed to come to the U.S. in 2001 with Chikamatsu-za that I discussed in Chapter Four. However, terrorism occurred in Manhattan, New York on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, which led to cancellation of his trip to New York. Arrow Promotion, Ganjirô's agency, replaced his plan with a small kabuki event. The alternative event was organized by Japan Society<sup>6</sup> in New York (Kominz). The small kabuki event was intended as a consolation concert following the terrorist attack, sponsored and also promoted by Japan Society (Nakano 2018). The program included one dance performance, *Fuji Musume (The Wisteria Maiden)*. For the performance of *Fuji Musume*, six people came from Japan to accompany and assist Ganjirô (Durston). This number differed greatly from Chikamatsu-za having come to the US in 2005 with a total number of 73.



Turning to the event planning of Ganjirô's presentation in Portland, with the invitation from the Portland Art Museum, on his way back to Japan, the troupe stopped in Portland and the Museum supported the tour in their Portland presentation. After the New York tour was organized, the invitation by the Museum was combined with the New York tour (Kominz).

Ganjiro's performance was intended as the kick-off event at the Museum to celebrate an upcoming major exhibition and attract public attention to it. The main event was Japan Summerfest series of programs in support of the exhibition *Splendors of Imperial Japan: Arts of the Meiji Period from the Khalili Collection* (Durston).

In anticipation of the exhibition, the Museum hired Diane Durston to produce all the performing arts and other PR related events. Durston was an experienced event organizer. She had helped produce a major performing arts program for an exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. in 1998, and the Portland Art Museum wanted a similarly grand schedule of events and asked Durston about the possibility of a kabuki production. However, she knew about past New York tours and was aware of the extreme complexity and high cost of producing a kabuki performance outside Japan. Addressing these concerns, Durston consulted with Laurence Kominz, a professor at Portland State

University, and learned of the possibility of requesting a solo dance performance by Ganjirô. After the discussion with Mr. Kawashima of the Arrow Production Company, Ganjirô's manager, the museum decided to hold an event called *A Glimpse of the Grand Kabuki*, featuring a performance of *Fuji Musume (The Wisteria Maiden)* in conjunction with the New York performance. The program contents were suggested by Arrow Promotion and also by Professor Kominz (Durstun).

In terms of the financial support and promotion, the performance was co-presented by the Japan-America Society of Oregon [JASO]<sup>11</sup> with the Museum. JASO is unrelated to Japan Society in New York. Additional in-kind and financial support was provided by United Airlines and other corporate and private sponsors. JASO and the Museum both promoted the performance to their memberships. This brought people who were already interested in Japanese culture to see the performance and later to the main exhibition of the Museum (Durstun). This local organization which had already built relationships with the Japanese community of the city played an important role in promoting the event.

However, the Museum was concerned about audience's shallow knowledge about

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<sup>11</sup> Japan-America Society of Oregon [JASO] is a non-profit organization consisting of corporations and individuals in Oregon and Southwest. Their mission is to develop business and community by strengthening the US-Japan relationship.

kabuki, and background education about kabuki and the *onnagata* tradition were required. An overview with explanation of the significance of the Living National Treasure status that Ganjirô held was carried in the Museum's magazine. Durston also spoke to local media about the performance and published an article in *The Oregonian*, the local newspaper (Durston).

There was another complication. The Museum Director wanted to use the performance for a fundraising banquet that took place in the Museum's Grand Ballroom. Donors to the Museum were asked to purchase tables. The initial plan was to hold banquet while the performance took place on stage at the front of the Grand Ballroom. However, after considerable negotiations with Shochiku it was agreed that in order to enable the donors to properly enjoy kabuki, the performance would be held after dinner in the same ballroom (Durston).

Regarding the logistics of the performance, the Museum facility did not have Green Room and shower facilities, and a storage space had to be re-modeled to provide the necessary furnishings requested by Arrow Productions. The Museum was able to comply with all the basic requirements but learned that performing arts were difficult to hold as part of the Museum's regular programming due to the lack of such facilities

(Durston).

On the performance day, one of the important parts of the program was that Ganjirô, age 71 at that time, agreed to come out onto the stage at the beginning of the dinner, dressed in formal kimono and *hakama*, Japanese traditional male clothing. He briefly introduced the art of the *onnagata*, and explained how he would transform himself backstage into the character of a 15-year-old girl to perform *Fuji Musume* (Durston). This was the first time Ganjirô had spoken in this way to an audience before a performance (Kominz). Ganjirô's oral presentation intrigued the audience and added significantly to their appreciation of the role of *onnagata* in kabuki. It gave special meaning to their viewing of *The Wisteria Maiden* (Durston).

The tickets were sold out, and Ganjirô received a standing ovation by more than 500 people who were astonished at the beauty of the breathtaking performance (Durston). According to Durston, "overall, the performance was a great success. The artistry and professionalism of Nakamura Ganjirô were matched by his cooperative and gentle demeanor. It was an honor and a privilege to work with him" (Durston). Ganjirô's presentation was a beneficial opportunity for the Portland arts community.

Beyond the stage, a workshop was led by Ganjirô and organized by Professor

Kominz for Portland State University students and other participants. This event extended the educational reach to the local university and added to the value of the performance (Durstun).

## **5-2. Japan Foundation presents Kabuki dance in five cities in 2009**

In the Fall of 2009 *Kabuki Lecture and Performance Backstage to Hanamichi-Behind the Scenes Look at the Color, Magic and Drama of Kabuki*” was produced by Shochiku, and presented and sponsored by the Japan Foundation. The Japan Foundation was established in 1972 as a special legal entity supervised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and reorganized as an independent administrative institution in 2003. Their activities are financed by annual government subsidies, investment revenue, and donations from the private sector. The tour was a cultural event in support of their mission to carry out comprehensive international cultural exchange programs for deepening mutual understanding among people of Japan and other countries, and creating opportunities for people-to-people interactions (Japan Foundation, “About Us”).

As for the tour, the same program toured Taiwan in October 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, 2009, and visited five cities in the U.S from October 15<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup>, 2009 (Nakamura Kyôzô).

Shochiku produced the Taiwan and the U.S. West Coast tour using a combined budget (Nakano 2018). The five cities included Los Angeles and San Francisco in California, Seattle, Washington, Portland, Oregon, and Denver, Colorado. The troupe visited the five cities in the order above. The visit in Los Angeles was a part of the 100th Anniversary Celebration of The Japan America Society of Southern California. The Consulate-General of Japan in every city co-organized the event and there were more supporters such as Japan Society of Northern California, Japan America Society of Nevada, LA Tokyo-kai, and Japanese Association of Colorado. The Portland tour was supported by JASO which also supported Ganjirô's performance in 2002. The event in Portland was co-organized by Consulate-General of Japan in Portland as in other cities and the show was organized and presented by the Center for Japanese Studies [CJS] of PSU (Japan Foundation, "Kabuki Lecture and Performance Backstage to Hanamichi"). The CJS was established in 2001 and has offered Japan related lectures and events to students at PSU and the Portland public since its foundation. The CJS seeks to facilitate understanding of Japan among students, faculty, and the greater Portland community through a variety of curricular and outreach programs (Center for Japanese Studies, "Home").

Because the CJS had collaborated with the Japan Foundation earlier in the same

year of this tour, 2009, presenting a noh<sup>1</sup> program, the relationship had already been built. Nine months before the tour, the Japan Foundation contacted Laurence Kominz, a former director of the CJS and a professor at PSU, to ask if PSU could host the tour. After the first contact with the Japan Foundation, Kominz engaged a venue, the Dolores Winningstad Theatre in downtown Portland since Lincoln Hall, the event hall at PSU used for theater was being rebuilt at that time (Kominz).

For small presenters like CJS, usually cost is a primary concern but almost all the costs were covered by the Japan Foundation as the tour presenter and the major sponsor. The CJS's budget was under \$10,000. The CJS paid for the hall rental and PR fees. The ticket sales (about \$3,770) compensated for the money for the hall rental including their services (about \$6,200), which made the gap about \$2,430. In addition, the costs for printing fliers and the hospitality were paid by the CJS. They provided a reception and dinner for the company after the show backstage. The CJS and PSU did not do any fundraising. All the other costs were covered by the Japan Foundation, such as actors' salaries, transportation and the accommodation fees. Since the tour presented the same program in each city, the Japan Foundation printed performance programs and mailed them to PSU (Kominz).

The CJS promoted the event with the print materials and on its website. JASO also helped the event with PR, sending information to their members. There were no preliminary lectures or educational campaign. Also no previews and no reviews were published in the press (Kominz).

One special thing that the CJS prepared for the troupe was making the dressing room floors as clean as Kabuki-za by taping butcher paper on all the floors. There was a room for costume dressing and a room for putting on wigs (Kominz). Kabuki costumes are very expensive and they buy special insurance for their costumes when they perform abroad (Kawashima). Even though the costumes are covered, some of them cannot be made again because of a shortage of special materials and costume makers. The costumes are usually made from silk, which should be taken care of with the close attention since they are very hard to fix and wash.

Fourteen members came including two actors, seven musicians and five other staff. The leading actors were Nakamura Kyôzô and Nakamura Matanosuke. Kyôzô is an *onnagata* actor and Matanosuke is a *tachiyaku* actor, male role (Nakamura Kyôzô). Both of them were not born in kabuki families but had been trained at kabuki schools. Kyôzô has performed abroad actively and has visited 50 cities in 21 countries as of 2018



(Nakamura Kyôzô, “Profile”). Bandô Matagorô, the head of the kabuki family of Matanosuke, likes to give lectures overseas about kabuki and Matanosuke succeeded him in this. After Kyôzô joined the group, they could introduce both *onnagata* and *tachiyaku*. Japan Foundation has often requested them to do overseas lecture/performance tours together (Nakano 2018).

The program included two lectures and performances of two plays: (1) the first lecture about the history and music of kabuki, was presented by Matanosuke (2) the first performance, *Sagi musume (The Heron Maiden)*, performed by Kyôzô (3) the second lecture of introduction about *onnagata* with make-up demonstration and dressing *tachiyaku*, male role by Kyôzô and Matanosuke (4) the second dance performance, *Nagauta hayashi renjû Shakkyô (Lion Dance)* by Kyôzô and Matanosuke (Nakamura Kyôzô). The usually unseen preparations for kabuki productions backstage were explained and demonstrated by Kyôzô and Matanosuke. A kabuki actor is supported by a team backstage of artisans and craftsmen including costumer stylists, wig masters, musicians and prop masters. The performances highlighted two contrasting styles; lyrical *onnagata* role, seen in *Sagi musume* and dynamic *tachiyaku* role seen in *Shakkyô* (Japan Foundation, “Kabuki Lecture and Performance Backstage to Hanamichi”). Live music

performances by professional musicians were very rare to see overseas, which added to the unique to the program of this tour.

A stage set of golden folding screens was set up for the *Lion Dance* and *The Heron Maiden* featured a back drop of a night time snow scene supplemented by snowy branches with snow falling from the ceiling. The audience was amazed with a quick costume change on stage in the middle of the performance. The lion duet with a back of golden folding screens was less spectacular than a big scale kabuki but equally impressive, according to Kominz (Kominz).

There was only one performance in the evening. No earphone guide or subtitles were used for the communications and only a plot summary was printed in the program. To supplement this, Shochiku brought an interpreter or MC for lectures from Japan and he toured together with the company in all five cities (Kominz).

The tickets were all sold out. The audience was 1/3 PSU students and 2/3 community members in Portland and they loved the show, including the demonstration part (Kominz). Kominz was planning to direct his own kabuki production with students at Willamette University, beginning rehearsals three months after the tour by Shochiku. It was a great opportunity for the students who participated in this production to learn about

professional kabuki, its special makeup, dance, costumes and music before they started rehearsing. The students at Willamette University came from Salem by bus to see the performance, about one hour drive away from Portland. For this special purpose, the timing of the kabuki tour was just right (Kominz).

Supporting the learning of students from PSU and other universities, and increasing understanding Japanese culture in the local community are the CJS mission, and they achieved their goals with this event (Kominz). Also the event furthered the mission of the Japan Foundation. Moreover, since Nakano (event manager, Shochiku), personally wants to provide students who are studying Japanese related courses in the universities overseas with an opportunity to see authentic kabuki (Nakano 2018), his personal desire was also fulfilled.

Regarding the make-up and costume demonstration program, Japan Foundation has often asked Nakamura Kyôzô accompany his performance with a lecture and a demonstration abroad. According to Kyôzô's official website, his first make-up and costume demonstration took place in Laos, Singapore, and Philippine in 1998. He did the demonstration-performance combination in Vietnam and Australia in 2000, and New York, Detroit, Pensacola, Washington D.C. in 2001. In July 2003 Nakamura Kyôzô

presented a make-up and a costume dressing demonstration for the first time in Japan with Shochiku support in the lecture part of the exhibition “*kabuki yonhyakunenten (kabuki’s four hundred history)*”. Beginning with events in New Zealand and Australia in 2004, Japan Foundation started to collaborate with Shochiku to present this type of program abroad. The 2009 event introduced in this thesis was the first time that Nakamura Kyôzô visited the USA with Shochiku support for a dance performance with a lecture and costume and make-up demonstration on stage (Nakamura Kyôzô). Nakano explained that Shochiku began supporting this sort of event abroad as a producer to increase the range of events for the future (Nakano 2018).

### **5-3. The kabuki costume exhibition and the Nakamura Umemaru dance performance in 2017**

The most recent small-scale kabuki production took place at the Portland Japanese Garden [Japanese Garden] in conjunction with a main event which was a kabuki costume exhibition in the Pavilion of the Garden in July-September 2017. I personally attended this presentation.

The Japanese Garden officially opened in 1967, and consists of eight separate

garden styles, including an authentic Japanese Tea House, meandering streams, intimate walkways, and a spectacular view of Mt. Hood (Portland Japanese Garden, “About”). Because of the increase of the number of the visitors, recently a part of the garden was expanded as the largest improvement since opening, at a cost of 33 million dollars. The new Cultural Village of buildings was designed by Kengo Kuma, an internationally renowned Japanese architect. The new complex was completed in March 2017 and opened to the public in April (Eastman). In order to celebrate the opening and also to enhance the prestige and cultural authority of the Japanese Garden, Stephen D. Bloom, Chief Executive Officer of the Portland Japanese Garden, held a special year of art and cultural programming (Durstun; Nakano 2017).

Japanese Garden exhibited three major art forms for the celebration: ceramics, noh<sup>1</sup>, and kabuki. The ceramics, created by Hosokawa Morihiro, a former Prime Minister of Japan, was displayed in April to May 2017 (Portland Japanese Garden, “Hosokawa Morihiro”). A lecture in conjunction about Mr. Hosokawa’s pottery practices was presented by Dr. Nishida Hiroko, a senior curator and deputy director at Nezu Museum, Tokyo (Portland Japanese Garden, “Fifteen Years of Pottery Making”). Another event was an exhibition of hand-carved Noh masks and elegant brocade costumes in October to

December in 2017. The masks were made by Ohtsuki Kokun, a Kyoto noh mask artist. The costumes were made in the Nishijin textile factory, Orinasukan. The selection of works on display was augmented by two performances by Noh actor Kawamura Haruhisa (Portland Japanese Garden, “Mirror of the Mind”). There was also a demonstration of mask carving with a lecture presented by Mr. Ohtsuki (Portland Japanese Garden, “Noh Lecture & Mask Carving”). The program concept for the noh exhibition and performance was similar to the kabuki event.

The kabuki invitation began in 2015 and it took two years to realize the plan of bringing kabuki to the Japanese Garden. Diane Durston who coordinated the 2002 event at the Portland Art Museum was the Arlene Schnitzer Curator of Culture, Art, and Education at the Garden in 2015. Inspired by a kabuki costume exhibition that had been held in Paris in 2012, she proposed the idea of organizing a costume exhibition for the celebration of the new buildings at the Portland Japanese Garden. Bloom liked her idea and tried to make a connection with Shochiku (Durston). He consulted Tadashi Yanai, Chairman, President & CEO, Fast Retailing Co., Ltd. and Uniqlo, a Japanese clothing company. Yanai is also a member of the Advisory Board of the Portland Japanese Garden. Yanai knows Junichi Sakomoto, President & CEO of Shochiku, because they have

worked together before. Yanai introduced Bloom to Sakomoto. Bloom visited Shochiku headquarters in early summer, 2015 with the purpose of inviting kabuki to the Japanese Garden (Nakano 2017).

After Bloom came back to Portland, he asked Durston to have a follow-up meeting with Shochiku. Her first meeting in Tokyo was to clarify the concept of both the costume exhibition and the performance. Following that meeting, discussions were held within Shochiku to determine the feasibility of a program, taking into consideration actors' schedules and financial requirements. Durston returned to Tokyo and met again with Shochiku representatives to learn about possibilities and costs. After coming back to Portland, Durston discussed what she learned in Tokyo with Steve Bloom. Bloom accepted the cost estimate and began fundraising to cover it as part of the budget for the Grand Opening of the Cultural Village. This kabuki event became the most expensive exhibition or performance in Portland Japanese Garden history (Durston). Major supporters included Delta Airlines, ANA (All Nippon Airlines), the Harold & Arlene Schnitzer Care Foundation and others.

The main event would be a costume exhibition running for about a month at the Japanese Garden. A solo kabuki dance performance including a lecture would be held in

conjunction, playing for two nights. When Nakano and a costume dresser and specialist from Shochiku Costume Co. Ltd, a Shochiku subsidiary specializing costuming, came to the Japanese Garden for meetings in August 2016, they discussed the details of the program with Japanese Garden. During their visit, Nakano also decided the locations for the stage and the costume exhibition. The stage would be set up outside in the new plaza and the costume exhibition would be displayed in the old pavilion (Nakano 2017).

Regarding the costume selection, seven costumes were selected from two major plays, *Sukeroku (Flower of Edo)* and *Shibaraku (Wait a Moment)*, with final decisions made by the head of Shochiku Costume. As with every exhibition, the packing, insurance, and US Customs regulations were challenging to handle. After the costumes arrived at the Garden, the layout of the costume installation was planned to accommodate wheelchair access to the exhibition gallery space, as per US law. The placement of the costumes was arranged beautifully in the pavilion (Durstson). The exhibition was held from July 29, 2017 to September 3, 2017 (Portland Japanese Garden, “Kabuki: A Revolution in Color and Design”).

When it comes to coordinating a kabuki performance, the most time-consuming task is arranging the actors’ schedule. Casting for small events has to be scheduled at



least one year before the show. As for big scale tours, it takes at least three years because more arrangements are needed for many more actors. Leading actors rarely go abroad because if they miss performances in Japan, it will diminish sales in Japan, which are of the highest priority for Shochiku. Because of these arrangements, the producer of the event plans casting as early as possible (Nakano 2017). This situation has not changed since at least 1960, when the first kabuki tour came to the U.S. For the performance at the Portland Japanese Garden, Nakamura Umemaru was selected for a dance performance.

He was adopted by the leading actor of male roles, Nakamura Baigyoku in 2006 (Japan Actors' Association, "Nakamura Umemaru"). Umemaru was 20-years-old when he performed at the Garden. Most kabuki actors from non-kabuki families do not play leading roles in Japan, although there are notable exceptions like Bandô Tamasaburô, a Living National Treasure. Usually only kabuki actors who are blood-related with leading kabuki families, can be stars in Japan and they lead the major international tours. However, this tour demonstrates that a small-scale tour overseas can provide a young kabuki actor with a chance to be a leading star. Nakano says that actor development and training is one goal for casting performances abroad, and he has seen young actors' skill and maturity improve after they experience international tours. A year later Umemaru

took one of the leading *onnagata* roles in *Naruto* (introduced in Chapter Four), and the Portland performance helped prepare him for the attention he received (Nakano 2018).

For the promotion for the kabuki events, the Portland Japanese Garden sent event information to various local, regional and national media as well as to Garden members who are interested in Japan-related events happening at the Garden. Targeting members was a very efficient way to promote the event. As a kickoff event for the exhibition at the garden, a lecture on the plays, *Sukeroku* and *Shibaraku* and costume demonstration was conducted by PSU Professor Laurence Kominz, Tanaka Toshimi, a kimono specialist, and one of Kominz's students who was dressed for a kabuki role and performed a short solo scene. It was held on July 1<sup>st</sup> before the exhibition started (Portland Japanese Garden, "An Introduction to Kabuki").

Regarding the kabuki dance performance, there was one performance each for two nights: one for high-level patrons on July 29<sup>th</sup>, and the other for general members of the public on July 30<sup>th</sup>. This performance needed ten people including two actors and other staff who came from Tokyo (Nakano 2018). Only before the performance on the 30<sup>th</sup>, a costume dresser from Shochiku Costume and a costume maker from Orinasukan lectured and demonstrated kabuki costume dressing, and explained how costumes were

embroidered, dyed and maintained. This workshop was a ticketed event (Portland Japanese Garden, “Kabuki Costume Presentation”).

In the dance program, before the actual performance, a 30 minute-long lecture was offered by kabuki actor Nakamura Umeno, a kabuki actor. Umemaru came up on stage wearing a cotton yukata. The audience watched him demonstrate on-stage how he applies make-up all by himself. The audience was enthralled, watching a young male actor transform into a young woman. Assistants helped him put on an elaborate wig, and a luxuriously embroidered costume that an *onnagata* wears in the role of a young maiden. Nakamura Umeno explained the details of the demonstration of *Tenaraiiko* (*Girl on Writing Practice*). An on-stage interpreter translated simultaneously all of the explanations by Nakamura Umeno. “The demonstration really helped in engaging our audience and helping them understand kabuki and how much is involved in a performance” (Durston). With the knowledge from the lecture, the audience enjoyed Umemaru’s performance of *Tenaraiiko* with the backdrop of beautiful nature of the Japanese Garden. Comparing this natural stage set with the Las Vegas tour introduced in Chapter Four, it is obvious that technology adds uniqueness and spectacle. However, a simple environment can be luxurious. The performance itself is the focus and in a simple

dance performance a technologically complex background would be distracting. For Umemaru's school girl dance, the simple beauty of a living garden was a perfect background. In the Garden's case, a fusion of kabuki's form and the Garden's beauty was achieved.

Regarding the opportunity to present kabuki in Portland, Durston reflected that “[the] experience of the kabuki exhibition enhanced by the demonstrations and performances have made the lives of everyone in Portland much richer and we are very grateful to Shochiku and all parties involved for their willingness to bring this magnificent cultural tradition to the world outside Japan” (Durston).

A number of seats were added to meet the unexpectedly high demand (Kabukibito, “Umemaru Introduces the Charms of Kabuki”). The tickets were all sold out and the audience enjoyed the performance very much (Durston, Kominz).

## **Conclusion**

Portland has had only one full scale kabuki play in 1990 that I presented in Chapter Three, followed by three small scale kabuki dance performances by Shochiku actors in 2002, 2009 and 2017 that I introduced in this chapter. Compared with this, the

most frequently visited city, New York, had ten full scale kabuki tours since the first U.S. tour in 1960 in addition to several small-scale performances. A professional Japanese kabuki performance of any kind is quite rare for the Portland community to see.

However, there are significant benefits to small-scale events including dance performances and other demonstrations.

First, small events can be tailored to needs of local venues, and can rely on local promotion and fund-raising. The 2009 event was intended as cultural exchange, whereas events in 2002 and 2017 used kabuki to celebrate the local Japan related organizations and attract the attention of the public. Kabuki could be used in these occasions because kabuki is recognized as a representative Japanese traditional performing art, but people do not know much about the details behind the scenes. The presentation about kabuki backstage can get audience attention and the status of kabuki adds value to events. Even in Japan, small events including a dance performance, costume exhibition and workshop with educational publicity were held only on special occasions.

Also, unlike the large-scale tours, the local venues can manage the promotion and fund-raising by themselves, and small presentations can be integrated into the local presenters' plans to use for their own purposes.

Second, the programs in small-scale performances can be highly contextualized, including additional presentations such as make-up and costume dressing on-stage and lectures. In fact, the three dance performances I discussed in this chapter were very well received, and this contrasts with Kawatake Toshio's conclusion about successful kabuki performance contents when touring abroad. Kawatake's conclusion, resulting from the surveys of large-scale international kabuki tours, was that human drama was of universal interest to audiences, but monotonous dance was not appealing to audiences (Kawatake, 'Kabuki' 9-22). The difference of the premise of his survey and my analysis rests on factors that are outside of the actual dance performance. If a dance performance is preceded by a carefully presented make-up and costume-dressing exhibition on stage, this additional context makes even dance performances entertaining for American audiences. They will enjoy learning something behind the scenes and better understand the mastery of the kabuki performer and the beauty of kabuki in the dance piece. Because of these characteristics of the program design, these small-scale events are very suitable for educational purposes.

Furthermore, fewer props and stage sets are necessary than for large scale performances. Also, with skilled local assistance, small scale performances can be

presented anywhere, such as in the museum and outside in the garden.

From the perspective of kabuki actors' development, performance in a small event overseas can provide non-major kabuki actors with opportunities to lead the tour. This is an advantageous characteristic of a small tour overseas. A big scale event and even a regular performance in Japan cannot offer this opportunity. The experience as leading actor enriches the quality of young actors' skills from a long-term perspective.

On top of those benefits above, the event can be organized more cheaply than big scale events because of the small number of staff. The high cost is always a primary concern for hosts of kabuki events. However, even small kabuki events were still extraordinarily expensive, higher than any other previous events held at the Portland Art Museum and the Portland Japanese Garden. This was the case even for small events that were not big tours. From the standpoint of cost efficiency, even though they are not cheap, a costume exhibition as centerpiece is one of the new ways to bring kabuki abroad that Shochiku discovered recently. There are five reasons that favor a costume exhibition as compared to a kabuki performance.

First, only a small number of staff are necessary, reducing personnel costs. A costume exhibition needs only two costume specialists, while, in a kabuki tour, one

kabuki actor needs at least three assistants: a costume stylist, a wig stylist and a prop assistant. Moreover, musicians usually consist of fifteen people including Nagauta singers, *shamisen* players, and flute and *taiko* or drum players. Due to the needs of the musicians and staff, even a dance performance like the 2009 event, needs at least fifteen to twenty. Even the make-up/costume dressing plus dance performance model, without musicians, require many people—like the events in 2002 with 6 staff and 2017 with about ten. A costume exhibition requires an event coordinator to visit twice, once for opening set-up and again the closing disassembly and repacking. This is somewhat expensive, but the total cost is cheaper than other types of kabuki related events (Nakano 2018).

Secondly, no performers are necessary, which leads to the cost efficiency and time efficiency because casting is one of the most time-consuming tasks for the event organizers in Japan.

Third, costume exhibitions do not need facilities that kabuki actors use backstage such as shower facilities and dressing rooms. The hosts in the case of the Portland Art Museum in 2002 and the Japanese Garden in 2017 did not have those facilities and had to modify different purpose rooms. The Garden does not even have a stage and had to rent



an outdoor stage. This involved costs and added to project tasks. But Shochiku has learned that small scale performances can be done in facilities that are not meant for theater. Flexibility is possible when the performance is small.

Fourth, since there is no performance, no huge props and stage sets are necessary. Because of these characteristics above, the preparation time was much shorter.

Lastly, a costume exhibition can run for about a month and it is easy to keep the event situated in one place. A dance performance or workshop can be held only once or twice in one place especially in a small city because attracting a large number of people is difficult. At the same time, multiple performances always have to be organized to reduce the costs for each performance.

Thanks to experiences in small scale events, like those in Portland, Shochiku is implementing a new international strategy even though they did not engage in many small-scale kabuki related events before this century. Specifically, the 2017 event was highlighted on Shochiku's homepage: "Shochiku is looking for a new approach toward international tours other than performances, such as the costume exhibition in Portland in 2017" (Shochiku, "Kabuki wa tabisuru taishikan"). Thus, the company recognizes the potential benefits of costume exhibitions. Nakano also recognized that the event at the

Japanese Garden was successful and wants to engage in similar events again to encourage people overseas to go to Kabuki-za in Tokyo when they visit Japan (Nakano 2018).

Small-scale presentations can be a strategy to develop audiences abroad.

Thus, small kabuki related events have different characteristics from large scale tours, and benefits that major tours do not have.

## **Chapter Six – Conclusion: Kabuki in the USA – Now and the Future**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, three major companies came to the U.S. six times in total: Heisei Nakamura-za in 2004, 2007, and 2014, Chikamatsu-za in 2005, and Las Vegas performances in 2015 and 2016. Furthermore, several small-scale kabuki events took place at various sites. This thesis examined three that were held in Portland Oregon as a sample city: the *Fuji Musume (The Wisteria Maiden)* dance performance at the Portland Art Museum in 2002, a lecture and dance performance in 2009, and the costume exhibition with a dance performance at the Portland Japanese Garden in 2017.

Kabuki faced new challenges in its tours to the US in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and responded by making significant innovations. These changes made it possible for many different types of kabuki performances to take place in United States. Moreover, innovations in the USA have developed further potential for future kabuki presentations abroad and in Japan. The three major challenges that needed to be addressed included the following:

### **6-1. The language barrier**

Kabuki is a traditional Japanese art and kabuki actors basically perform only in

Japanese. Before 1960, performances relied on program notes and oral explanations to introduce what was going to take place on stage. Use of earphone guide service starting in 1960 has provided another way to communicate action on stage to the audience.

There were three ways to deal with language barriers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. 1) Heisei Nakamura-za and Chikamatsu-za used earphone guide. Actors in Nakamura-za in 2007 and Las Vegas kabuki in 2016 spoke or sang some of their lines in English. Scholars and audiences still debate which is better and which is more authentic: earphone guide translation and commentary by professional commentators with all lines on stage presented in Japanese, or, real kabuki actors speaking translated lines in English, tinged with Japanese pronunciation. 2) All three presentations in the small events did not use translation of dance lyrics or earphone guide. Interpreters presented explanatory materials, partial translations and demonstrations on stage before the dances were performed 3) The Las Vegas shows created visually appealing plays that did not need the translation or explanation – except for some lines delivered in English in 2016. Audiences seem satisfied with these approaches at these particular venues.

## **6-2. Play choice for performances in the United States**

In Pre-war tours, programs had to include the messages that the governments wanted to deliver through kabuki as a propaganda tool. After the war, around the time cultural exchange was active, the program adhered to authentic forms of kabuki because it was still the early stage of introduction of kabuki. Turning to the current century, it all depends on the specific factors connected to the presenter's purpose, audience education, the language barrier, and allowable runtime. It was essential for Chikamatsu-za to present a classical play by Chikamatsu. A few years later, in Las Vegas, it was essential to write new plays specifically for those two shows. Solo dances or duets are best for small scale performances.

### **6-3. Production Collaboration**

Event management in kabuki tours improved because organizers learned better collaboration procedures through trial and error over the years. There are significant differences between the performance environments in the U.S. and Japan. However, as discussed above, presenters took initiative in organizing the events and made them successful by and large. Therefore, if kabuki tours in the USA are run by planners who understand the differences of the event managements in the two countries well and can

find a way to manage them carefully, kabuki can be successful in the US. Organizers on the Japanese side are knowledgeable staff who can adjust their procedures base on what they've learned from their previous experiences. It is also very important for organizers to be able to manage Japan related events effectively.

For example, Jane Langill from One Reel had studied *kyôgen* for a long time and speaks Japanese fluently. According to Kawashima, One Reel is the best American company that Arrow Promotion has ever worked with. It is significant that Jane Langill translated not only Japanese instructions for US theater staff, but also explained in detail the expectations and intentions of the Japanese side. The One Reel president was able to mobilize his staff to work overtime hours to keep to the production schedule, demonstrating the importance of the local leader (Kawashima). Diane Durston, who organized two small scale events in Portland, had lived in Japan for 18 years. Reflecting on the 2017 event at the Japanese Garden, Durston said that “the professionalism and exceptional commitment to excellence of kabuki actors and staff was a lesson to all of us in the US. The authentic kabuki experience to be had in Japan will not be the same when it is interpreted in the US or other country, but the success of such attempts will be found in new directions and ideas and in the sharing of the true spirit of the living art form that

is kabuki. Different ways of thinking and behaving must be considered. Putting ego aside, trusting each other's sincerity, and working together for the sake of international understanding can result in a life-changing experience for both sides" (Durston).

Professionalism on both the Japanese side and American side are necessary to achieve a success.

#### **6-4. New flexibility in forms and venues**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century US tours broadened the potentials in event sizes, new venues, and contents of kabuki presentations. In other words, kabuki is a remarkably flexible and universally relatable medium. The scale of a kabuki event can be bigger or smaller. Even in a small-scale events, audience satisfaction can be augmented with an extended program such as a lecture or make-up or costume demonstration. Kabuki can perform in various types of venues. Of course, large scale kabuki needs a fully functional theater, but small-scale kabuki has flexibilities which accept the differences between the U.S. and Japan, and it can be performed in a garden or a museum or a fountain. In addition, kabuki's contents can vary significantly. Large scale programs differ depending on factors as discussed above, but kabuki is a fusion of many Japanese traditional arts and each can

receive a special focus. A good example of this was the costume exhibition discussed in Chapter Five. The exhibition also takes advantage of flexibilities in scale and venues.

### **6-5. New Audiences and New Approaches: Kabuki in America and Japan**

The biggest innovation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that Shochiku is now using US kabuki tours to safely experiment with new approaches. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Shochiku strived to present kabuki overseas authentically as it is done traditionally in Japan, but for some tours that conservative approach changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some kabuki tours in the USA have become crucibles for experimentation. Shochiku has tried what has never been done in Japan. If their experiment works, Shochiku could reimport it to Japan in the near future.

For example, the small-scale kabuki presented dance performance in non-theater venues. It included on-stage lectures, make-up and costume demonstrations including wearing wigs, all presented by professionals. These were very successful in Portland and all four other Western cities in the USA in 2009, which suggests that this practice would be successful in provincial sites in Japan where audiences usually can't see Grand Kabuki. Shochiku recognizes the potential benefits of small scale dance performances



with accompanying demonstrations and exhibitions. Events like the one at the Japanese Garden in 2017 can be successful abroad and in Japan, and Shochiku wants to produce similar events in the future (Shochiku, “Kabuki wa tabisuru taishikan”). The large-scale kabuki example is the Las Vegas tour which presented short duration visual spectacles that don’t need earphone guide or subtitles, in non-traditional venues such as a huge fountain outside, or a hotel theater. These flexibilities allow kabuki to entertain anyone almost everywhere. This experiment will help Shochiku develop its inbound tourism market since the target audience is the same—foreigners (Sugimoto). Also, these sorts of performances can be tried in Japan for Japanese viewers whose knowledge about kabuki is the same as foreigners. Kawatake’s research about audiences supports this initiative. Kawatake Toshio has stated that among non-regular kabuki fans, the level of ignorance about and interest in kabuki is about the same among Japanese and non-Japanese (Kawatake, "Zoku Zoku Hikaku engekigaku" 356).

This kind of short duration spectacle is not authentic traditional kabuki and it would be dangerous were this sort of performance to replace traditional kabuki. Shochiku has no such intention. Traditional kabuki will continue as it always has in the post-war era. These short plays will attract a completely new viewership, including Japanese and

foreigners and hopefully many of them will like what they see and try traditional kabuki for the first time.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, kabuki is universally appealing. Whether a dance performance by a single actor, or a full-scale kabuki play, a short spectacular entertainment, a display of beautiful costumes, or a single actor using make-up to transform himself from man into woman, kabuki is beautiful and professionally executed. As long as the home organizer, Shochiku, and local American hosts can develop working relationships that realize the goals of each, then kabuki can be used and presented in the United States in a variety of ways, and kabuki is sure to be appealing and educational for American audiences.

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## **Interviews**

Durston, Diane, Portland USA, January 16, 2019

Kawashima Akira, Tokyo, Japan, September 13, 2017

Kominz Laurence, Portland USA, November 27, 2018

Langill Jane, Seattle, USA, November 11, 2017

Nakano Masao, Portland, USA, August 1, 2017 and Tokyo, Japan, December 27, 2018

Ôshima Mark, Portland USA, June 2, 2017

Suzuki Chieko, Tokyo, Japan, September 19, 2017



### Appendix. Interviewee Biographies

**Diane Durston** was the Arlene Schnitzer Curator of Culture, Art & Education at the Portland Japanese Garden from 2007 to 2018 and managed Nakamura Umemaru performance in 2017 in this thesis. Now she is a Curator Emerita. From 2002 to 2006, Durston was Director of Special Projects and later Curator of Education at the Portland Art Museum and organized the 2002 event in this thesis.

**Jane Langill** is Japan Projects Director of One Reel, and supervised the tours in 1990 and 2005 in this thesis. In the 1980s she learned kyogen performance under Nomura Mansaku, noh1 actor of the Living National Theater.

**Kawashima Akira** is the President of Arrow Promotion, managing kabuki actors including Sakata Tôjûrô IV. He was involved in the 2002 and 2005 tours in this thesis.

**Laurence Kominz** is Professor of Japanese Literature and Drama at Portland State University. He assisted with the two One Reel produced tours in this thesis, writing the printed programs, educational essays, and the earphone guide text (2005). He organized the 2009 kabuki dance show in Portland and assisted with the two other Portland dance shows. He is former director of the PSU Center for Japanese Studies.

**Mark Ôshima** is a translator for kabuki subtitles and singer in the Kiyomoto style of kabuki music under the stage name of Kiyomoto Shimatayu.

**Nakano Masao** is a manager of international kabuki projects at Shochiku. He engaged in many international tours including every tour in the 21st century I introduced in this thesis.

**Suzuki Chieko** is a manager of Matsumoto Koshirô. She was engaged in the two Las Vegas tours in this thesis.