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Amateurs and the Theater : The So-called Demented Art Gidayū

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Amateurs and the Theater: The So-called Demented Art *Gidayū*

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1. ARISTOCRATIC AND COMMERCIAL CULTURE

Modern technologies increasingly tend to make us passive listeners or spectators to music, literature, drama and sport through phonographs, radio, film and television. Nearly every day we consume arts and amusements as commodities to be purchased. But traditionally we had to participate actively in order to experience arts or entertainments. Though new technologies tend to distance the consumer from the professional producer, we still witness evidence of the persistent human urge to join in and become part of a community of participants. Whether as amateur musicians, members of actor fan clubs, collectors of baseball cards, or *karaoke* stars, we see a pattern of seeking out like-minded folk to share our activities, and of seeking to mimic or get as close as possible to famous professionals in whatever field. A standard for judging the quality of modern life, one might argue, is a measure not solely of how much free time or expendable income the populace has but more importantly to what use it puts them. The predominant view in the modern industrialised world of the last few decades has been that value in life is the pursuit of economic progress and material wealth; nevertheless, all societies have undercurrents of resistance, which claim that humans cannot live by bread or rice alone, that quality in life is a balance between the material and practical, and the spiritual and frivolous. How would we rank the major nations of the world if we were able to determine the quality of their amusements, the nature of their pursuits of pleasure or entertainment, and the balance between tendencies toward hedonism and self-cultivation? Such comparisons are of little interest for any hierarchical ranking which might emerge; comparisons are useful if they help us gain new perspectives on how we have structured our lives today and on our sense

of values. Another approach is to examine how societies viewed play-time, both for children and adults, in the past, and to distinguish what has been considered "work" and what "play."

Aristocratic culture, in whatever setting, relies on ownership of land or capital for the maintenance of economic or military power. But the maintenance of status, the right to be considered superior to other classes, also depends on the control of classical arts. Japanese court culture demanded fluency in arts such as poetry, calligraphy and music for admission to its ranks. Traditional societies around the world have tended to accept aristocratic privilege if it is built upon self-discipline and self-cultivation—an efficient use of the free time that wealth and status grant. Acceptance as a Heian gentleman or lady (*yoki hito*) demanded training in court etiquette and various artistic hobbies. A cult of sophisticated pleasure-seeking (*sukimono*) was fundamental, but the ethic was built on the concept of pursuing leisure with vigor, style and sensitivity. Heian courtiers developed an extremely complex ideal of the cultivated amateur artist, which has continued to influence Japanese culture even today. Material means is a necessary attribute for admission to polite society, but that alone is never enough. Proficiency in cultural activities is invariably a necessary thread in the fabric of upper class society. The cultivated use of leisure remains an important measure of the quality of life in societies and for individuals.

The idea that a professional artist is superior to an amateur is now common but has not always been so. Technologies such as commercial printing and the rise of urban commercial areas of entertainments have been a catalyst for the separation of professional producers of arts and amusements. In Japan, though we see some trends toward commercialism before 1600, the rise of several urban centres in the Edo period provides the foundation of modern commercial culture. The aristocratic legacy certainly remained influential, but what distinguishes this period is the tension between the maintenance of traditional classical, and therefore class values among both Kyoto courtiers and *bakufu* (government) *samurai*, and the demands spurred by the energies and new wealth generated by commoners officially below the ruling class. I have argued elsewhere that one view of this age is that of commoners consistently attempting to appropriate the right to claim the past, in particular the classical or aristocratic legacy [GERSTLE 1989a]. The *bakufu*'s official Neo-Confucian ideology, of course, was not openly sympathetic to any public or private pursuit of pleasure. Work and duty suitable to one's station was official policy. The popular image persists that Edo society was repressive and restrictive, but recent research has altered this view.

2. COMMONERS AND *YŪGEI*

The late Moriya Takeshi was a pioneer in research on *yūgei* (cultural arts) in Edo Japan, work which led him to postulate the radical notion of *asobi* (play or amusement) as fundamental in the total ideology of the society, and in particular

that the commoner classes claimed the right to the aristocratic pursuit of pleasure [MORIYA 1980, 1986: 111-112, 1987]. This idea pushed me to think afresh about the pervasive Japanese love of amateur theatrical activity and need to participate in hobbies. The contemporary Japanese propensity for social, life-long hobbies began to make sense. The writings of Ihara Saikaku (1642-1693), among others in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, show clearly that socialising through amateur cultural pursuits was thought to be a means of meeting the right people (*yoki hito tsukiai*); but these same writings always warn of the over-zealous amateur whose passions lead to individual, family and business ruin. The playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon's Chūbei in *Courier for Hell* (*Meido no hikyaku*, 1711) is presented as the new commoner gentleman:

He is clever in business, at assigning packloads, and at managing the thrice-monthly couriers to Edo. Adept in the tea ceremony, poetry, chess, and backgammon, he writes an elegant hand...Knowing in the ways of love.
[KEENE 1961:162]

Chūbei, as an exemplar of Edo-period *sui* (pleasure-quarter expert), is in the finest tradition of the Heian gentleman who pursued elegant pleasures (*suki*). Of course the modern version, if untempered, often led to excess and ruin, as in this play, but the point is that commoners had come to expect the right to participate in the cultural arts (*yūgei*). It is important also to note the wide range of *yūgei* categories in Edo Japan; any activity outside those associated with official work of the four classes (government, farming, crafts, commerce) was considered an "art." Scholarship, including medicine and philosophy, was considered to be in the same basket as tea ceremony, dance and the performing arts. Moriya argues interestingly that it is this notion of "play" which infuses the lively, non-practical atmosphere of much of what we would today call scientific or scholarly activities [MORIYA 1980: 46]. Work is associated with public duty, while pleasure and fun are essentially private. The number of professionals who made a living as teachers of *yūgei* increases throughout the Edo period. The passion for such activity is fascinating and it is of course in this period that the *iemoto* (grand master, family based) system matures and commercial theaters increase to remarkable numbers throughout the country [MORIYA 1986: 111-112].

We now readily acknowledge that the more than 250 years of the Edo period witnessed tremendous social change and development, but a distinguishing pervasive feature, nevertheless, is the *bakufu* ideological constant, which held that each person, at least ideally, should remain within his or her particular status, vocation and locality. (Such views were, of course, hardly uncommon in the world during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.) Regardless of the reality, the ideal constricted expectation. And it is from this official ideology that the somewhat dark popular image of this age persists. The parameters of opportunity in everyday life certainly were distinct; yet it is clear that in the cities at least the pursuit of

amusements and hobbies (*keiko-goto*) of all kinds flourished increasingly throughout this period. Individuals sought out alternative or exotic private worlds in their free time outside the bounds of public duty. With enough time and means, individuals pursued hobbies with remarkable passion and vigor. Participation is the key word here. The pattern is to join a community who pursue a particular activity under the guidance of a professional. Initiated into the secrets, the devotee eventually takes on a new name to gain an identity within this distinct community. Hino Tatsuo has written of this tendency among Edo artists to create little utopias based on poetry (*kyōka*, *haikai* etc.) circles [HINO 1977]. This practice, it would seem, extends far more widely and deeply into Tokugawa society. In these urban collectives of like minds, the ideal—in contrast to *bakufu* policy—was that young or old, male or female, *samurai* or commoner, all competed on equal terms.

Of course too much effort into play or hobby pursuits was perceived to be dangerous to the *bakufu*'s ideal Confucian state, or in more modern times even to an enlightened Meiji government, who saw *asobi* (play) as a hindrance toward the goal of the modern civilised state. Official Meiji ideology shifted from an ideal of stability, to an emphasis on dynamism, progress, nation-building and equality, but the role of hobby communities, especially those inherited from the Edo period, remained constant. They were a world outside the pressures of the new creed, which demanded achievement, success on the social ladder and acceptance of certain modern or western norms of behavior. The Edo arts were seen as subversive and banned from the modern national school curriculum (and virtually still are). One of the popular ditties of the period cleverly sums up the change: "*Uta ya shamisen yūgei misute kayou bunmei shōgakkō* ("Songs and *shamisen*, all the arts left behind as we set off for the modern civilised primary school.") [SAEKI 1990: 185]. Under the *bakufu* ideology of stability, *asobi* is subversive because it is the pursuit of private pleasure; it frees the individual—even if only temporarily—from official restrictions on status, vocation or locality. In the Meiji ideology of constant crisis and change, the same *asobi* is equally subversive though for somewhat different reasons. The class system was of course dissolved, but the state/public versus individual/private tension certainly continued. Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916) argued in two lectures in 1911, in contrast to the Meiji official view of *asobi*, that moral considerations have nothing to do with the natural tendencies of humans to spend as much energy as possible on enjoyable pursuits and as little as possible on work [NATSUME 1966a,b]. The path towards civilised society is to increase the ability of its members to spend their energies on avocations. Sōseki is most concerned about the painful effects of outside-induced modernization and civilization, but he is also interested in the psychology of human perceptions of work and play. The ideal civilised state is where the individual perceives his work to be an avocation. Sōseki's criticism of Japan's over-zealous efforts at nation-building based on tireless work and self-sacrifice still echoes in postwar Japan. Perhaps in 1911 he was looking back fondly on his less-pressured days in the 1890s when he and the poet Masaoka Shiki were known to frequent Women's *gidayū* performances and

other such popular theater in the *yose* (small performance halls) districts of Tokyo.

3. JŌRURI

In contemporary Osaka, Tokyo or any other Japanese city, *jōruri* (*gidayū*) evokes among most people—young or old—an image of something a bit musty, old-fashioned and difficult; few would see it as an entertainment for fun. It is striking how great has been the change since the first few decades of this century when *jōruri* was at its heyday, whether as professional *bunraku* theater, Women's *gidayū* or as one of the most popular amateur hobbies throughout Japan—or from the eighteenth century when amateur chanting was common among both men and women throughout the land. *Jōruri* is an interesting “amusement” for several reasons: one, its plays are the core of the repertoires in both *kabuki* and *bunraku* theaters; two, chanting was widely popular among both men and women until the end of World War II; three, its nearly one thousand published texts were widely read throughout Japan as popular literature until at least the Meiji period; and four, over the last three centuries it has been alternately praised by intellectuals, fans and government officials alike as the highest exemplar of morality, the essence of Japanese culture, and likewise condemned as horribly immoral and perverse. Its history, particularly as an amateur hobby, offers insights into the larger question of the role of *goraku* (amusements) and particularly the relationship between amateurs and the performing arts.

Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1886-1965) is representative of what I would call Japan's complex if not quixotic relationship with its popular cultural heritage, and by extension its own identity. Outsiders tend to see Japanese attitudes toward its own culture as often one extreme or the other: either passionately pro-China or pro-Western and dismissive of its own heritage, or extremely nationalistic and dismissive of foreign cultures. Though all nations have nationalistic pride, few display such official antagonism toward their own traditions, particularly elements of popular culture. The *ga-zoku* (elegant-aristocratic vs. vulgar popular) dichotomy in Japanese-Chinese aesthetic theory certainly influences perceptions of popular culture, but more fundamental elements are at play here. Music and associated performing arts are a barometer of culture because they are pursued for pleasure and because they evoke emotional, rather than intellectual responses. It is fascinating to an outsider that postwar Japan has virtually discarded the Edo performing arts as part of its cultural heritage.

Tanizaki loved *kabuki* and *bunraku*, growing up with them as part of daily rather than school life. He was fluent with both worlds as any other writer of his time. Tanizaki is both a stimulus and a challenge to my thesis. His 1948 essay, “*Iwayuru Chiho no Geijutsu ni tsuite*” (“On the Demented Art *Gidayū*”) reveals a complex view of Edo popular culture [TANIZAKI 1968: 331-357]. He describes sitting with Onoe Kikugorō, Bandō Mitsugorō and Yamashiro no Shōjō, three of the most famous *kabuki* and *bunraku* performers of the time. Yamashiro no Shōjō

leans over to ask him to defend *gidayū* from the criticism of Tatsuno Yutaka, a writer and scholar of French literature. The essay depicts his struggle to come to grips with what he sees as his own intellectual versus emotional sides. In essence, he is embarrassed *vis-à-vis* the West about various aspects of *bunraku* plays he considers foolish or ludicrous. He is ashamed that *bunraku* and *kabuki* are being touted in the postwar period as Japan's contribution to international culture. His cringing at seeing a westerner in the *bunraku* audience is revealing. Why does he pray that the man will leave, and conclude that "we Japanese have *jōruri* in our blood but its 'illogicality' and 'feudal' elements should not be exposed to foreigners" [TANIZAKI 1968: 355-356]? His association of the war and the military with *jōruri* as a *kokusui geijutsu* (an art representing the essence of Japan) obviously colors his attitude, but he represents here the complex nature of the intellectuals' relationship with *jōruri* and by extension with Edo popular culture in general. The quixotic nature of intellectual or official attitudes toward *jōruri* over the last few centuries offers us a fascinating insight into Japan's relationship with its own past.

Jōruri has from at least the 1670s expected a close relationship between the professional chanter and his connoisseur audience. We know that it was avid patrons who pushed performers such as Harimanojō and Kaganojō to include the hitherto secret musical notation in the published texts because this helped them when taking chanting lessons [GEINŌSHI KENKYŪKAI 1975a: 7]. In the 1680s chanters began to publish collections of individual scenes (*danmonoshū*) expressly for disciples or amateurs to use as practice texts [GERSTLE 1986]. *Jōruri* texts thereafter for the next two centuries were always published with the chanter's notation included. Professional chanters were often given court titles and we know that they did perform in lofty Kyoto settings from time to time, but *jōruri* became an Osaka inspired art, certainly by and for the common folk. Its golden age of box office success and creation of today's famous plays is from about 1700 until the 1770s, but even then hardly any performers could rely solely on income from the theater for their livelihood. Performers regularly supplemented their income as teachers.

Jōruri music and particularly the *shamisen* has always been considered by official Neo-Confucian ideology to be highly evocative and erotic, and therefore disruptive of morals. But there was a contrasting view that popular (*zoku*) arts were important because they portrayed the emotions (*ninjō*) of the common people and that an understanding of such emotions was necessary for an understanding of the Way and of good government; Itō Jinsai (1629-1705) was the most influential proponent of this theory. The upright Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) certainly was a regular *jōruri* fan during his five-year stay (1752-57) in Kyoto, as recorded in his diary. His acceptance of the emotional content of literature in contrast to official Confucian doctrine, later argued in his treatises on poetry and Heian fiction, perhaps allowed him to enjoy *jōruri*'s depiction of human tragedies and triumphs. He was of course influenced by Itō Jinsai's emphasis on *ninjō* as essential for an understanding of the Way. Norinaga's teacher Hori Keizan (1688-1757), a Confucian scholar in the Jinsai line, however, in his *Fujingen* (1767) reveals a complex

view of the *shamisen* [HORI KEIZAN 1915]. Though he argues straightforwardly that an understanding of *ninjō* is necessary for the Way and for good government (*ninjō ni tsūtatsu sezushite, kokka no matsurigoto wa hittei ni naranu koto nari*, pp.325-26), he is adamant about how the *shamisen* can lead innocent minds astray (*okori mo senu in'yoku o sasou mono nari*) [HORI KEIZAN 1915: 338; GERSTLE 1990a]. He prefers the medieval, more reserved tones of the *biwa*, but nevertheless acknowledged the power of *jōruri* to evoke the essence of human emotion, recording almost indecent praise for first-rate performances of the best *jōruri* chanters in the same section, which includes a general condemnation of *shamisen* music.

An audience will certainly enjoy the performance of a talented chanter, but when listening to a master, the entire audience without exception is moved to the depths of their souls; and losing sense of self, each lets out a cry, "magnificent!" (*Ah/shitari ya*). This too is an example of an act of innocence (*omoiyokoshima nashi*, pp.328-29).

Such views presage Tanizaki's complex feelings almost two centuries later.

We know that a general passion for the theater was common enough for it to become the butt of satire from as early as 1720 in Ejima Kiseki's *Ukiyo Oyaji Katagi* (*Characteristics of Modern Old Men*), but we also know that the *bakufu* government was ready to crack down on any performance which caused a public disturbance [GERSTLE 1989b]. By the second half of the eighteenth century, nevertheless, we have more and more references that show an increasing population of amateur *jōruri* performers. An important book which attests to the level of quality among amateurs is the *Amateur Jōruri Critiques* (*Kishin Shirōto Jōruri Hyōbanki*) published in Osaka, Kyoto and Edo in 1786 [GEINŌSHI KENKYŪKAI 1975b,c; GERSTLE, MALM, INOBE 1990]. This is a remarkable document because it is a criticism of public performances of amateurs at temples or shrines (*kishin*), which means that the audience paid to see these performances and that the proceeds went to support the temple or shrine. The critiques are serious and in the style of earlier books on professional performances. Tribute is paid to these amateurs in the subtitle: *Mirror of Hard-Working Amateurs* (*Benkyō Sukanjo*). This text even goes as far as boldly criticising the general level of current professionals. The word *shirōto* (amateur) has, from the earliest records of its use, been associated with the performing arts. The Shōgakkan *Nihon Kokugo Daijiten* lists Zeami's fifteenth-century *nō* treatise *Fūshikaden* as the first reference, but its common use dates from the Edo period. The continuous publications of critiques, training guide books and fictional accounts paint an interesting picture of how serious the business of amateur performances became. Shrines and temples were the usual settings for amateur public performances. These amateurs certainly craved the fame of being on stage and of having one's name in print. The later Meiji-Taishō-Shōwa *Jōruri Zasshi* and other magazines served the same function, that of criticism and of publishing photographs and short histories of the winners of competitions. The

urge to strive to be as good as a professional, however, is matched by the opposing ethic of the cult of the amateur, the purity of performing for the gods and for the benefit of others—not for one's own profit. An important word which appears often as the purpose of performance is *nagusami*, a term Chikamatsu used to describe the aim of *jōruri*. It has the Buddhistic meaning of calming the spirit and of being a serious aid to the human condition of suffering. The *Amateur Jōruri Critiques* also describes the purpose of amateur performance as *nagusami* [GEINŌSHI KENKYŪKAI 1975b:493]. And it depicts how each night all the gods in Osaka gather to discuss the various *jōruri* performances. Amateurs perform, at least ideally, for the gods' pleasure and the critique is from them. The main text contains rankings of amateurs and commentary on their skill and techniques. The focus is Osaka, but it includes lists of individuals in Kyoto, Edo and Sakai as well. Competition both among groups or clubs and among individuals is fundamental to the organization of amateur activities. *Jōruri (gidayū)* has never had an *iemoto* system and has always depended on competition, rather than lineage, in both professional and amateur spheres for the vigor of the tradition.

The somewhat earlier fictional satire *Tōsei Shibai Katagi* (*Characteristics of Modern Theater*, 1777) focuses on the passion for theatrical participation among the young in Kyoto and Osaka [GEINŌSHI KENKYŪKAI 1973]. The opening gives the highest praise possible for the *shamisen*, claiming it has the power to entice anyone's heart—far “above that of the *biwa* or *koto*” (p.433). “No matter who the fellow playing is, the charm of the *shamisen* makes the girls want to see his face.” This enticement of erotic fame, much like the perceived glory of becoming a rock star today, leads the first young gent of this collection of stories to take up the *shamisen*. His devotion, however, leads to parental anger and finally eviction. He therefore becomes an apprentice to a professional but is treated harshly now that he wants to be a professional and only finally makes it after much difficulty. In the second story, a *sake* merchant's son takes up chanting as a hobby and is flattered by the professionals into thinking that he has extraordinary talent. Another story depicts a fellow who takes up *kabuki* villain roles after his business fails. This collection of stories suggests how powerful and how close was the allure of theatrical life, and how amateur activity was common in daily life.

The last few decades of the eighteenth century began the golden age of amateur *jōruri* which lasted until World War II. The 1797 *Hanakenuki* implies in fact that there were far too many amateurs about: “Amateur *jōruri* performers are as common as ants,” the author states, and continues, “today there seems to be a teacher on every block” [GEINŌSHI KENKYŪKAI 1975c: 232]. He complains that the quality of shrine performances has declined and advises that one wait until after many years of practice before performing in public [GEINŌSHI KENKYŪKAI 1975c: 239]. Shikitei Sanba's *Ukiyoburo* (*Bathhouse in a Floating World*, 1809) makes jest of the popularity of amateur *jōruri* among both men and women [NAKAMURA 1957: 103-105, 229-232]. The 1808 *Jōruri Keiko Himitsu-bako* describes the popularity of *jōruri* in all three major cities and far into the countryside, and cautions against

chanting in the public bath or when drinking or walking [GEINŌSHI KENKYŪKAI 1975d: 275]. Though most of these texts are written in a light and humorous style, increasingly they want *jōruri* to be considered a serious art. The author of *Hanakenuki* is severe in his criticisms of standards of performance and general behavior. His main thrust is that *jōruri* is a serious art through which moral teachings (*jingi*, *kōtei*, *chūshin*) are made clear through the tales and easily understood by all. It expresses the essence of *nō* drama through more realistic action (*jitsui*), teaching the varied forms of human emotion (*ninjō*) [GEINŌSHI KENKYŪKAI 1975c: 231]. His aim is to make *jōruri* a classical art and therefore respectable. Such defenses of the performing arts always remind me of Plato and his fear of passionate Dionysiac music and his view that music should be orderly and produce good, model citizens. Aristotle, of course, presented a different view of the use of the depiction of powerful and even excessive emotions on the stage. The author of *Hanakenuki* does make a strong claim for the didactic thrust of *jōruri* but in fact opens his treatise with an “apology” of a different kind:

Those who love to drink *sake* don't tend to like *mochi* rice cakes. Those who love scholarship don't tend to like the theater. Each tends to find his own delights to enjoy. (p.230)

This is in a strong Edo tradition (with such writers as Hiraga Gennai and Shikitei Sanba) of defending the performing arts as being useful for their own sake as entertainment. This debate, nevertheless, is likely to continue forever.

4. WOMEN IN JŌRURI

We know that women made up a considerable number among amateurs and professionals from the eighteenth century onward. *Jōruri Keikoburi* (*Jōruri Lessons*), a comic *sharebon* novel published in 1777, describes a *jōruri* lesson in Edo given by a woman teacher [SHAREBON TAISEI HENSHŪ IINKAI 1980]. The 1819 *Gidayū Shusshin Roku*, states that women's *jōruri* began to flourish in the 1770s and is all the rage today, and gives considerable details on women performers [GEINŌSHI KENKYŪKAI 1975e: 58, 75-76]. Asakura Musei, the famous scholar of popular arts, traced women *gidayū* performances in a 1913 article [ASAKURA 1992: 168-174]. He found that women performers of *bungo-bushi*, a variant of *jōruri*, became very popular in the 1730s in Edo but after the 1739 ban on *bungo-bushi* because of its erotic themes, these women shifted to *gidayū* chanting. Since public performances by women were associated with prostitution, they were occasionally banned but would usually return after a few years. The boom in Edo women *gidayū* performances commenced about 1813 when a young girl of about twelve was given permission to perform to support her aged mother. This spurred others to begin performing and the 1820s saw a flourish of popularity until the severe crackdown of 1841 as part of the Tenpō Reforms when thirty-six performers and

several hall managers were arrested and jailed. The reason for the crackdown was specifically because of the popularity among *samurai* who became passionate followers of these young women. A fascinating aspect of this period and the later mid-Meiji boom as well is that it was common for the young girls to dress and wear their hair in the young boy's style (*wakashū*). This is a reversal of *onnagata* eroticism in *kabuki*. At the height of this period of popularity, the critique *Musume Jōruri Gei Shinasadame* (*A Critique of Young Women's Jōruri*, 1837) was published, attesting to the extent of their fame [GEINŌSHI KENKYŪKAI 1975f: 518-527]. Each performer is matched with a famous actor from one of the three cities. The criteria for judging them is on voice and technique, as well as on appearance. Some of the phrases used are: "erotic chanter" (*iroke no katarite*), "a face to worship" (*okao ga ogamitai mono*), and "the best possible voice and beauty" (*koe no yoi to gokiryō no yoi no wa hoka ni wa arumai*). This fascination both with their real talents as artists and with their passionate performances foreshadows the attractions of women performers in the mid-Meiji. Instead of young *samurai*, the élite university students of Tokyo, Waseda and Keiō were so passionate in their patronage that Toyama Shōichi, the Minister of Education, announced publicly in 1900 that university students were not to attend Women's *gidayū* because of the bad influence it was thought to have on innocent young minds. Though he could not enforce this view and it had little immediate impact, it was another example of official exclusion of Edo popular culture from the modern Japanese identity. Perhaps he knew about the Tenpō Reforms' precedent.

The official attitude toward any of the popular performing arts has consistently been to keep them out of sight and out of mind from *samurai*, or later from the élite in society. The *bakufu* official Moriyama Takamori (1738-1815) reflects the official line when he admonishes in his *Shizu no Odamaki* (1802) those among the *samurai* who flirted with such arts:

The *shamisen* became extremely popular during the 1740s-1760s. Eldest sons of good *samurai* families and even other sons all took lessons; from morn till night *shamisen* sounds were always to be heard. Eventually they began to perform other *kabuki* music and full dramas, etc., and followed this depravity to the extent of performing amateur *kabuki* in residences. High *hatamoto* officials mimicking riverbed beggars (actors), aping female impersonators and stage heroes. [MORIYAMA TAKAMORI 1929: 658]

He gloats that the Kansei Reforms put a halt to this trend. Followers of *jōruri* obviously needed to argue the case that this art had educational benefits within the Confucian tradition in which literature's function is to teach morality (*kanzen chōaku*).

The idea of parents having their daughters taking lessons in a cultural art as part of a proper education was certainly part of court and *samurai* society from early on, but it was to take until the mid-eighteenth century before girls from good commoner families began learning *shamisen* music or dance. Moriya quotes

several texts of the period to support a view that by the late eighteenth century it had become common that girls from wealthy city households were learning to dance and sing material based on the theatrical world [MORIYA 1987: 42-43]. The word *keiko*, used today lightly to refer to lessons in anything, has the serious meaning of studying and training to achieve knowledge. An art needs to achieve some status as respectable or classical to be considered suitable for young girls or boys to study as part of their education. The second half of the eighteenth century saw in the city of Edo an unprecedented growth in interest by *samurai*, some of *daimyō* status, in the popular arts associated with *kabuki* and *jōruri*. I have elsewhere examined this phenomenon, which had the effect of raising the status of popular theater and of stimulating general interest in the performing arts as a way for young girls to get accepted into *samurai* households for work [GERSTLE 1989b]. The development of the *iemoto* system in many of the arts, of course, also contributed to the social acceptance of performing arts associated with the *shamisen*.

Regardless of official attitudes toward or periodic crackdowns on popular performing arts, theatrical activity flourished and remained central to cultural life in Japan. An 1825 print of rankings of theaters throughout Japan lists 132 "permanent" theaters, a remarkable number in comparison to any other culture in the world of that time [HATTORI 1986: 282-283; MORIYA 1986: 102-103]. This figure did not include the shrines, temples or other sites where many one-off performances by amateurs were held. Perhaps we need to argue that it was because of the restrictive nature of Tokugawa ideology that the escapist (*utsutsu o nukasu*, to use Moriya's phrase) element of popular theater was so attractive, or that participation was a kind of subversive statement toward the system, or that commoners were claiming a right to the pursuit of pleasure (*suki*) from the upper classes. It is fascinating to an outsider how well organized were these hobby communities, whether as *iemoto* organizations or in teacher/disciple groups or fan clubs, and how passionate and serious were the participants. What happens to this pattern of amateur activity after the fall of the Tokugawa class system when official restrictions are lifted on status, location and occupation for both men and women?

Saeki Junko cites the Meiji (1887) novel *Kyōiku Shōsetsu: Chigo-zakura* (*An Educational Novel about Blossoming Children*) by Hattori Bushō (1841-1908) as an example of the "modern" view of education and the role of traditional performing arts¹⁾ [SAEKI 1990: 186]. Any kind of "*asobi*" (fun), but particularly any art associated with the *shamisen*, is bad in the new enlightened Meiji Japan, because this keeps Japan backward and unable to relate to Western civilised cultures. The similarity to *bakufu* attitudes is obvious: Edo performing arts keep common folk

1) The novel is in *Meiji Bungaku Zenshū*, Chikuma Shobō [1969: vol. 4, 260-290]. See also the volume *Geinō (Nihon Kindai Shisō Taikēi*, Iwanami Shoten [1988: vol.18]) for an assortment of Meiji writings on state policy for popular Japanese performing arts. The articles (1886) of Iwamoto Zenji [337-339] are representative of the antagonism élites felt for the *shamisen*. He advocates that it be abandoned for Western instruments. In fact there was a movement in the early Meiji period to ban the *shamisen* altogether.

from doing their duty, which has changed from being good stable farmers, merchants or *samurai* bureaucrats to becoming dynamic and western-like. Hattori is of course following in the general *kairyō* (improvement) movements of the 1880s to modernise and sanitise all aspects of Japanese culture, and thereby make them acceptable to what were perceived to be international civilised standards.

The arrival of Commodore Perry's Black Ships in 1853 and the half-century struggle to repeal the subsequent Unequal Treaties, the symbol of acceptance in the civilised club of nations, affected Japanese attitudes and actions more than most of us can imagine today. The other great event which has affected Japanese society was the defeat in the Pacific War. Both historical moments brought about, at least for a time, official and intellectual rejection of the legacy of Edo-period popular culture with its vigorous and creative sub-culture of play, which I would argue, has been a denial of self-identity. Under the Meiji, however, the impact of Western culture was far less pervasive among the general populace than in the postwar era. *Kairyō* movements in the 1880s were essentially from the élites downward, and seem to have had only temporary and marginal immediate impact either on the practice of the performing arts or on their popularity. In the long run, nevertheless, the lack of official status and consequent exclusion from the school curriculum would have severe effects on these arts, especially after World War II. The official separation of actors and prostitutes, which had been administered as two sides of the same coin by the *bakufu*, did have the immediate effect of freeing theaters—large and small—from official control, allowing theaters to be built in convenient sites within city centers. Also importantly restrictions on women performers were lifted and this consequently led to the almost hysterical popularity of Women's *gidayū*, one of the most interesting cultural phenomena of the Meiji period.

5. THE GOLDEN AGE OF MUSUME GIDAYŪ AND ONNA GIDAYŪ

Musume (maiden) *Gidayū* was a more common term than *Onna* (women) *Gidayū* before the Meiji to designate *gidayū* performances by females, because girls began performing from very young ages, often under ten years, and their appeal was as much in their appearance (at least during their youth) as in their skill in chanting. Small performance halls (*yose*) around Tokyo had flourished from at least the early nineteenth century, but Meiji is the golden age. The range of entertainments, particularly different kinds of storytelling, was impressive. *Yose* were an essential part of student life from the 1880s to well into the twentieth century. Numerous references from writers such as Natsume Sōseki, Masaoka Shiki, Takahama Kyoshi, and Nagai Kafū to Nakae Chōmin and Shiga Naoya, to name a few, all frequented this world for some period in youth.²⁾ The 1877 *Saikyō Hanjōki* (*Life in the Western Capital*) describes succinctly the power of Women's

2) Some references are: Komiya Toyotaka, *Natsume Sōseki*, Iwanami Shoten [1938: 157] Takahama Kyoshi, *Haikaishi* in *Takahama Kyoshi Zenshū*, Mainichi Shinbunsha ↗

gidayū. They are angels (*tennin*) or mystics (*sennyo* or *senjo*) whose beauty Yang Kuei-fei does not even compare to. And their performances have “exquisite music which charms both the ears and eyes, and softens the heart as if one is in an intoxicated trance... moving even the trees and grasses in the mountains; how could the human heart withstand their impact [SAEKI 1990: 193]?” But as we have seen in so many such descriptions of performances the author must criticise: “To become enamored of such a frivolous, worthless thing—would that the audience would become infatuated with the study of modern civilization (*bunmei no gaku*).” Edo popular arts are subversive because they are seductive and keep innocent minds away from the duty to create a modern civilised state. We know from the *shishōsetsu* (I-novel) fiction of this period how severe were the strains on society to achieve worldly success and how it led many to follow a path of self-destruction.

The passion for women *gidayū* performers among both men and women is well documented. They were the first female stage stars of modern times, much like later popular singers, or stage, screen and television actresses. It was in the Meiji a relatively attractive means for a woman to achieve financial independence in an age when that was almost impossible without an inheritance. Many of these women never married and at the height of their careers commanded considerable incomes—at least in the late Meiji and Taishō eras.³⁾

6. *GIDAYŪ ZASSHI AND JŌRURI ZASSHI*

These performers were a stimulus both to men and women amateurs, and most connoisseurs of *gidayū* performances were amateurs. Serious amateurs actively tried to lessen the “erotic” elements in Women’s *gidayū* and heighten the artistic level. *Gidayū Zasshi*, which began publication in 1893 in Tokyo, was the first of a series of magazines devoted to *jōruri*. Its opening theme or “apology,” stating the journal’s mission, in essence is that *jōruri* is the receptacle of Japanese popular culture; that since *jōruri* is the only language commonly understood throughout the country, it should be taught as the core of the national curriculum as the model for

↘ [vol. 5 1974]; Nakae Chōmin, *Ichinen Yūhan* [1901] in *Nakae Chōmin-shū*, *Meiji Bungaku Zenshū*, Chikuma Shobō [vol. 13 1967]. Chōmin records several trips to *bunraku* and *rakugo* [166-171] and states that *gidayū* is the highest example of Japanese literature [177]. Shiga Naoya, diary in *Shiga Naoya Zenshū*, vol. 10; Kurata Yoshihiro, *Meiji-Taishō no Minshū Goraku*, Iwanami Shoten chap. 4 [1980]; Okada Dōichi, *Meiji-Taishō Onna Gidayū Seikan Monogatari*, Meitoku Insatsu [1953: 1-43].

3) Some books that document this history are: Okada Dōichi, *Meiji-Taishō Onna Gidayū Seikan Monogatari* [1953], Mori Yoshio, *Motome Monogatari*, Sōrinsha [1954]; Hayashi Yoshiki, *Onna Gidayū Ichidai: Toyotake Danshi Jōruri Jinsei*, Kōbe Shinbun Shuppan [1988]; Sakurai Toshie, *Toyotake Danshi no Isseki*, Minerbua Shobō [1989]; Takemoto Sokyō, Katō Masaki, *Hikigatari Onna Gidayū Ichidai*, Sōshisha [1990]. A.K.Coaldrake in *Joryū Gidayū: Women Performers of Gidayū in Contemporary Tokyo*, University of Michigan PhD [1986] has examined this tradition, particularly as it is practiced today.

the national standard language; and that we must keep this tradition alive and vigorous to maintain Japanese culture in the face of the Western challenge. The editor's push to make *jōruri* the model national language is fascinating since this was a Tokyo-based magazine and *jōruri* is a Kansai-centered language. The theme that *jōruri* contains the essence of Japanese culture remained a consistent cry in similar publications until the end of World War II.⁴⁾ The editor attempts to raise the status of *gidayū* through a series of articles on Women's *gidayū* published in four issues in 1897; he criticises the erotic elements of performance as a hindrance to *gidayū*'s development as serious art. The technique of tossing the head in order for a hairpin to fall out at climatic moments is cited as an example of poor practice.

This journal was influential in promoting both amateur and professional activities giving information on all aspects. There is an interesting reference to *Gidayū Zasshi* in Takahama Kyoshi's novel *Haikaishi* (serialised in *Kokumin Shinbun* in 1908), which gives us a good sense of its impact [TAKAHAMA 1974: 271-272]. Sanzō, a student and budding writer, has become a passionate fan of Takemoto Komitsu (Kotosa in real life). He is browsing in a Hongō bookshop and comes across several issues of *Gidayū Zasshi* and is delighted to discover in issue No.6 a photo of Komitsu, which captures her in performance with her hair in disarray; thereafter he searches out all articles on her in subsequent issues, learning more and more about the facts of her life. Takahama based much of this story on his own experiences in the 1890s and portrays vividly the student passion for these women. We see an elated Sanzō, who had thought that Komitsu was several years older, learn that she is only twenty-two years old, just one year older than himself. From the beginning, information on and photographs of both professionals and amateurs were an essential feature of these magazines.⁵⁾

The most influential and long-running of these journals was (*Naniwa Meibutsu*) *Jōruri Zasshi*, which began publication in 1899 and ended in 1945 after produc-

4) Issues of this magazine are not easy to locate. The Waseda Tsubouchi Shōyō Memorial Theatre Museum Library has some. Some other similar journals are: *Jōruri Zasshi* (Osaka) [1889-1945], issues of which can be found in Waseda, Furitsu Chūō Toshokan (Osaka), and the Kokuritsu Bunraku Gekijō Library. *Jōruri Sekai* (Kyoto) [1920-1930s?], in Waseda Theatre Museum and Osaka Furitsu Chūō Toshokan. *Gidayū Kenkyū* (Tokyo) [1921-?] in Waseda. *Jōruri Jihō* (Tokyo) [1929-?] in Waseda. *Jōruri Geppō* (Kurume) [1920s?-1930s?] in Waseda. *Jōkyoku Kenkyū* (Tokyo) [1940s] in Waseda, *Gidayū-kai*, *Dainippon Jōruri-kai*, *Jōruri Bunko*, *Seikyokukai*, *Kyūshū Jōruri Geppō*, *Take no Kawa*, *Engei* and *Kamigata* are some other titles I have seen or at least seen mention of. *Kamigata Shumi* (Osaka) [1920] is a delightfully tasteful small booklet (about fifty pages) with articles on various aspects of traditional Kansai culture. It is printed as if it were an Edo-period woodblock with folded pages and colour prints on the cover and inside. Each issue includes a stamp from a temple or shrine in the area, and has a seasonal aesthetic flavour. *Jōruri* commands centre stage naturally in its pages as Osaka's contribution to the best of Japanese traditional culture. I am thankful to Yoshinaga Takao for introducing me to this journal.

5) This trend was evident even in book publications. The 1930 monograph *Jōruri* ↗

ing about 425 issues. Its “head title” *Naniwa Meibutsu (Osaka’s Famous Original)* suggests that local pride *vis-à-vis* Tokyo was a stimulus in its inception and that it had the Tokyo *Gidayū Zasshi* in sight as its rival. *Jōruri Zasshi* is even more strident in the claim that *jōruri* is a world-class art form and unique to Japan, but it was focused more on amateur activity and less on Women’s *gidayū*, which was more of a Tokyo phenomenon. Since *jōruri* and other popular arts and music were not part of the school curriculum, writers had continuously to argue for *jōruri* as essential to the modern state (*kokka*). The editor in his first editorial used the word *kotodama* (word spirit) to convey the sense that *jōruri* narratives contained the soul of Japan. Chikamatsu was raised as standard—a match for the best overseas, even Shakespeare [SATŌ 1972, 1973].

One could cite many excellent quotations to show the vigor and passion of amateur *jōruri* and how it was considered by its followers to be good for the Japanese soul and nation state. The fact that again and again editors and contributors had to “defend” *jōruri* as useful and important indicates an insecurity in the face of official (usually Ministry of Education) or elite attacks on such popular arts. For example, the 1906 article (vol. 46) by Kinshikan Mitsunobu replying to an attack on *jōruri*, argues that Japan’s economic and military successes are due to Chikamatsu and *jōruri*, which everyone learns naturally through lessons. Victory in the Russo-Japanese War is due greatly to the knowledge and ethics in the heads of most of the soldiers. He argues that we must not abandon our heritage because we are now in a civilised age (*bunmei no yo*, pp. 10-11). An important point, he argues (p. 30), is that *jōruri* teaches good morals (*chūkō*) best because individuals “enjoy (*horetaru gyō*) chanting and so work hard at this hobby (*shumi*).”

An article in vol. 49 (1906) asks some basic questions about why one chants *jōruri*: to the question is it for oneself or for others, the answer is neither. The goal is constant self-improvement. For fun or for a profession? Neither, it is a Way to continuous improvement. How does *gidayū*’s popularity affect public morals? It depicts both good and evil and therefore it depends on the eye of the beholder (*miyō ni yori kikiyō ni yotte ri to mo nari gai to mo nari*, p. 6). *Jōruri* was a “way” of life for many, both in the sense of individual artistic (and therefore spiritual) training and as a focus of social activity. The running debate about whether amateurs should charge for their performances hits at the core of an amateur’s reason-to-be. The same issue, vol. 49, comments on the recent scandal in which fees were charged at an amateur performance at Dōtonbori’s Kado-za theater. The ideal of the purity of the amateur activity—that material profit is not the goal—remained essential throughout this period. This is one of the most impressive and attractive aspects of

↘ *no Sakusha* published in Kurume by Jōruri Gappō-sha is fascinating not for its first part on *jōruri* playwrights but for the other more than half of the 350-page book which has photographs of fifty men and women of western Japan, mostly Kyushu, each with name and business, and a final list of about 900 other names and businesses. Amateurs loved a little fame.

Japan's more serious amateur amusements and of course it harks back to the traditional view of arts as a serious Way in the Buddhistic sense. We know that even professionals acknowledged that amateurs had certain pieces which even surpassed professionals and that professionals went to learn such pieces from them.⁶⁾ *Jōruri* is one of the most difficult arts to master; the fact that some amateurs achieved this status at a time of a golden age of *bunraku* talent shows the extent of the passion for this hobby.

The need for official status was almost always near the surface for those most dedicated to *jōruri*. The editorial of vol. 57 (1907) asks why shouldn't *jōruri* be publicly-supported (*kōkyō*) since it is so important for the public good. And the public good is the maintenance of traditional ethics and loyalty in the face of Western influence.⁷⁾ Iwata Taizan, a frequent contributor from Tokyo to *Jōruri Zasshi* around this time, is the most fervently nationalistic *jōruri* fan I have come across while exploring this topic. He first appears in vol. 58 (1907) with the theme that *jōruri* is the hope for all of Japan to improve its culture (*fūzoku kairyō*). He appropriates the élite terminology and argues vehemently that *jōruri* is the source for all the Confucian virtues and Japanese aesthetics, and that it must be preserved (*kokusui hozon*) in order to oust the cultural influence of Europe and America and return to Japan's roots. Importantly he wants *jōruri* to be in the school system. He is thorough in his advice: "everyone must give *jōruri* plays (*maruhon*) for gifts at Obon and at the end of the year, and as part of every gift at any time" (p. 8). Iwata argues in vol. 60 that the victory in the Russo-Japanese War was due to *jōruri* and in vol. 61 that *jōruri* is the best source for *bushidō*. Iwata was certainly extreme in his nationalistic fervour, though he was representative of a wave of national pride after a victory over a European power. What is fascinating here is that it was still necessary, even with the renewed cultural nationalism of this period, for this journal to argue again and again passionately for the acceptance of *jōruri* as an officially sanctioned art and therefore allow it status in the state ideology. This was primarily because Japanese music was not allowed into the schools. Orikuchi Shinobu (1887-1953), who grew up in Osaka and was, like Tanizaki, extremely fluent with *bunraku* and *kabuki*, wrote in 1947: "For the youth of my generation, it was shameful to watch *kabuki*. Gentlemen were not supposed to go to the theater" [ORIKUCHI 1976: 450]. *Jōruri* and *kabuki* remained subversive to the state ideology.

6) The famous Meiji *shamisen* player Tsuruzawa Dōhachi says that it was not unusual for a professional to go to an amateur to learn a particular piece; Kōnoike Yukitake, *Dōhachi Geidan* [1944: 100-101]. *Jōruri Zasshi*, vol. 106 [1912] has an article on how amateurs are getting as good as the professionals and vol. 109 [1912] bewails the fear that there are too few professionals. Dōhachi also says that often patrons (*dannashū*) risked bankruptcy because of the costs of putting on private performances.

7) There is a fascinating 1930 article on how the popularity of baseball (which embodies the "American spirit") threatens the "Japanese spirit" in *Jōruri Zasshi* vol. 295 [2-4]. In particular, the author objects because baseball is accepted as a school activity.

Most issues of *Jōruri Zasshi* have one article on some sociological topic, but the other 95% of the magazine served the primary function of providing a focus for the nationwide community of practitioners, those who spent many years of their lives learning new pieces and regularly performing publicly in one of the many associations in the cities throughout the land, including Korea and Taiwan and the immigrant communities in the new world. A typical issue of the magazine was about seventy to a hundred pages and contained advertisements for all necessary gear—from texts, to music stands, to instruments and clothes, to medicine to keep one's throat healthy; and merchants were ready to ship to any point. Vol. 182 in 1918 is typical: it contains photographs of amateur gatherings, performers and prizewinners—both men and women. And importantly it has detailed mini-biographies of the prizewinners with address, business, telephone, history of performances, which pieces were specialities, and a list of previous prizes. There is an article analysing a *jōruri* piece and one on recommendations for judges in large competitions, as well as many short articles and reports. There is a report and criticism of each performer from all major amateur events and *banzuke* (playbills) of upcoming performances. Increasingly the journal carries more “scholarly” articles and modern printings of source materials. From the late 1930s we begin to see considerable changes, in particular a less “political” tone and more emphasis on professional *bunraku* as more scholars take a role in the editing, but the magazine contains reports on amateur performances until the very last issue just before the end of the Pacific War.

7. THE QUESTION OF OFFICIAL STATUS

The vigor and longevity of the passion for amateur chanting is impressive. Two questions: why was it so popular? and why did it disappear so rapidly after the war? Was its popularity just based on an anti-modernist stance of clinging stubbornly to an old culture to spite those who wanted to westernise the nation? We could, however, ask that question about the study of any traditional art in any society. Perhaps the dedication of some was driven by the need to get *jōruri* accepted officially. But we cannot avoid the fact that *jōruri* is one of the most difficult amusements imaginable, and people only pursue pleasure when it is fun and rewarding. There are some obvious reasons: one, the desire to participate in a group activity; two, the love of competition; three, the tradition of viewing artistic pursuits as a spiritual “way” and a means of self-improvement; four, the need to cling to one's familiar cultural roots in times of great social change; and five, people found it immensely satisfying as an amusement which always challenged them to go further. The second question of why such a quick demise is just as complex. Certainly the modern amusements of film, radio and phonographs and the introduction of western music, both through the schools and in the popular media, gradually drew audiences and practitioners away.⁸⁾ *Jōruri* is extremely difficult, like opera singing

8) Miriam Silverberg in a recent article discusses the prewar research of Kon Wajiro and

or learning the violin, and needs nurturing from a young age. But the acceptance finally of official status for *jōruri* as a *kokusui geijutsu* under the military period from the mid-1930s to the end of World War II proved ironically to be decisive in its downfall. Defeat brought both an official and, more importantly, a popular repudiation of all things perceived to be “feudal” or militaristic, and *jōruri* suffered more than most other arts. Once a generation of amateurs was lost because of either poverty or no interest, the tradition as a popular art could not recover. Without the teachers in the neighborhoods the art was lost because children no longer encountered *jōruri* as part of daily life. The code was lost and an understanding of the language and music gone. The 1984 inauguration of the National Bunraku Theater in Osaka both closed a chapter and opened a new one in the history of *jōruri*. This event publicly marked the end of *jōruri* as a popular art form; and at the same time the construction of this monument under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, completed almost exactly three hundred years after Takemoto Gidayū opened his theater a few blocks away, has finally given *jōruri* official status as a classical art of the nation and one that can be taught to children (though it still will not allow Japanese music in the school curriculum).

I am not sure that Tanizaki would be too happy with this development, nor of the habit now of taking *bunraku* and *kabuki* overseas to present to audiences around the world. I feel a bit nervous as the “foreigner” he saw in the theater and wished would go away. He described attending a *jōruri* recital just after the war and of thinking that everyone in the audience had a “*gidayū*” face, causing me to wonder if mine had the same characteristics—not too intelligent looking and terribly old-fashioned. I began to question why I did not find *jōruri* plays illogical and why I wanted to write books analysing the plays as important works in the world’s culture. And finally I began to feel guilty for translating the play *Sesshū Gappō ga Tsuji* (*Gappō at the Crossroads*, 1773), which he discusses in his essay, and even arguing that it is an extremely interesting and complex portrayal of female sexuality.⁹⁾ This play is an interesting choice for Tanizaki to discuss because he reveals his love of *jōruri* in most damning fashion by admitting that among the few possessions he took with him to Atami for three years to escape the bombings during the war, he brought some *gidayū* records along with other *shamisen* and *koto* music. A recording by Yamashiro no Shōjō of *Gappō* was one of them. This piece does have a convoluted plot with some supernatural, folktale-like elements and has been criticised for being “illogical” by scholars of *bunraku*. I believe, however, that the 1930 performance on this phonograph is one of the finest and most powerful productions ever recorded of any drama (and Tanizaki might have

Gonda Yasunosuke on modern popular culture in the first half of this century: “Constructing the Japanese Ethnography of Modernity”, *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 51, No. 1 [1992: 30-54]. She suggests that consumer capitalism was influential in the popularity of Western arts and fashions.

9) Submitted to a collection of Edo-period translations to be published in honour of Professor Howard Hibbett.

reluctantly agreed). Tanizaki of all writers, it seemed to me, should have loved the twisted elements of this play which show a young woman Tamate lusting after a young man, whom she has loved since first sight years before when she came into service in the *samurai* household; she pursues him passionately even though she has unwillingly been elevated to become his stepmother. She scandalises both her parents and her stepson. The sudden reversal (*modori*) late in the play, when Tamate reveals that she has disfigured her stepson-lover Shuntokumaru, “feigned” lust and finally sacrificed herself—all for motherly love—is at once easily understood in the conventions of the theatre and at the same time obviously odd because her action of sacrificing herself to save Shuntokumaru’s life only makes sense within the dramatic convention of a woman dying for her lover or husband. The play depicts female sexual desire frankly through confrontation of the incest (stepmother/stepson) taboo. Why is it that I see this as having a consistent internal logic that makes sense? And why are Tanizaki and others so uncomfortable with this and other like dramas?

8. CONCLUSION

Modern Japan’s élite has at times tended to idolise the West as a “rational” world of enlightened civilization—ignoring elements which don’t fit into the mould—and seen much of its own tradition as emotional and irrational. The modern Japanese official denial of its popular musical and dramatic heritage—and music and drama are predominant amusements in Japan—has had significant impact on modern self-identity. Tanizaki may have come to regret that he got his wish that children would cease to be exposed to *jōruri* and therefore get no taste at all for the foolish world of *bunraku* or *kabuki*, as he himself had as a child. Amusements are essential to a healthy, vigorous society, and the quality and content of leisure consciously or subconsciously determines our sense of individual and collective selves. A strong individualistic and competitive amateur performing arts tradition could have been welcomed by authorities, but it was not. The result is that the popular mind of the 1910s or 1920s is radically different from that of today. The erotic, evocative tones of the *shamisen* and the stories and language of *jōruri* are no longer part of the popular landscape; they are now far more exotic than American or European popular or classical music. This change was not accidental; it was virtually state education policy since the Meiji era. I think that we need to question more carefully how the policies on the amusements or music and drama have affected, and continue to affect, Japanese culture and identity over the last two centuries.

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