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Theater-going as Homework : An Aspect of Modern Japanese Theater

メタデータ	言語: eng 出版者: 公開日: 2009-04-28 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: Powell, Brian メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	https://doi.org/10.15021/00003004

Theater-going as Homework: An Aspect of Modern Japanese Theater

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- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Theater-going | 6. Proletarian Drama |
| 2. Modern Japanese Theater | 7. Official Control of <i>Shingeki</i> |
| 3. <i>Shingeki</i> | 8. <i>Kabuki</i> |
| 4. <i>Shingeki</i> Audiences | 9. <i>Shin-kabuki</i> and Mayama Seika |
| 5. <i>Shingeki</i> and Education | 10. Conclusion |

1. THEATER-GOING

In English we have the word "theater-going." In Japanese there are two terms to express the same thing: one means "viewing plays" (*shibai-kenbutsu*) and the other "watching drama" (*kangeki*). As against an expression in English which indicates "making a trip to the theater building," in Japanese the words used emphasize the act of seeing what is performed on the stage. Historically, however, the activity described has been similar in the two cultures. In both Japan and England permanent theaters made their appearance at about the same period. People began gathering in theaters in large numbers, and watching plays became one of the pleasures of everyday life for the various classes in society.

The inhabitants of Edo and London at the beginning of the eighteenth century would rise early in the morning, would in many cases walk for several hours to the theater, and once there would be treated to about five hours of various spectacles. In a certain sense theater-going existed in both cultures from long before this, but it is from this period that it becomes generally recognised as a desirable form of recreation, something to be positively sought after at a cost of money and time. Theater-going has not changed all that much from the eighteenth century to the present day. There have been some variations in the style of theater management in both countries and in both Tokyo and London there seems to be a modern trend towards theater-going in groups (in London principally to opera and musicals), but generally speaking theater-going has always been practiced for the sake of enjoyment.

2. MODERN JAPANESE THEATER

The subject that I will be discussing in this paper is modern Japanese theater.

There are various theories about what the word "modern" means, but because I will be touching on "new kabuki" (*shinkabuki*) below and I am not intending to discuss whether *shinkabuki* is modern or not, I am using the word "modern" simply to indicate the chronological period between the Meiji Restoration in 1868 and the present day. The subject of this paper is theater in modern Japan so defined. When I considered what to make the primary focus of my paper within the field of modern Japanese theater, I thought I would like to take up and examine a little more a feature of that theater that I had been vaguely conscious of for a number of years.

As I have been reading materials relating to modern Japanese theater over the years, I have been struck by how often words such as "enthusiastic" (*nesshin*) or "serious" (*majime*) appear. One can find such words not only in reference to "new drama" (*shingeki*) but also in materials referring to twentieth-century *kabuki*. Whether this is peculiar to Japanese theater I do not know, but the impression one receives if one reads similar material relating to western theater is that words like "enthusiastic" and "serious" appear comparatively frequently in the case of Japan.

I was first prompted to investigate this subject by an incident which happened several years ago. I had gone into a stationery shop which was located near the headquarters of a Tokyo theater company together with one of the assistant directors of the company. Apparently the lady of the shop had recently watched one of the company's performances. As we entered the shop, she said in very polite language to the member of the company who was with me: "I am very grateful to you for giving me the opportunity to learn something the other day." As I looked at her face and listened to the conversation about the play that the two of them then had, it did seem as though she had really enjoyed watching this play from which she had "learnt" something. The way in which she expressed her appreciation seemed to me interesting and worth following up in the context of a wider survey of Japanese attitudes towards theater-going.

I will be devoting most attention to *shingeki* and *shinkabuki* in this paper. In the audiences that watch *nō* and *bunraku* too there are many people who are learning as they watch. A large proportion of the spectators at *nō* performances will themselves be amateur practitioners of *nō* chanting or dancing, and many members of *bunraku* audiences will be following in a score as they listen to the chanter. In these cases there would seem to be special circumstances accounting for the active learning of the spectators. Certainly there are many amateur actors in the audiences of *shingeki* and some *kabuki* fans go to classes in *kabuki* dancing, but on the whole there would seem to be comparatively few members of the audience who are observing the art of their own teacher on the *shingeki* or *kabuki* stage.

3. SHINGEKI

The theater genre that is referred to by the word *shingeki* came into being during the first decade of the twentieth century. At that time two groups that are commonly called the pioneers of *shingeki* began their theatrical activities. In the 1910s

many small *shingeki* groups were active and then in the early 1920s there was the beginning of a *shingeki* movement on a scale not seen previously. Subsequently there was the rise of the proletarian arts movement and proletarian drama became one part of that. The latter half of the 1930s was the epoch of socialist realism. In this paper I want to consider the *shingeki* movement as a whole but to focus in on four important elements of it: Bungei Kyōkai (Literary Arts Association), Jiyū Gekijō (Free Theatre), Tsukiji Shōgekijō (Tsukiji Little Theatre) and proletarian drama.

Bungei Kyōkai's activities can be divided into two parts. The first part began in February 1906 and only continued until November 1907. There were only two performances, both in the form of Evenings of Entertainment (*engei taikai*). Then after a break the second part [Bungei Kyōkai II] began with the first public production (*kōen*) in March 1911 and continued until the group disbanded after the sixth public production in June 1913 [TANAKA 1964: 81-82]. The leaders of Bungei Kyōkai were Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859-1935) of Waseda University and his disciple Shimamura Hōgetsu (1871-1918). The actors were mainly university students of both sexes.

Jiyū Gekijō was founded at about the same time but was quite different in character from Bungei Kyōkai. The leaders were Osanai Kaoru (1881-1928), who was a graduate of the English Literature section of Tokyo Imperial University, and the *kabuki* actor Ichikawa Sadanji II (1880-1940), and the actors were members of Sadanji's *kabuki* company. The first public production was in November 1909 and the group's activities came to an end with the ninth public production in September 1919 [TANAKA 1964: 91-94].

During this period there was much theatrical activity of a modern and non-commercial nature apart from Bungei Kyōkai and Jiyū Gekijō, but these two groups are generally acknowledged to occupy a significant position in the history of *shingeki*.

The founding of the Tsukiji Shōgekijō in 1923 can be said to have marked a new stage in the development of *shingeki*. Tsukiji Shōgekijō was different again from Bungei Kyōkai and Jiyū Gekijō in that it built itself a theater which was dedicated to *shingeki*. Osanai Kaoru, who was forty-three at the time, joined up with the younger Hijikata Yoshi (1898-1959), who came from an aristocratic family, and they assembled in this theater men and women from a wide social spectrum who wished to become *shingeki* actors and actresses.

By the time that Tsukiji Shōgekijō split up in 1929, the proletarian theater movement was already enjoying a heyday. It seems that proletarian theater activity was deeply involved in the split within Tsukiji Shōgekijō. The movement had several leaders, but we must also number among them the theorists, by which is meant those who wrote on the theory of proletarian arts. In terms of social background the scope of proletarian theater was not much different from that of Tsukiji Shōgekijō, but it had the particular feature that in almost every case its practitioners shared a relatively unified—maybe sometimes too unified—political standpoint. Following the dissolution in 1934 of Purotto (Nihon Puroretaria Gekijō Dōmei, Japan Proletarian Arts League) there were productions of socialist realist

theater under the leadership this time of playwrights.

4. *SHINGEKI* AUDIENCES

During this thirty-year history of *shingeki* the audiences changed along with the times, but it is possible to observe some common features. One of these was earnestness—audiences viewed the plays with a serious attitude. Another was that inside the theaters in almost every case the audiences watched the plays quietly and with due decorum. Considered together, these two features contrast sharply with what happened in traditional theater, especially *kabuki*.

The earnestness of *shingeki* audiences is often commented on by people writing at the time and by scholars of the period. For example: on the occasion of the second Evening of Entertainment given by Bungei Kyōkai.

For all four days every seat was taken. Ōkuma Shigenobu, who said he had not seen a play in decades, brought his family. The young Sadanji, who had just taken his late father's stage name and who was secretly burning with new passions, came to watch earnestly. Not only him but a great many other actors of both traditional and contemporary theater were there too. It was a great success. [AKIBA 1956: 94]

The full houses continued. Bungei Kyōkai II's *Hamlet* (its first public production, in May 1911) achieved an average of 91% capacity over its seven-day run, and the performances in Osaka which followed were also well attended [AKIBA 1956: 102, 104]. The first private production (*shien*), of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, was apparently sold out. "Excitement" is a word which one sees frequently in connection with the first night of Jiyū Gekijō's *John Gabriel Borkman*. For example, Satomi Ton describes Osanai Kaoru on that occasion as "... standing in the middle of a whirlpool of artistic excitement." Nagata Hideo also has recorded that "people were experiencing great excitement [AKIBA 1956: 158]."

The excitement of the first night of the Tsukiji Shōgekijō fifteen years later is often described in the wealth of memoirs concerning the theater. And it does seem as though the enthusiasm of audiences afterwards hardly diminished at all. One example of this can be seen in the following humorous account by Yoshida Kenkichi.

The audience sat on hard seats that Yamamoto Yasue has likened to park benches. But the spectators sitting on them glued their eyes to the stage with such enthusiasm that they scarcely seemed to notice the hardness of the seats. [YOSHIDA 1971: 80]

Shingeki audiences up to this time shared another characteristic apart from enthusiasm. It appears that, whether it was Bungei Kyōkai, Jiyū Gekijō or Tsukiji Shōgekijō, audiences sat quietly as they watched the plays. Shimazaki Tōson wrote about the special atmosphere at performances of Jiyū Gekijō.

... even in the *sajiki*¹⁾ people did not eat from the lunch boxes that seemed to be an essential accompaniment to playgoing, they did not drink tea and they did not smoke tobacco. One could watch the play in the same mood as if one had gone to a concert. [MATSUMOTO SHINKO 1980: 1008]

(This brings to mind the concert that is described in Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's *Kappa* [written in 1927]. "The auditorium is not very different in appearance from those in Japan. Three or four hundred male and female *kappa* sat in banked rows of seats, every single one of them holding a programme and listening intently [to the music].")

And concerning Tsukiji Shōgekijō Yoshida Kenkichi again writes as follows:

People were very well-behaved. It was very rarely that there was anyone eating or drinking in their seats. More than that, if one made a slight noise turning the pages of one's programme, one was liable to have someone from a nearby seat turn to look at one. [YOSHIDA 1971: 81]

From this one can see that *shingeki* audiences were quite different from those of *kabuki*, who would be calling out the names of their favorite actors during the performance and frequently eating and drinking. One reason for this is probably that the motivation for going to the theater differed. Motivation is something that is difficult to be precise about, but one can surmise to a certain extent from source materials concerning *shingeki* that mention the audiences. Phrases such as "looking for something new," or "I was curious," or "it was something out of the ordinary" appear frequently.

Akiba Tarō, who has made a detailed study of *shingeki* history, writes as follows about the opening night of Jiyū Gekijō:

... the actual situation was that many were watching the play as if to assure themselves that translated drama was generally like that. [AKIBA 1956: 158]

It is difficult to say how long this "actual situation" continued, but in the Tsukiji Shōgekijō there were many productions of plays belonging to the new genre of expressionist theater, and it seems there were many spectators watching the plays who became excited even though they could not understand the dialogue very well.

5. SHINGEKI AND EDUCATION

A clear answer to the question of how much the consumers of drama were motivated by the desire to find out about the latest developments in theater is also not possible, but it is safe to say that the producers of drama created an educational atmosphere and fostered in their audiences an attitude of watching enthusiastically

1) *Tatami*-laid square from which four people could watch plays. Was associated with eating, drinking and chatting.

and seriously.

Bungei Kyōkai had originally been a society for university students and in the building erected for it in 1909 there was a large lecture room as well as the rehearsal rooms [MATSUMOTO KAPPEI 1966: 41]. One of the objectives was certainly to train the actors and actresses of the future, but there was also a strong intention to make the students do research about theater. And not only the students. The plan was also to extend this education to the audiences. The first clause of Bungei Kyōkai II's regulations (1911) read as follows: "This Society hopes to reform the Japanese theater world and to encourage new arts that will be appropriate to the age. At the same time it will have as one of its objectives the raising of levels of taste in society at large [ŌZASA 1985: 82]."

Tsubouchi Shōyō would sometimes give a lecture to the audience before performances of Shakespeare. This tendency was also strong in Jiyū Gekijō. Osanai Kaoru was a man who had introduced the works of the foreign playwright Ibsen to Japan through the pages of the literary journal *Shinshichō*, and his hope and ambition were to show to Japanese audiences productions that were identical to the original foreign ones. When he directed *John Gabriel Borkman* at the Yūroku-za, he tried to reproduce a production that had been done in Vienna, relying on notes and sketches provided by a friend who had seen it. Later when he himself went abroad in 1914, Osanai took detailed notes of productions of the plays that he watched and he then attempted to recreate them in Japan just as they had been in their country of origin. Some of his productions at the Tsukiji Shōgekijō followed the same method. The interior walls of the Tsukiji Shōgekijō were painted grey all over and it was sometimes referred to as a "laboratory for drama." Some of those who went there were left with the impression that "... they had come into a school examination hall [MIZUSHINA 1954: 63]."

The overwhelming majority of *shingeki* productions, including those at the Tsukiji Shōgekijō, were of foreign plays in translation and there were therefore many opportunities for everyone in the audiences to have something new shown to them while watching the plays. From about 1928, however, the proletarian theater movement began its run of prosperity and there were then more plays written by Japanese playwrights. At this point the situation changed somewhat.

6. PROLETARIAN DRAMA

Instead of works from foreign cultures which treated life abroad unfamiliar to Japanese audiences, plays were now produced whose subject matter could be understood straightaway. Almost all proletarian plays were of this kind, but they also contained another characteristic that cannot be overlooked. This was that almost all plays written after the rise of proletarian drama were written by playwrights who were observing the tenets of proletarian arts theory.

Aono Suekichi published "Natural Growth and Consciousness of an Objective" in September 1926 and after that numerous proletarian arts theories appeared.

In the golden age of proletarian drama one theory was dominant over all the others. This was Kurahara Korehito's "The Road to Proletarian Realism" (May 1928). There is not space here to describe the content of this article in detail, but briefly what Kurahara required was that the playwright when writing a play should see the world with the eyes of the proletarian vanguard.

At the time many one-act and multi-act plays were written in accordance with this theory. People who watched these plays were not discovering the nature of foreign plays; they were not even finding out what the state of Japanese society was at the time. They were being taught what stage Japanese society had arrived at, as defined by Marxist theorists. The most famous proletarian plays of the time were of this type, for example Murayama Tomoyoshi's *Bōryokudanki* (*Record of a Gang of Thugs*, 1929), and even more so the small-scale drama that was performed at the beginning of the 1930s, when the tendency towards agit-prop plays was strong.

Up to about 1931, when police suppression of proletarian theater became more determined, this type of drama had achieved such a level of popularity that it was even played in large-capacity theaters. One inference that can be made from this popularity is that, while spectators already embracing Marxism would obviously be quite happy to be instructed in this way, even those who were not attracted to Marxism did not feel much resistance to being the objects of instruction while watching plays.

Police suppression intensified, and after the murder of the novelist Kobayashi Takiji in 1933 the proletarian literary movement was already coming to an end. Purotto was forced to dissolve itself the following year. It was now impossible to proclaim socialist thought from the stage, and the 1930s saw the development of socialist realism, which attempted to describe society as it was.

Playwrights devoted their efforts to trying to portray the society that was to appear on the stage in as much detail as possible. The play that is always quoted as a work which typifies this is Kubo Sakae's *Kazanbaichi* (*Ash Terrace of the Volcano*, Part 1 published in 1937 and Part 2 in 1938). This drama is set in agricultural country in Hokkaido which is subject to ash deposits from a nearby volcano. The sufferings of the head of an agricultural research institute and his family are unfolded against the background of the interpersonal relationships existing in the local society, which is minutely described.

It is well known that Kubo Sakae (1900-1958) wrote this drama after having done research both into agricultural conditions in the area and into chemical fertilizers. There are scenes where the dialogue contains many references to agricultural science and where characters speak to each other in great detail about the qualities of the soil. This is a very long play in two parts, it has dense dialogue and a large number of characters, and the plot is very complicated, and yet according to reminiscences written by people who saw this play the audiences without exception were obviously excited as they watched.

We come up against the problem of motivation in the case of socialist realist drama too. Spectators were not only going to watch socialist realist drama: it

seems that going to see a play performed by a group of actors known to have been left-wing in the mid-1920s was intended to demonstrate a certain opposition to militarism. It is not possible to be categorical about this, but one can suggest that such people might have been bored if they had watched the same play in different circumstances. There have been revivals of socialist realist drama in the postwar period and they have attracted large audiences, but it is possible that many spectators attended for nostalgic reasons. However, in general those who watched the plays before the war probably did not feel that their enjoyment was seriously impaired because of the dense social description in the dialogue.

7. OFFICIAL CONTROL OF *SHINGEKI*

Not only did the producers of *shingeki* fashion their productions with an educational objective in mind, the government too had long recognised the power theater had to influence its audiences and even expected it to fulfil that role. The summoning of Morita Kan'ya, Kawatake Mokuami and Sakurada Jisuke, the leading personalities in theater at the time, in 1872 to the Tokyo First Ward Office is well known. The instructions that they received there began with the statement: "Of course theater should have as its aim the 'encouragement of virtue and punishment of vice'." Three days after this was made public the following sentence appeared in an article in the *Tōkyō Nichinichi Shinbun*: "Lecturing on the Confucianist classics or history and performing a play only differ in appearance. Actors are in this sense teachers [MATSUMOTO SHINKO 1974: 36]."

One can also observe this kind of attitude in censorship as practiced after the start of the *shingeki* movement. There is a famous example in the case of the play *Heimat (Magda)* performed in May 1912. In Sudermann's play the heroine Magda defies her father to the end and the play finishes with the father dying of a stroke brought on by his daughter's behavior. The censor warned that the play would be banned if it did not present a moral system that was appropriate to Japanese society. As a result Shimamura Hōgetsu was forced to rewrite the final scene [IMAI 1971: 110-111].

Further, *shingeki* was essentially an intellectual movement. The leaders of *shingeki*, from Bungei Kyōkai to socialist realism, were almost all university graduates, and intellectuals made up a large part of the audiences. Western drama and literature began to be introduced into Japan in quantity at the beginning of the twentieth century, and the death of Ibsen in 1906 boosted this considerably. Naturally enough young intellectuals wanted to obtain information about this literature.

In postwar *shingeki*, however, this phenomenon has not been prevalent either among those who perform plays or those who watch them. In this sense the prewar *shingeki* movement has a particular significance in the history of Japanese theater.

8. KABUKI

After *shingeki* we must consider *kabuki*. *Kabuki* is a theater genre whose conventions differ completely from those of *shingeki*. With a long tradition stretching back to the seventeenth century, *kabuki* was proud of the acting and production styles that it had brought to perfection over three hundred years and it had no special need to learn something new from the West. During the first half of the Meiji period (the 1870s and the 1880s) Ichikawa Danjūrō IX tried to bring something new to one aspect of *kabuki* with his “plays of living history” (*katsurekigeki*), but this ended in failure. After his death in 1903 *katsurekigeki* were hardly ever performed again.

Western objects did make their appearance in *kabuki* plays. For example, the text of Kawatake Mokuami's *Tōkyō Nichinichi Shinbun* (*Tokyo Daily Newspaper*, 1873) contained many references to novelties like steam trains and telegrams. Such things, however, had already been introduced into Japan by that time and audiences would not have felt that they had to learn about them because they existed in the West.

The Drama Reform Movement, which began in 1886, learned from the West in matters of theater management and conventions of behavior, but its influence on the theatricality of *kabuki* was not very great. Later on in the 1910s the commercial character of *kabuki* was again intensified as the rapidly expanding entertainments company Shōchiku gradually came to exercise monopoly control over theaters playing *kabuki*. Shōchiku adopted the policy of constructing programmes primarily to attract audiences. They put on single acts of plays that their audiences liked, much as had happened in the Edo period. Performances of full-length plays became rare. Plays were still not regarded as literature, and their existence outside the theater was not recognised. In theater like this, one would not expect to find audiences calmly accepting the idea of being taught something by the playwright or actors.

9. SHIN-KABUKI AND MAYAMA SEIKA

Within *kabuki* performed in the twentieth century, however, we find the genre of “*shin-kabuki*” (“new *kabuki*”). In general terms this denotes plays written for *kabuki* actors by playwrights who lived or are living in the twentieth century. Three playwrights have especially made names for themselves as writers of *shin-kabuki*. Tsubouchi Shōyō, mentioned above, is one of these; the other two are Okamoto Kidō (1872-1939) and Mayama Seika (1878-1948). The plays that they wrote are still often performed even now, but Tsubouchi Shōyō is probably the least frequently performed of the three. There are many points of difference between Okamoto Kidō and Mayama Seika. Okamoto's plays have a strong flavor of traditional *kabuki* and are loved by *kabuki* audiences everywhere. Mayama Seika had his own ideas about playwrighting and wrote in a bolder style. Perhaps for this

reason while many among his audiences are fans of his plays, others have mixed feelings about them.

Mayama Seika was born in Sendai in 1878, came to Tokyo from Sendai, and spent about five years earning his living as a writer of Naturalist short stories and plays. Then for about ten years during the Taishō period he worked as a *shimpa* playwright, subsequently becoming known as a writer of plays for *kabuki* in the mid-1920s. While the actor Sawada Shōjirō (1892-1928) was alive, he also wrote many plays for an intermediate theater genre called *shinkokugeki*. Mayama's production during his *shinkokugeki* and *kabuki* periods was almost entirely of historical plays. The heroes of his plays are historical personalities from the Heian (794-1185) to the early Meiji periods. Many plays are set in the main part of the Edo period or during the years before the Meiji Restoration of 1868. His most famous work is the ten-part *Genroku Chūshingura*.

Mayama wrote his plays on the basis of detailed historical research. He had two or three research assistants working for him and he was himself an ardent collector of antiquarian sources and old maps. His particular method of playwriting was to depart as little as possible from historical fact while not forgetting for an instant that his real profession was that of a playwright. In addition to this, he wrote extremely detailed stage directions for the actors, in which he incorporated the results of his research. His dialogue too has quite a high content of historical fact.

The following type of scene appears especially frequently. Character A tells Character B in some detail something that he should already know. The reason why Mayama Seika had no compunction about having A tell B things he has no need to tell him seems to be that Mayama is anxious for his audiences to know these things too. A reading of Mayama Seika's plays suggests strongly that he wants to teach his audiences, or at least inform them, about certain historical facts.

His ten-play cycle *Genroku Chūshingura* can be cited as an example of this. This long work was written over a period lasting from 1934 to 1941. Certain of these ten plays have been performed frequently in both the prewar and the postwar periods. A "full performance" (*tōshi*—in this case this means six rather than ten plays) has been produced four times in the postwar period.

A great many plays have been written on the subject of the revenge of the Akō *rōnin* from the time when it happened in 1702 until the present day, but of those written in the Edo period *Kanadehon Chūshingura* is generally reckoned the masterpiece. In the modern period nothing has been written on as large a scale as Mayama's *Genroku Chūshingura*. *Kanadehon Chūshingura* is probably the most famous set of plays ever written in Japan. Anyone who has even an occasional playgoing habit is likely to have seen some part of it. So almost everyone who watched *Genroku Chūshingura* in the 1930s would have previously seen *Kanadehon Chūshingura* or some part of it. Even if they had not seen it, they would at least have been aware of its subject matter. And we can be sure that this was very much in Mayama Seika's mind as he was writing his own *Chūshingura*.

When Mayama Seika was preparing to write *Genroku Chūshingura*, he col-

lected materials concerning the various events from the incident in the Great Pine Corridor of Edo castle to the *seppuku* of the *rōnin* and made a meticulous study of them, as he had done in writing historical plays previous to this. Mayama wrote the part of the hero Ōishi Kuranosuke for the *kabuki* actor Ichikawa Sadanji II. Sadanji visited Mayama's home in 1935 and he wrote afterwards about how he found Mayama's study strewn with materials relating to the *Chūshingura* story [ICHIKAWA 1935: 45].

Of course *Genroku Chūshingura* is not a play cycle totally faithful to historical fact. A number of scenes from *Kanadehon Chūshingura* had been beloved of *kabuki* audiences over more than two centuries and some of these Mayama incorporated direct into his own version. To use an example that is often quoted, the weather on the night of the attack of the *rōnin* was rain, not snow as in *Kanadehon Chūshingura*, but Mayama Seika has snow falling in *Genroku Chūshingura*.

Mayama Seika's stance of trying to be faithful to historical fact appears directly and indirectly many times in *Genroku Chūshingura*, but perhaps the clearest expression of it comes in Act II of play 9 *Sengoku Yashiki* (*Sengoku Residence*). In this scene forty-six of the *rōnin* are interrogated about their attack on their dead lord's enemy in front of the City Magistrate Sengoku Hōki no Kami. Before the questioning can begin, it has to be ascertained that all the *rōnin* are present. In order to do this one of the characters on stage "takes out a record of the members of the vendetta and reads out their names [KŌDANSHA SHUPPAN KENKYŪJO 1975: 604]." So while about fifty actors sit quietly on the stage, a list of the names of the Akō *rōnin* is read aloud. Not only the names are read out; each *rōnin*'s salary and age are also given. Each *rōnin* answers "Here" or "Yes." This takes about ten minutes. During this time the actors do not move at all. I have seen five performances of this play and each time the audience listened quietly. The Akō *rōnin* are held in great affection by the Japanese and there must have been many members of the audience who were waiting to hear a name they knew read out. But there must also have been some who were unfamiliar with the names of the *rōnin*. There is no doubt that the reading of this list is dramatic, but it is also clear that the audiences were being taught some historical facts or reminded of some that they already knew. It would be difficult to find the reading of a plain list of forty-odd names in western drama.

We can find another example of this in the first play *Edojō no Ninjō* (*The Attack in Edo Castle*). In this scene Okado Denpachirō is trying to convince a government representative that Kira's attitude has been suspicious. Denpachirō says: "A *samurai* should have in him from birth a *wakizashigokoro*²⁾." The other person asks: "A *wakizashigokoro*?" whereupon Denpachirō proceeds to explain what it is [KŌDANSHA SHUPPAN KENKYŪJO 1975: 38]. These lines seem to be directed at the

2) An instinctive spirit of self-defense, by which a *samurai* should defend his life in the last resort with his short sword (*wakizashi*). The *wakizashi* was the sword used for *seppuku* and was therefore also the defender of a *samurai*'s honour.

audience. It is very unlikely that a government representative would not know what a *wakizashigokoro* was. It is more likely that Mayama Seika inserted these lines because he thought it essential for the audience to understand this point.

10. CONCLUSION

There may be a difficulty here in using as an example a playwright who bases his plays on historical incidents. Writers of historical plays have been active in the West too since the time of Shakespeare. These playwrights have put forward their own views of history through various plays. As he relates the events of a past epoch, a playwright is inevitably influenced by his own thinking concerning his own age or the age he himself has fixed on. Mayama Seika is no exception to this. There are many places in his plays where he too reflects the age in which he was living or reacts against it.

What I am concerned with here, however, is not so much playwrights' or novelists' view of history—why a certain historical event occurred or according to what historical process it occurred; my concern is with their stating that the facts of a certain historical event are such and such according to the source materials available. Because Mayama Seika had a reputation as an indefatigable researcher, spectators at his plays and others who read them in magazines were looking out for this, and Mayama Seika fully answered their expectations. And it was not only Mayama Seika. There are a number of historical novelists in Japan who have a reputation for doing research into historical materials. Probably the most famous such literary person in Japan is Mori Ōgai.

This phenomenon can be observed not only in serious literature but in popular literature too. In the works of the popular prewar novelist Hasegawa Shin (1884-1963) there are many passages where he carefully explains to his readers the meanings of words which were current in the Edo period but are no longer in use. Even today there are still popular novelists writing who are conscientious as researchers.

There are probably few countries in the world where the feeling is as strong as in Japan that one can learn about one's own history through creative works—plays, novels, films, television dramas, cartoons, etc.. In Britain too the general reader is interested in historical novels, especially historical biography, but in terms of numbers of copies printed this is not on the scale of Japan. Furthermore, creative writers in Japan have the reputation of being able to deepen their readers' understanding of a past age, because it is recognised that with their strong intuition and imagination they should have a good understanding of men's emotions and psychology.

This paper has mainly been concerned with historical dramas and historical novels in modern Japan, but facts often make their appearance in creative works in a wider sense. Documentary novels are popular among the Japanese. One can find factual material in various types of classical literature, for example war tales such as *Heike Monogatari* (*The Tale of Heike*) or the domestic dramas of Chikamat-

su Monzaemon. Japanese as readers of creative works are accustomed to the frequent appearance of factual material.

If it is the case that audiences in Japan accept the peppering of plays with historical facts as part of the pleasure of watching plays in the theater, this is something very interesting to a theater historian. Maybe an anthropologist or a sociologist might point to the "curiosity" of the Japanese, which has itself been the subject of academic study, but a theater historian would have a different approach.

Unlike the reader of a novel, once spectators are inside the theater, they cannot easily escape. A novel which bores because of the large quantity of historical facts in it can be easily discarded, but only a few spectators try to leave a theater during a play. If one is not bored, there is no need to discard a novel or leave a theater, but if one is likely to be bored, one has the choice of not buying the novel or not going to the theater. But playwrights like Mayama Seika and several historical novelists are still successful in maintaining their popularity, and one may suppose from this that spectators and readers can find enjoyment in their works.

The reader of a novel has the freedom to read it slowly or fast, in one go or at several sittings. The novelist is well aware that his/her readers have this freedom. But it is more difficult for the playwright. He has to produce a finished piece of work which will be performed in a limited amount of time. Perhaps one can go as far as to say that the phenomenon of a playwright maintaining his popularity while packing his plays with historical facts in spite of this time limit is an indication that being taught these facts is part of the enjoyment that audiences experience.

Of course there is no proof to support such a hypothesis, but when one thinks of the history of theater in the widest sense in modern Japan, it does seem that there are ample opportunities for audiences to learn various things while watching plays. When one considers the prevalence of works of this kind and their popularity, one may venture to suggest that being taught something is a pleasure in Japan.

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