

Okumura Masanobu's "Large perspective picture of the Kaomise Performance"
depicting the *Ya no ne Goro* scene from the *Tale of the Soga Brothers*

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The Edo period (1600–1868), which witnessed the birth of Ukiyo-e, was the age of the most totally integrated feudal system in the history of Japan and the age in which the same system deteriorated and collapsed. It was an age of unprecedented peace after almost a century of civil strife, and it was favorable to the growth of a skillful and affluent merchant class. The merchants, however, suffered under the oppression of the feudal authorities. They had no true freedom, and the full development of their financial strength was severely obstructed, with the result that mercantile wealth was largely squandered in extravagant and unproductive ways.¹⁾

The townsmen of the time gave themselves over to fleeting delights and spendthrift behavior, drowning their cares in the enticements of the pleasure quarters. Second only to the pleasure quarters as centers of entertainment were the theaters. The large theaters supplied the townspeople with the only places for regular gathering where "their" world could be collectively celebrated – as showplace for their economic success, their licentious fantasies, and daring fashions, as well as for the venting of their veiled criticism of forbidden topics and of their masked aspirations for social recognition. Kabuki was the typical theatrical expressions of the Edo culture as it developed in the urban milieu, where the merchants played the main role in their fluctuating and ambiguous position of energetic economic leadership in the face of sociopolitical oppression.²⁾

While Kabuki was the dramatic art of the merchant townsmen of the Edo period, Ukiyo-e (pictures of the Floating World) was the graphic art of the Edo-period merchant class.³⁾ At the same time, the popular Kabuki theater was one of the favorite

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1) Seiichiro Takahashi, *Traditional Woodblock Prints of Japan*, New York, 1973, p. 9.

2) Benito Ortolani, *The Japanese Theater*, Princeton, 1990, p. 162.

3) Seiichiro Takahashi, *Ibid.*, p. 9.

themes of the Ukiyo-e artists.⁴⁾ The life of the Ukiyo-e depicting the Kabuki theater lay in the expression of formal pictorial beauty, particularly in the climatic scenes of the drama.⁵⁾

Ukiyo-e of the Kabuki theater often utilize Western-style perspective. They share enough features in common, to be considered a category of their own. The earliest known prints of the type date from the 1740s, but they continued to be popular.⁶⁾ Although Japanese artists had first been exposed to Western art by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century; it was only in the eighteenth century that Western techniques and styles of composition became more generally familiar. Etchings and oil paintings brought to Nagasaki by Dutch merchants led to experiments in these mediums by Japanese artists. The Japanese medium in which the influence of Western art is most clearly seen is woodblock printing. It is well known that the Edo period witnessed the most brilliant flowering of woodblock printing in Japanese history. Beginning in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the art of Ukiyo-e emerged in the ateliers of the Hishikawa, Torii, and Kaigetsudo schools. This genre took as its focus the brilliant literary, fashion, and entertainment culture of Edo -- the last-named comprising both the Kabuki theater and the government-licensed pleasure quarter called Yoshiwara. Ukiyo-e designers were among the first Japanese artists to adopt selected elements of the Western artistic tradition. Creating within a popular, relatively young art form, they were not bound as were the painter of more established schools, such as the Kano or Tosa, to accepted, conservative themes and techniques. Their experiments and any resulting innovations, in fact, only made their works more marketable to the eager mass audience. Western perspective, a mathematical system established during the Renaissance to create the impression of depth on a two-dimensional surface, was such an experiment adopted during the so-called Primitive phase of Ukiyo-e.⁷⁾ By the mid-eighteenth century, the first experiments in the use of Western perspective composition had appeared in Ukiyo-e woodblock prints and paintings. Employing vanishing-point perspective, these designs, whether in prints or paintings, came to be known as *uki-e*,

4) Benito Ortolani, *Ibid.*, p. 168-69.

5) William Watson, *The Great Japan Exhibition*, London, 1981, p. 131, fig. 110. Seiichiro Takahashi, *Traditional Woodblock Prints of Japan*, New York, 1973, p. 9.

6) Donald Jenkins, *Floating world revised*, Honolulu, 1993, p. 227.

7) M L Williams, "Western influences in "Pictures of the Floating World," *Japanese Prints : Realities of the Floating World*, Cleveland, 1983, pp. 49-52.

or “floating” perspective pictures.⁸⁾

“Large perspective picture of the Kaomise Performance (*Shibai kyogen butai kaomise o-ukie*)” by the Ukiyo-e print designer and painter Okumura Masanobu (1686-1764) in the Philadelphia Museum of Art is an excellent impression of the earliest known woodblock print to bear the word *uki-e* in its title.⁹⁾ (fig. 1) Its size is extra *oban*, 17 1/2” in height and 26 1/4” in width (44.5 x 66.7 cm). The image is characteristic of the earliest Ukiyo-e graphics in being printed in ink alone and then hand-colored, in this case, with red and yellow pigments. The coloring of the print is variously described as *urushi-e* (but there doesn’t seem to be any “lacquer” black), *beni-e* (but again, the colors don’t seem to include pink *beni*), or *tan-e* (but *tan* is generally used on much earlier prints).¹⁰⁾ Most colors show a gradation due to hand coloring. The impression and the condition of the print are good though there are vertical creases, and the surface of the print is rubbed in places. Its publisher, *Okumuraya Genroku*, is shown in the right margin. The source of the print in the Philadelphia Museum is a gift of Mrs. Henry LaBarre Jayne, to be added to the Henry LaBarre Jayne Memorial.¹¹⁾ How many

8) Stephen Little, “The Lure of the West: European elements in the art of Floating World,” *Museum Studies*, v.22 no. 1, 1996, pp. 74-93. *Uki-e* (perspective picture) is pictures emphasizing spatial depth in the Western manner. Masanobu was the first to use the technique, which was subsequently refined by Toyoharu. It is important as a forerunner of the woodblock landscape print. (Gabriele Fahr-Becker, *Japanese Prints*, Köln, 1994, p. 193.)

9) Okumura Masanobu (1686-1764): major Ukiyo-e painter, print artist, illustrator and publisher. He exercised the greatest influence on the development of the Ukiyo-e School during the first half of the eighteenth century. He seems to have been self-taught, carefully studying and assimilating the styles of the Torii artists as well as Moronobu, Sukenobu, and the Kaigetsudo. Masanobu’s work covers the whole range of early Ukiyo-e, from *sumizuri-e* and *tan-e* through *urushi-e*, *ishizuri-e* and *beni-e* on to the *benizuri-e* that just precede the development of full-color prints. His prints abound in the wit and Edo verve that typified the best in 18th-century popular art. He was often his own publisher and thus exercised a greater control over the final printed result of his designs than most Ukiyo-e artists. In his early work he shows a great fondness for parody and novel designs. With maturity, and with the increasing importance of coloring in the success of a print, Masanobu concentrates his attention more on design and harmony of composition. (Richard Lane, *Images of the Floating World*, Portland, 1983, p. 301. Helen C. Gunsaulus, *The Clarence Buckingham Collection of Japanese Prints*, Chicago, 1955, p. 116) For more information on Masanobu, see James Michener, *The Floating World*, New York, 1954, pp. 72-78.

10) Card catalog from the Philadelphia Museum of Art. For reference of the print, see Calvin French, *Through Closed Doors*, Kobe, 1977, #38, pp. 95-100; Richard Illing, *The Art of Japanese Prints*, Ware, 1980, p. 18, #12; Marjorie L. Williams, *Japanese Prints*, Cleveland, 1983, p. 50, #34.

11) Card catalog from the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

copied were produced is probably unknown, but besides the one in the Philadelphia Museum, there are other specimens in the Art Institute of Chicago and in the British Museum.¹²⁾

Like many prints of the period, it takes as its subject the lively Kabuki theater, which flourished in eighteenth-century Edo.¹³⁾ The print depicts the Kabuki actor Ichikawa Ebizo II playing *Ya no ne Goro* in the “arrow-sharpening” scene from a revenge drama about the Soga brothers, produced at the Nakamura Theater in Edo in 1740. Since theater prints served as souvenirs of specific productions, timeliness was all; we can assume that Masanobu designed this print in 1740. The dramatic view is clearly based on Western models, although it only approximates the one-point perspective technique that it so closely imitates.¹⁴⁾ In the rigid one-point perspective system all receding, parallel lines converge at a single vanishing point. If, for example, the receding lines of the balcony and side aisles in Masanobu’s theater print were extended, they would meet at one point above the painting of Mt. Fuji. Masanobu’s handling of the system does, however, arbitrarily vary in other elements of the design; the boards at the right of the stage are contrary to the overall geometric plan, as they do not converge at the vanishing point.

This print is perhaps the grandest of Masanobu’s compositions in *uki-e* style which demonstrate the conduciveness of linear perspective to the woodblock medium.¹⁵⁾ By the year 1740, Masanobu began experimenting with Western-style perspective, producing a number of excellent prints--usually featuring large interior scenes in horizontal format.¹⁶⁾ “Large Perspective picture of Cooling off at Ryogoku Bridge” (c.1740) and “Interior of the Ichimura-za” (c. 1744) are good examples of *uki-e* by Masanobu. (figs. 2 and 3) Masanobu’s *uki-e* of the interiors of theaters are mostly symmetrical and balanced in their composition, which also creates a sense of spatial depth. The effect of these prints were a startling innovation to Masanobu’s contemporaries.¹⁷⁾ He thus made an early

12) David Waterhouse, *Early Japanese Prints in the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, Toronto, 1983, pp. 50-52.

13) David Waterhouse, *Ibid.*, pp. 50-52.

14) Stephen Little, “The Lure of the West: European elements in the art of Floating World,” *Museum Studies*, v.22 no. 1, 1996, pp. 74-93.

15) David Waterhouse, *Ibid.*, pp. 50-52.

16) For other examples by Masanobu, see David Waterhouse, *Early Japanese Prints in the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, Toronto, 1983, figs. 28 and 31, and Helen C. Gunsaulus, *The Clarence Buckingham Collection of Japanese Prints*, Chicago, 1955, fig. 84 and fig. 85.

17) Richard Lane, *Images of the Floating World*, Portland, 1983, p. 78.

attempt to absorb Western art, and thereby prepared the ground for the adoption of linear perspective by the landscape painters of a later period.¹⁸⁾

“Large perspective picture of the Kaomise Performance” reveals to us every corner of the interior of the Kabuki theater, Nakamura-za¹⁹⁾ in Edo during the period of its consolidation in the mid-eighteenth century.²⁰⁾ The artist gives a careful attention in depicting the physical features of the theater in details, and his point of view is surprisingly objective. Features of the building, like the third story windows above the boxes and the roof over the stage, are carefully delineated.²¹⁾ A pillar on the left of the stage reads *Shiki sambaso: Okina, Senzai, Sambaso* (the introductory pieces preceding the main play); and on another pillar in the center of the theater is the legend *kido juroku mon*, ‘Price of admission 16 mon’ A leading actor, *Ichikawa Ebizo* is announced on a pillar on the right of the stage (*ontsutome moshi soro*). Above the stage is a *gaku* tablet reading *Ichimando harai*, ‘Purification ten thousand times’; and the ceiling of the theater is filled with lanterns bearing the *mon* of individual actors.²²⁾ In the left margin, there is a signature, *Edo-e ichiryu kongen Hogetsudo Tanchosai Okumura Bunkaku Masanobu hitsu* and a seal, “*Tanchosai*” (Foremost Edo picture by Hogetsudo Tanchosai Okumura Bunkaku Masanobu, his authentic brush work. Gourd seal,

18) Narasaki Masaharu, *The Japanese Print: Its Evolution and Essence*, Tokyo, 1966, p. 193. Recent research on early Japanese attempts at European perspective suggests that Japanese artists such as Masanobu were probably influenced more by Chinese translations of Western manuals of perspective (which they would have been able to read) than by European originals of the manuals. Certainly, however, by the 1760's artists like Shiba Kogan (1747-1818) are known to have owned such books as Gerard de Lairettes's *Groot schilderboek* (first published in Amsterdam in 1707), a Dutch manual on painting whose illustrations were enormously influential in Japan. (Stephen Little, “The Lure of the West: European elements in the art of Floating World,” *Museum Studies*, v.22 no. 1, 1996, pp. 74-93, fig. 2)

19) Nakamura-za was a theatre first opened in March 1624 by Nakamura (Saruwaka) Kanzaburo I, who had come to Edo from Yamashiro. It was situated in the Nakabashi district, where Nihonbashi-dori, 2-chome is today. The Saruwaka-za was its first name, but this was later changed to the Nakamura-za. In May 1632 the theatre was forced to move to Go-machi and then had to move to Sakai-cho in May 1651. Because of management problems plaguing the theatre from the fall of 1793 to October 1797, the Miyoko-za put on plays in its stead. Aside from this period the theatre continued to be managed by the generations of zamoto named Kanzaburo until the early years of Meiji. (Samuel L. Leiter, *Kabuki encyclopedia*, Westport, 1979, pp.264-265.)

20) James Michener, *The Floating World*, New York, 1954, p. 304, fig. 30. Donald Jenkins, *Floating world revised*, Honolulu, 1993, pp. 226-227.

21) William Watson, *The Great Japan Exhibition*, London, 1981, p. 131, fig. 110.

22) David Waterhouse, *Ibid.*, pp. 50-52.

Tanchosai). A signature in the right margin is *Tori-sho-cho e-toiya akaki hyotan shirushi, Okumuraya Genroku hanmoto* (A perspective picture showing a view of a kyogen play stage, Shop located at Torishio Street, the picture wholesaler at the sign of the gourd, Okumuraya Genroku the publisher).²³⁾ Reddish brown large timber structures of the upper floor, especially on the left side, are faded over centuries. The attendants in the top right-hand and the left-hand corners are removing sliding doors to let in more light (lanterns were banned because of the danger of fire, so huge open windows marked the upper floor of the theater). Small dots are sparsely or densely depicted on thatched roofs below the large open windows, showing a texture of a real roof material like that of the roof over the stage. The inner stage roof and other features are derived from the No drama.²⁴⁾ The sliding doors behind the stage are partly open to show a painting of Mt. Fuji, which is the center of the print. On the stage, about eight people are shown. The leading actor *Ichikawa Ebizo* stands in the enclosed shrine. Ebizo, who is wearing exaggerated costume with typical *Kumadori* make-up, is almost lost in crowd.²⁵⁾ He is surrounded by other, supporting actors and a samisen player. Musicians sit left; the playwright sits right and bangs the blocks to mark moments of climax.²⁶⁾ The *hanamichi* (passage-way), a stage device of the Edo period, which extends the length of the theater, is where the actors make their entrances, often pausing for dramatic scenes, monologues, and character-defining poses.²⁷⁾

As the side walls of the theater sharply slant toward the stage, the figures gradually

23) James Michener, *Ibid.*, p. 304, fig. 30.

24) Jacob Raz, *Audience and Actors, A study of their Interaction in the Japanese Traditional Theatre*, Leiden, 1983, p.157.

25) *Kumadori* is Kabuki's most distinctive makeup technique. It is a nonrealistic makeup that emphasizes the movement of the facial muscles. *Kumadori* resembles Chinese opera's face painting, which some scholars feel had a strong influence on its origins. Kabuki's *Kumadori* emphasizes the facial expressions growing out of the character's personality. It is said have been first used in 1673 when its prototype was created by the thirteen year-old Ichikawa Danjuro I at the Nakamura-za. The legend has it that he received critical acclaim for his unique makeup of red and black patterns. *Kumadori* became the special province of the Ichikawa line of actors and was imitated by others. The growing stylization of Kabuki performance witnessed a perfection of *Kumadori* technique in the hands of Danjuro VII in the early 1850s. Kuma's three basic color are red, black, and blue, although red ocher, purple, and gold are employed on occasion, too. (Samuel L. Leiter, *Kabuki encyclopedia*, Westport, 1979, pp. 209-210.)

26) James Michener, *Ibid.*, p. 304, fig. 30. According to J. Michener, in the Chicago impression, the chanter is Ozatsuma Shuzendayu and the samisen player is Kienya Kisaburo.

27) Donald Jenkins, *Ibid.*, pp. 226-227.

diminish in size in relation to one another. Lining the sides of the theater are the upper and lower balcony seats (*sajiki*) for affluent patrons such as samurai and wealthy townspeople, who are leaning on a bright orange-colored handrail as far as they can to get a clearer view.²⁸⁾ The *sajiki* boxes were connected by passageways to the actors' dressing-rooms and to the theater-tea-house, which were attached to the theater both physically and economically. In the pit, the motley crowd of plebeian playgoers are showing various looks and poses. The spectators in the *doma* had the low social and economic status. These spectators were workers, shop-assistants, and male and female servants, some of them on their annual vacation (mainly in the New Year or the seventh moon). Different classes of playgoers are distinguished clearly by their clothing and behavior. A vendor parades along the *hanamichi* carrying sake and lacquered lunch boxes to a waiting patron. As is evident from the lively activity in the theater, Kabuki audience were anything but sedate. They talked, laughed, and ate. The print shows the play as also a social occasion. From the print, one can imagine the scenery of a theater of the Edo Kabuki: fights among spectators, vendors trying to push their way through the crowd, people complaining, people peeping at their neighbors' programmes, while everyone is enjoying sake, manju and tobacco.²⁹⁾

The gaily dressed spectators in boxes and *doma* are paying attention to the performance on stage of *Ya no ne Goro*, the arrow-sharpening scene from a revenge drama about the Soga brothers.³⁰⁾ A leading actor, *Ichikawa* Ebizo is seen sharpening his oversize arrows prior to New Year's Day in preparation for his revenge on his father's murderer.³¹⁾ A dream will show him his brother Juro in trouble whereupon Goro will dash into the street, fight with a radish merchant, steal the man's horse and make a tremendous exit down the *hanamichi*, brandishing the radish and shouting wild threats.³²⁾

28) Donald Jenkins, *Ibid.*, pp. 226-227. From the beginning Kabuki followed No in its arrangements for various classes seated in different places. The theater was divided into upper and lower *sajiki* and *doma*. The *sajiki* which provided a better view of the stage were occupied by the wealthy merchants. The *doma* was later divided into square sections (*masu*) by wooden partitions, which were used as a pathway by vendors to reach the crowded areas of the pit with food and drinks. (Jacob Raz, *Audience and Actors, A study of their Interaction in the Japanese Traditional Theater*, Leiden, 1983, pp. 170-172.)

29) Jacob Raz, *Audience and Actors, A study of their Interaction in the Japanese Traditional Theater*, Leiden, 1983, pp.180-183.

30) David Waterhouse, *Ibid.*, pp. 50-52.

31) James Michener, *The Floating World*, New York, 1954, fig. 30.

Almost every year the New Year play on a Soga theme came to be at least one of the Edo theaters. Today the Soga Brothers are not as conspicuous as they once were; but they have left a permanent mark on Kabuki, and many unrelated characters and incidents were woven into the story. The original tale appears in the *Azuma kagami*, the chronicle of Minamoto Yoritomo's conquests in the twelfth century; but it was greatly elaborated in a long prose romance, *Soga monogatari*, composed anonymously at some time during the thirteenth or fourteenth century. The earliest stage versions were No plays written by Miyamasu in the fifteenth century; and next came *kōwaka* ballad-drama versions in the sixteenth. There were also regional *yoruri* and Handayū-bushi ballads on the theme. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries Chikamatsu and his collaborators were responsible for a number of puppet plays on the Soga theme.³³⁾

The *Soga monogatari* (*Tale of the Soga Brothers*), which provided subject matter for all later manifestations of the Soga story such as No recitations and the dances for the medieval period, as well as the ballad dramas (*yoruri*) and Kabuki plays of later centuries, is a heroic story dating back to the middle ages, telling of the revenge accomplished by Soga Juro Sukenari and his brother Soga Goro Tokimune in 1193 after suffering more than eighteen years of hardships, on their father's enemy, Kudo Suketsune at the foot of Mount Fuji, inside the camp of Minamoto Yoritomo, whose men cut down Juro after a struggle, and took Goro prisoner. Yoritomo, after interrogating Goro, had him put to death, but in admiration of the two brothers subsequently dedicated a shrine to them at the foot of the mountain.³⁴⁾

The *Soga monogatari* is a historical narrative interlaced generously with legend, folk belief, and elements of the fictitious. This story presents a broad picture of warrior society, detailing its customs and its ideals and practices.³⁵⁾ Together with the *Hogen monogatari*, *Heiji monogatari*, *Heike monogatari*, and *Gikeiki*, the *Soga monogatari* is

32) James Michener, *Ibid.*, p. 304, fig. 30.

33) David Waterhouse, *Ibid.*, pp. 50-52.

34) For English translation of the *rufubon of the Soga monogatari*, see Thomas J. Cogan's *The Tale of the Soga Brothers*. Factual date including people, places, and literary sources are thoroughly footnoted in the translation. The index, bibliography, and other references aids are excellent. Also see Lorence Kominz, "The Tale of the Soga Brothers," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 49, 1989, pp. 244-251. Margaret H. Childs, "The Tale of the Soga Brothers," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, v. 48, 1989, pp. 154-155.

35) J. Cogan, *The Tale of the Soga Brothers*, Tokyo, 1987, pp. Xiii-XI

usually classified as a war-tale (*gunkimono*), a genre unique to the medieval period in Japanese literary history.³⁶⁾

Many different texts of *Soga monogatari* survive. The four major variant texts of the *Soga monogatari* are the *Manabon*, the *Taisekijibon*, the *Taisanjibon*, and the *Rufubon*.³⁷⁾ *Rufubon* is the longest, most recent, and most widely read version of the *Soga monogatari*. It is also considered the most important, since all later manifestations of the Soga story derive their material from this text.³⁸⁾ The *Rufubon* as it exists today was most likely put into its ultimate written form in Kyoto.³⁹⁾ Although Japanese scholars have done much research into the genealogy, authorship, and dating of the Soga texts, we still do not know their authors or the precise dates of authorship. We may say, however, that the texts were most likely written in the Kanto area in the early to mid-Muromachi period, and represent the cumulative efforts of an indeterminate number of persons, most of whom were probably priests of Buddhist and syncretic Buddhist Shinto monasteries.⁴⁰⁾

The structure of the *Soga monogatari* may be described as extremely episodic. Indeed, approximately one-fourth of the total pages are devoted to digressions taken from Chinese and Buddhist sources. Doubtless they were inserted into the tales in order to enlighten readers and listeners on the importance and efficacy of Buddhism and Confucianism.⁴¹⁾ Many of the digressions appear, especially to modern readers, only

36) J. Cogan, *Ibid.*, pp. Xiii-Xl.

37) The *Taisekijibon* is divided into ten books and written in Japanese in a style combining both kana and kanji. The *Taisanjibon* is divided into ten books and written almost entirely in kana. The *Manabon*, the oldest extant version of the *Soga monogatari* dated from the mid-fourteenth century, is written in a corrupt form of Chinese and divided into ten books. (J. Cogan, *Ibid.*, pp. Xiii-Xl.)

38) J. Cogan, *The Tale of the Soga Brothers*, Tokyo, 1987, pp. Xiii-Xl. Compared to the *Manabon*, in the *Rufubon*, romantic entanglements increase dramatically in number, and the brothers take on strikingly different personalities, with Goro, the younger brother, emerging as a superhuman strong man, always spoiling for a fight. New characters and episodes were introduced to facilitate new romantic liaisons and martial conflicts. In the *Rufubon*, tearful partings between loved ones increase in number, and the brothers' poverty is emphasized to facilitate audience identification with the brothers. (Lorenz Kominz, *Avatars of Vengeance*, Ann Arbor, 1995, pp. 40-41)

39) Japan Culture Institute, *An Invitation to Japan's Literature*, Tokyo, 1974, pp. 71-72.

40) J. Cogan, *Ibid.*, pp. Xiii-Xl.

41) The *Soga monogatari* contains about forty episodes from Chinese, Buddhist, and earlier Japanese sources. In most instances, the compilers of this tale adopted the stories in the forms they had assumed in other works of medieval Japanese literature. Consequently, the versions appearing in the *Soga monogatari* tend to differ somewhat from their counterparts in the original sources. (J.

tangential to the main story.⁴²⁾ These digressions, are largely responsible for the negative appraisals of the text. However, insofar as the digressions are offered as analogies to circumstances affecting the Soga brothers, they afford the reader the opportunity to evaluate the comparability of the main story with the tangential ones. Other digressions, general maxims quoted from celebrated sources, leave the reader to consider their application in specific instances. Moreover these erudite allusions to the Chinese classics and earlier Japanese history fulfill the function of giving the text added dignity and weight.⁴³⁾

The story of the Soga brothers' revenge is presented in the twelve books of the *Rufubon* in the following manner: Book 1, Introduction and the motive for revenge; Book 2, Yoritomo's sojourn in Izu Province; Book 3, The sparing of the Soga brothers' lives; Book 4, Hakoo's (Goro's) deeds; Book 5, Hakoo's deeds; Book 6, Juro's deeds; Book 7, the pardoning of Goro by his mother; Book 8, Preparation for revenge; Book 9, Achievement of revenge and the death of Juro; Book 10, Goro's execution and the fate of his clan; Book 11, Memorial services conducted by Tora and the mother; Book 12, The devotion of Tora and Shosho. This list, however, is somewhat deceptive, for the structure is neither strongly unified nor linear.

Major episodes of the Soga vendetta are as follows. In the beginning of the *Soga monogatari*, Ito Sukechika, a grandfather of the Soga brothers, usurps the manors and Ito clan hardship, which were the birthright of his nephew, Ito Kudo Suketsune. Bearing malice against his uncle, Kudo orders his retainers to assassinate Sukechika. When Sukechika holds a grand hunt, Kudo's retainers kill Kawazu Saburo, Sukechika's son, as he returns home from the hunt. The widow remarries Soga Sukenobu, and Soga Sukenobu adopts the two boys, who become the Soga brothers, Ichiman and Hakoo. When the boys are eleven and nine, Kudo tries to execute the Soga boys by convincing his lord, Yoritomo who killed Sukechika. But, with the help of one of feudal lords, the brothers are saved just as they are about to be killed. As the brothers grow up, the memory of their father intensifies their determination to avenge Kudo for their father. Two years later, Ichiman becomes an adult samurai, taking the name Soga Juro Sukenari. The younger brother, Hakoo who was sent by his mother to Hakone Temple

Cogan, *Ibid.*, pp. Xiii-Xl.)

42) J. Cogan, *Ibid.*, pp. Xiii-Xl

43) Margaret H. Childs, *Ibid.*, pp. 154-155. J. Cogan, *Ibid.*, pp. Xiii-Xl.

to become a priest meets his father's murderer when Kudo goes on pilgrimage to Hakone Temple. The thought of his father's foe being still alive becoming unbearable, at the age of seventeenth, Hakoo runs away from the temple and becomes an adult samurai, taking the name Soga Goro Tokimune. The two brothers secretly plot to kill Kudo and hope to achieve their object soon. They attend several hunts held by Yoritomo, hoping to get a chance to attack Kudo, but they are unable to approach him. At the conclusion of these hunts, Yorimoto announces that another hunt will be held at the foot of Mt. Fuji. Juro and Goro are determined to achieve revenge this time. Juro set off to pay a farewell visit to his mistress, Tora Gozen. But, she is called on to entertain the feudal lord Wada Yoshimori who has conceived a great affection for her. Tora offends Yoshimori by showing preference for Juro. Yoshimori's men are about to attack Juro, but Goro rescues his brother in the famous "Armor Pulling" encounter with Yoshimori's son, Asahina. This "Wada's banquet" scene provides a basic story line of the *Ya no ne Goro* depicted in Masanobu's print. Before setting out for Mt. Fuji, Juro and Goro go to pay a farewell visit to their mother.

Finally they arrive at the hunt on Fuji Plain. The Soga brothers move about the hunt in search of their enemy. Juro gets a good shot at Kudo, but at the last second his horse stumbles over a fallen log. The attempted assassination goes unnoticed. Juro spies on Kudo's camp but is spotted and invited in. During a tense conversation with Kudo, Juro divulges neither his feelings nor his plans. As a precaution, Kudo changes the location of his camp, but late at night a retainer of Hatakeyama Shigetada helps the Soga brothers find their blood enemy. The brothers wake Kudo and his companion, Otonai, and then strike them down. They slit Kudo's throat to conclude the ritual of revenge. They kill and injure numerous samurai who try to arrest them. At length, however, Juro, exhausted, falls a victim to the sword of one of samurai. Goro who enters Yorimoto's camp, hoping to kill him is captured by an enemy disguised as a woman. The next morning Yoritomo interrogates Goro. The shogun expresses admiration for the brothers' devotion to honor but orders Goro to be beheaded. After then, Yoritomo deplors the death of the brave young men and erects a temple where prayers can be offered to Amita Buddha for the repose of their souls.

Major themes and motifs of *the Tale of the Soga Brothers* are retribution, dreams, honor, separation from loved ones, romance, and piety.⁴⁴⁾ Revenge is the major theme of

44) Margaret H. Childs, *Ibid.*, pp. 154-155.

the first ten books of the *Soga monogatari*. The *Soga monogatari* is a complicated tale of revenge encompassing the lives of many characters, all bound together in an intricate web of personal and political relationships. The revenge of the Soga brothers was considered pure by warriors and common people alike, mainly because of the boys' devotion and loyalty to their father and their willingness to sacrifice their own lives. It is this concept of self-sacrifice that has made them into heroes as admired down through the ages.⁴⁵⁾ Two Japanese heroes, archetypical avengers show us an early example of samurai heroism from the aesthetic and values of the aristocracy.⁴⁶⁾

The story of two brothers who after eighteen years of varied hardships at last succeeded in taking their revenge on their father's irreconcilable enemy covers the whole period from their childhood until their glorious self-sacrifice on the altar of filial piety. Throughout the greater part of the work, the marked contrast between the powerful position of their proud enemy, Kudo Suketsune, and the youth and weakness of the two brothers, as they patiently endured and surmounted the poverty of their circumstances, inevitably evokes feelings of tender sympathy towards such brave and dutiful sons.⁴⁷⁾

The characters of the two heroes in their virtues and weakness aptly balance each other: Juro, the elder, had cool courage and discretion, while Goro, the younger, was rash and hot-tempered. The brothers, faced with the same predicament, behave quite differently, in accordance with the inborn nature of each.⁴⁸⁾

The *Soga monogatari* is a work of considerable importance in the history of Japanese literature. It is a fascinating tale of revenge, filled with generous portions of intrigue, adventure, bravado, and even romance. It contains a number of moving passages describing the agony of shame, the depth of family loyalty, the sadness of parting, the value of honor, and the joy of success. It has been criticized for lacking a tight structure and abounding in Chinese and Buddhist digressions; moreover, it is populated by stereotyped characters and permeated by didactic intent, both Confucian and Buddhist. The story of the Soga brothers' determination and perseverance is one that has appealed to the Japanese down through the ages.⁴⁹⁾ The *Tale of the Soga Brothers*

45) J. Cogan, *Ibid.*, pp. Xiii-Xl

46) Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai, *Introduction to Classic Japanese Literature*, Westport, 1970, pp. 223-229.

47) Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai, *Ibid.*, pp. 223-229

48) Donald Keene, *Seeds in the Heart*, New York, 1993, pp. 8887-891.

49) J. Cogan, *Ibid.*, pp. Xiii-Xl.

contributed to the development of a national literature, for it is a work that embodies the themes, emotions, beliefs, and ideals of the nation. This tale constitutes a superb description of the elements central to the Japanese ethos: self-sacrifice, filial piety, duty, courage, and tenacity.⁵⁰⁾

The *Soga monogatari* has served as a major source of themes and motifs for various genres both in Muromachi and Tokugawa periods.⁵¹⁾ It provided an important source for many works of Tokugawa literature, including the dramatic forms of Kabuki and bunraku, and popular fictional forms such as *ukiyo-zoshi*, *akabon*, and *kusazoshi*.⁵²⁾ In Kabuki especially a great number of Soga pieces have been produced, and it has become a time-honored tradition to stage a Soga piece in the month of January every year. In addition, among Kabuki *Juhachiban* (the Eighteen Classical Kabuki Pieces), *Ya no ne* and *Sukeroku* are connected with the Soga tradition.⁵³⁾

Ya no ne (The Arrow Sharpener) depicted in the Masanobu's print, "Large perspective picture of the Kaomise Performance," was first performed at the Nakamura Theater in 1729, and it was the most popular scene in a long play entitled *Suehiro eho Soga*.⁵⁴⁾ Despite the fact that new Soga plays were usually presented every year, *Ya no ne* was shown eleven times in the Edo period.⁵⁵⁾

Though the story of the Soga brothers reached its pinnacle of popularity and status in Kabuki theater, the characters of the tale, their motivations and appearances, and even the basic plot of the Soga vendetta were dramatically changed.⁵⁶⁾ The brothers' revenge is virtually irrelevant to the play. Instead we witness Goro celebrating the New Year's holiday. The only martial combat in the play is an easily won fight with a lowly radish seller, and Goro makes an undignified but humorous exit, riding the radish seller's market horse.

The plot of the play is based on a small part of the *Tale of the Soga Brothers*. The

50) J. Cogan, *Ibid.*, pp. Xiii-XI.

51) In the Muromachi period, two important performing arts, the *no* and the *kowakamai*, drew heavily from the tale of the Soga brothers. There are nineteen *no* and seven *kowakamai* pieces based on the *Soga monogatari*.

52) J. Cogan, *Ibid.*, pp. Xiii-XI.

53) Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai, *Ibid.*, pp. 223-229. For Kabuki's Eighteen Favorites, see Kawatake Toshio, *A History of Japanese Theater II*, Yokohama, 1971, pp. 78-80.

54) Samuel L. Leiter, *Kabuki encyclopedia*, Westport, 1979, pp.431-432. See Lorence Kominz, 1995, pp. 195-217 for a detailed discussion, translation, and commentary of the play *Ya no ne*.

55) Lorence Kominz, *Ibid.*, 1995, p. 194-95.

56) Lorence Kominz, *Ibid.*, 1995, p. 79.

original source for *Ya no ne* is found in the “Wada’s Banquet” episode of the *rufubon*, book 6. In the *Soga monogatari*, when Juro visits Tora, Juro’s mistress and proprietress of a brothel in Oiso, she is called on to entertain the feudal lord Wada Yoshimori.⁵⁷⁾ After Tora has served sake to Juro rather than Wada Yoshimori the two men exchange heated words, and Yoshimori’s retainers prepare to assault Juro. Juro wishes that his brother were on hand to help out, and Juro’s thoughts are so intense that Goro senses Juro’s danger and hurries off to rescue his elder brother. Goro rescues his brother in the famous “Armor Pulling” encounter with Yoshimori’s son, Asahina, and the brothers leave safely.

Compared with the story of the *Soga monogatari*, *Ya no ne* is concerned solely with Goro’s premonition and hastily departure. And Juro is endangered by Kudo Suketsune, their father’s murderer, not by Wada Yoshimori.⁵⁸⁾ In the play *Ya no ne*, Soga Goro is polishing arrows when Osatsuma Shuzendayu comes to wish him a happy new year. When Goro later sleeps on his friend’s gift, a picture of a treasure ship, his brother Juro appears to him in his dream and tells him that he is in danger. Goro awakens, borrows a horse loaded with radishes from a passing radish seller, and , using a huge radish as a whip, heads for the palace of the evil Kudo.⁵⁹⁾

A major innovation in *Ya no ne* is its New Year’s setting. *Ya no ne* embellishes the story and interweaves all manner of Edo-period New Year customs. The dominant New Year’s performance context completely overwhelms the story of the Soga brothers’ revenge, and Goro is more like a New Year’s decoration or talisman come to life than a character in a story. The most important modifications in the Kabuki version serve to emphasize the strength and determination of Goro and the virtuosity of the actor portraying him.⁶⁰⁾ Some scholars consider the text to be “incoherent and impossible to comprehend,” even to an Edo-period audience. It is true that one cannot find a well-crafted story in this play; such is not the purpose of the text. First and foremost the words of the play provide opportunities for the aragoto actor to display his virtuosity. Second, they delight the audience with their irreverent and sarcastic wit. The play pokes fun at the values and symbols that the Edo-period elite held in respect, and that dashing Edo townsmen therefore took pride in debunking. Puns twist the sayings

57) Wada Yoshimori : maternal uncle and ally of the Soga Brothers

58) Lorence Kominz, *Avatars of Vengeance*, Ann Arbor, 1995, p. 194-95.

59) Samuel L. Leiter, *Kabuki encyclopedia*, Westport, 1979, pp.431-432.

60) Samuel L. Leiter, *Kabuki encyclopedia*, Westport, 1979, pp.431-432.

of Confucius into calls for lechery, and Goro heaps abuse on the gods of happiness in a satiric monologue. Much of the humor in the play derives from incongruities created by the juxtaposition of “contemporary” Edo-period vocabulary with the traditional Soga story. Edo-period audiences were familiar with both vocabularies, so the contrasts in meaning and tone were apparent and amusing. The intrusion of New Year foods, gifts, and superstitions lightens the tone of the Soga story and brings Soga Goro in to the lives of ordinary spectators.⁶¹⁾

Ya no ne is an aragoto play with a stronger emphasis on Goro’s heroism. In the play, Goro’s huge arrows, oversized costume, and bold, red stripes painted on his face identify him as a Kabuki superhero.⁶²⁾ The acting in an aragoto role is as stylized and overstated as the actors’ appearance.

Ya no ne is the only play in which an aragoto character handles huge arrows. The arrow plays an important symbolic role in Japanese religion. Blind men or children shot arrows for divination; arrows were shot into the sky to quell violent storms or to determine holy boundaries when shrines or temples were founded; and arrows with white feathers represented gods or the the will of gods in numerous religious stories. During the New Year’s holiday people bought arrows at shrines and hung them in their houses. By means of these arrows the god of a shrine defeated evil spirits that might cause illness or accidents in the house in the coming year. In the Edo period people hung pictures of *Ya no ne Goro* for the same purpose. Goro was depicted in two common poses: in profile, ready to loose an arrow, and in a front view, holding an arrow. Ukiyo-e prints became the artistic icons of aragoto. Prints of Danjuro as Goro in *Ya no ne* were placed above door frames to ward off evil spirits.⁶³⁾ Examples of pictures of *Ya no ne Goro* can be seen several prints such as Ichikawa Ebizo (Danjuro II) as Goro by Torii Kiyomitsu I in James Michener Collection (c. 1758) (fig. 4) ⁶⁴⁾ and Utagawa Toyokuni III’s Danjuro VII as Soga Goro (c. 1852) (Fig. 5).⁶⁵⁾ Soga Goro and the Fudo were the only heroes in the “Eighteen Great Plays” to be depicted in full face in Ukiyo-e prints. The full face pose of “*Ya no ne Goro*” derives from traditional

61) Lorence Kominz, *Avatars of Vengeance*, Ann Arbor, 1995, p. 194-95.

62) Lorence Kominz, *Ibid.*, 1995, pp. 2-3. Samuel L. Leiter, *Kabuki encyclopedia*, Westport, 1979, pp.431-432.

63) Lorence Kominz, *Ibid.*, 1995, p. 163.

64) Howard A. Link, *The Theatrical Prints of the Torii Masters*, Honolulu, 1977.

65) Laurence R. Kominz, *The Stars Who Created Kabuki*, New York, 1997, fig. 17, p.103.

representations of Fudo: Goro's arrow represents divine power, and the raised brazier on which he sits corresponds to Fudo's pedestal of stone.⁶⁶⁾

Ya no ne had great popularity with the masses at the time of its premiere. Its abundance of corny jokes, the sharpening of the arrows, the novelty of riding an unsaddled horse with a huge radish as a whip, its depiction of Goro in the aragoto style of costume and makeup, its pictorial beauty, its blending of the musical background with the play's rougher qualities -- all these factors transmit the essence of the Kabuki.⁶⁷⁾

"Large perspective picture of the Kaomise Performance" depicting the *Ya no ne Goro* scene shows the two indispensable elements of theater, the actor (the play) and the audience. With the actor the Kabuki audience is an essential part of the theatrical event.⁶⁸⁾ The audience has been a subject of many works of art -- from prints and scrolls to novels, diaries, and poems as well as plays. There are numerous prints and scrolls depicting the Kabuki theater from its very beginning at the time of Okuni, until the Meiji period, when photographer supplanted the painter. Most of these descriptions show the whole auditorium, including the audience. From the very first scrolls showing Okuni, special care is taken by the painters to give the scenery in front of the stage no less attention than that on the stage (figs 6 and 7). Nakamura-za in Masanobu's print are also shown in Fig. 8 and fig. 9. Fig. 8 is the Nakamura-za at the time of the *wakashu* Kabuki (mid-seventeenth century), and Fig. 9 is a panoramic view of the Nakamura-za during the Genroku period by Hishikawa Moronobu in Tokyo National Museum. The artists of the second print is clearly as interested in the theater milieu as in the performance itself. A line of actors, dressed to play a wide variety of roles, dances onto the stage (left and center), while barkers and placards (right) draw passerby into the theater. The theater entrance is under the drum tower decorated with the Nakamura-za crest, a ginko leaf.

Utagawa Toyokuni (1769-1825)'s "Inside a Kabuki Theater" in the British museum also clearly details all elements of the Edo theater including the actor and the audience.(fig. 10) Indoor scenes were performed on the raised platform under the roof, in front of painted backdrops. Outdoors is represented by the forestage, which here has

66) Lorence Kominsz, *Avatars of Vengeance*, Ann Arbor, 1995, pp. 194-201

67) Samuel L. Leiter, *Kabuki encyclopedia*, Westport, 1979, pp.431-432.

68) Jacob Raz, *Audience and Actors, A study of their Interaction in the Japanese Traditional Theater*, Leiden, 1983, pp.180-183.

been decorated with props indicating a rough terrain -- the actors are posed for a confrontation. Rekisentei Eiri (active 1790-1800)'s "*Shibaraku Scene*" (c.1796) shows that a crowd has gathered in one of the great theaters of Sakaicho to see Danjuro V perform his famous *Shibaraku* scene.(fig. 11) The audience is packed so tightly that there is no room to move, and additional tiers of seats have been step up behind the stage, creating a so-called *rakan* gallery. A banner hanging above the stage at left declares the obvious, *o-iri*, full house. Danjuro has just made his appearance on the hanamichi, and all eyes are riveted on him. He is wearing the stiff crimson robes emblazoned with the family crest that were the standard costume for the scene.⁶⁹⁾

As we have seen these prints, the audience in these prints and scrolls is never painted as an abstract entity, with stains of colours. On the contrary, it is painted in full detail; each member of it is given full attention, regardless of his place in the auditorium. It is clear, therefore, that the artists of Edo considered the audience an integral part of the theatrical event. In making prints of the theater, it was natural for them to include the audience in the picture. Judging from the prints as well as the records and the literature we have from the period, this inclusion of the audience seems only natural. Theatre-going meant enjoying the auditorium scene as well. Theatrical experience included being an audience. For the artists of the time, who used the theater as material for their prints and plays, there was no question of separation or distinction between the stage and the audience. Thus there was no such thing as watching a 'clean' stage, a pure 'artistic' stage. Physically and conceptually, audiences were part of the scene, and therefore when one attempted to describe the theater, the whole theater was a natural unit to depict.⁷⁰⁾

In sum, Masanobu's "Large perspective picture of the Kaomise Performance," one of the earliest *uki-e* prints takes as its subject the lively Kabuki theater and shows Ichikawa Ebizo II playing *Ya no ne Goro* in the "arrow-sharpening" scene from a revenge drama about the Soga brothers, produced at the Nakamura Theater in Edo in 1740. Like many others prints of Kabuki theaters, it gives a careful depiction of the physical features of the theater in details.

The play *Ya no ne Goro* in the print is based on the famous revenge story, the *Tale*

69) Donald Jenkins, *Floating world revised*, Honolulu, 1993, pp. 226-227.

70) Jacob Raz, *Audience and Actors, A study of their Interaction in the Japanese Traditional Theater*, Leiden, 1983, pp.180-183.

of the Soga Brothers, from which a number of Soga pieces in Kabuki have been produced. And it has been a time-honored tradition to stage a Soga piece in the month of January every year for the *Tale of the Soga Brothers* is a work that embodies the themes, emotions, beliefs, and ideals of the nation: self-sacrifice, filial piety, duty, courage, and tenacity.

Ya no ne, however, embellishes the story of the Soga brothers and interweaves all manner of Edo-period New Year customs. The dominant New Year's performance context completely overwhelms the story of the Soga brothers' revenge, and Goro is more like a New Year's decoration or talisman come to life than a character in a story.

Thus, "Large perspective picture of the Kaomise Performance" by Masanobu is an important *uki-e* print that shows the two indispensable elements of theater, the play based on the traditional Japanese revenge story as well as the audience enjoying the play and theatrical experience at the famous theater, Nakamura-za in 1740, giving information on the representative culture of the Edo period.

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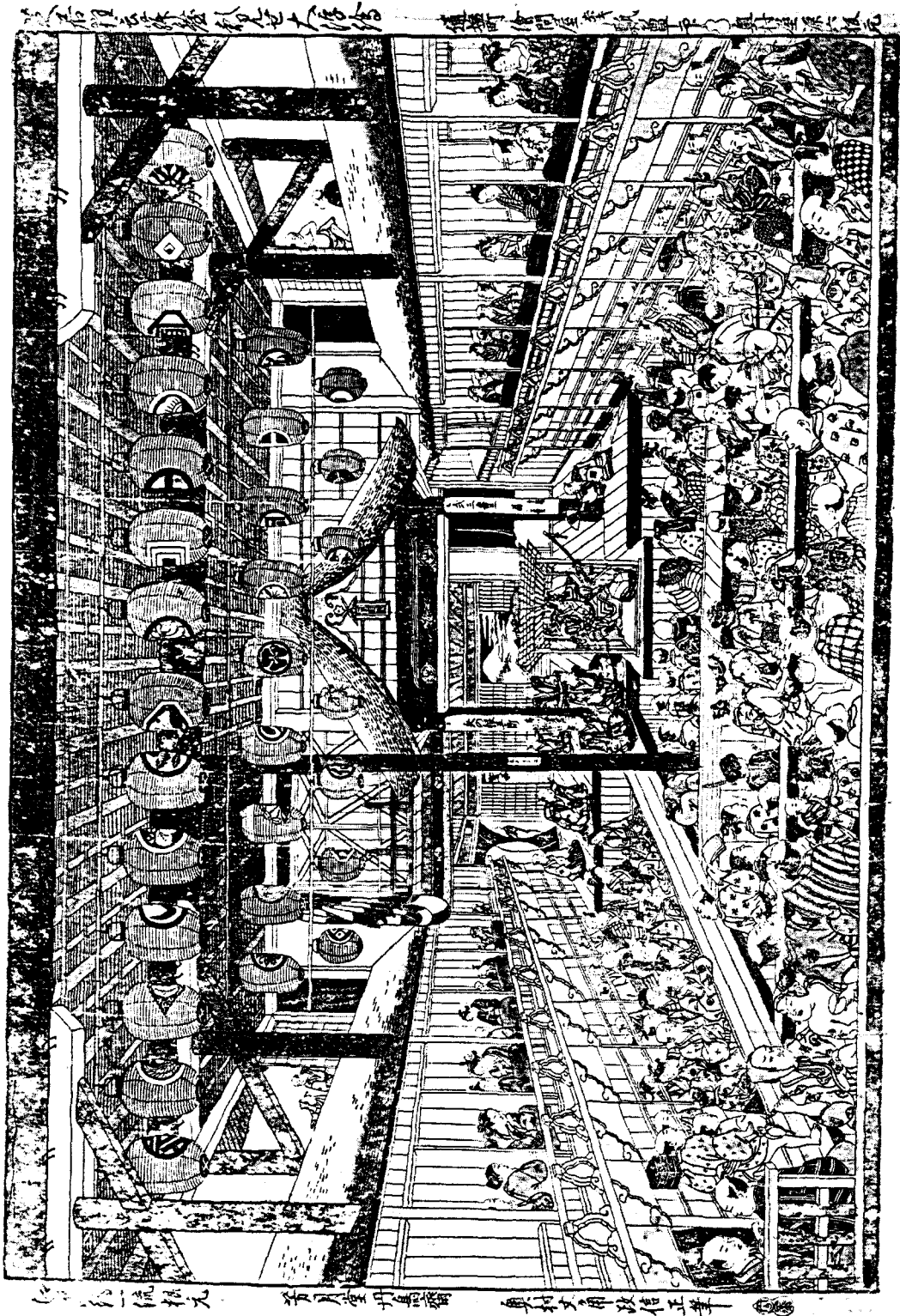


Fig. 1. Okumura Masanobu, Large perspective picture of Kaomise Performance (c. 1740) (after David Waterhouse, *Early Japanese Prints in the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, Toronto, 1983, fig. 32)



Fig. 2. Okumura Masanobu, Large Perspective picture of Cooling off at Ryogoku Bridge (c. 1740) (after Richard Lane, *Images of the Floating World*, Portland, 1983, fig. 84)



Fig. 3. Okumura Masanobu, Interior of the Ichimura-za (c. 1744) (after James R. Brandon, *Studies in Kabuki*, Honolulu, 1978, pl. 2)

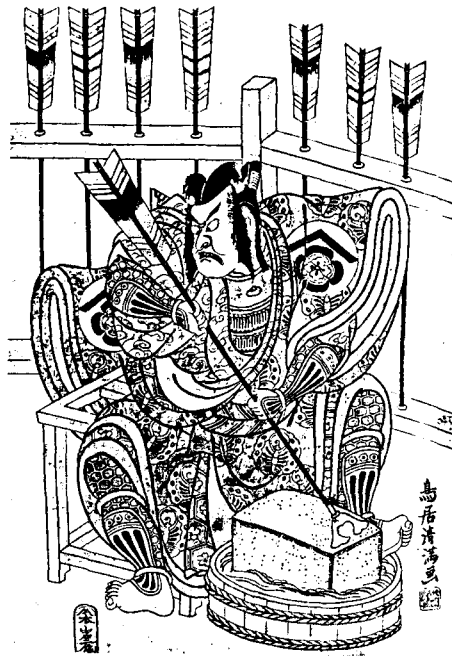


Fig. 4. Torii Kiyomitsu I, Ichikawa Ebizo (Danjuro II) as Goro, James Michener Collection (c. 1758) (after Benito Ortolani, *The Japanese Theatre*, Princeton, 1990, fig. 61)



Fig. 5. Utagawa Toyokuni III, Danjuro VII as Soga Goro in *Ya no ne*, c. 1852, *nishiki-e*, The Theater Museum of Waseda University (after Laurence R. Kominz, *The Stars Who Created Kabuki*, New York, 1997, fig. 17)



Fig. 6. An *onna kabuki* dance(after Benito Ortolani, *The Japanese Theatre*, Princeton, 1990, fig. 52)



Fig. 7. Stage of the *onna kabuki*, painting from the Tokugawa collection (after Benito Ortolani, *The Japanese Theatre*, Princeton, 1990, fig. 53)



Fig. 8. The old *Kabuki* theater Nakamura-za, at the time of the *wakashu Kabuki* (mid-seventeenth century) (after Benito Ortolani, *The Japanese Theatre*, Princeton, 1990, fig. 54)

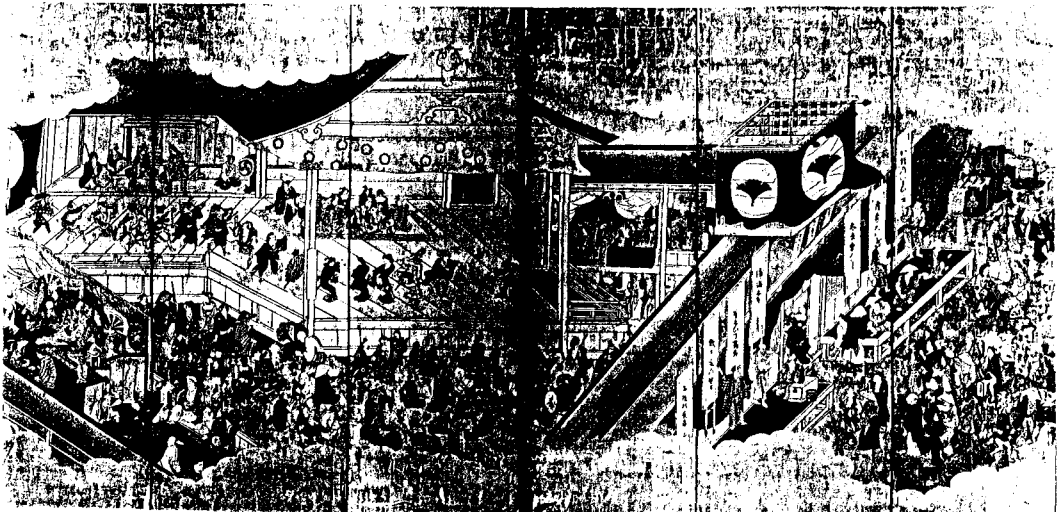


Fig. 9. Hishikawa Moronobu, Panoramic view of a Genroku period theater (the Nakamura-za Theater in Edo), Tokyo National Museum (after Laurence R. Kominz, *The Stars Who Created Kabuki*, New York, 1997, fig. 1)

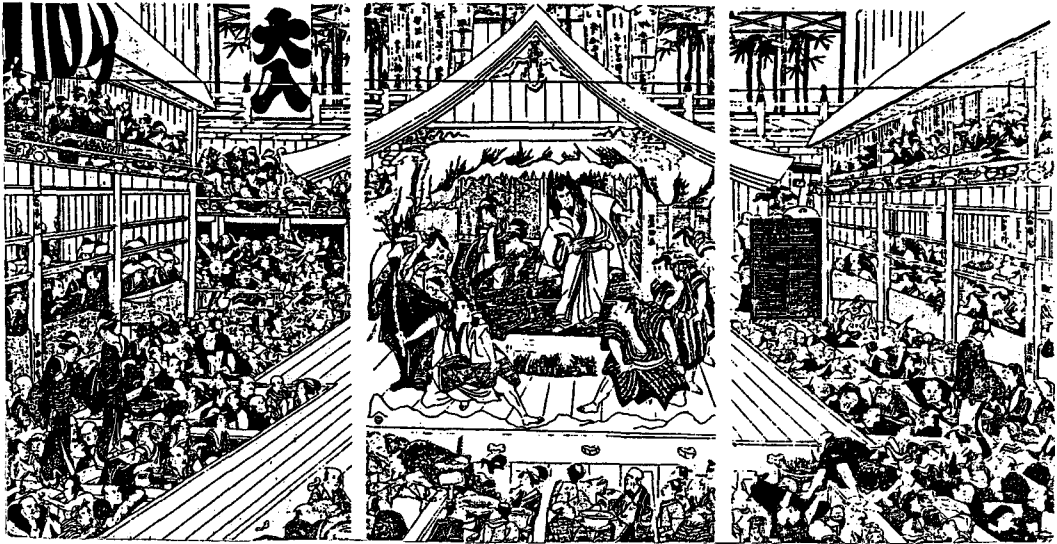


Fig. 10. Utagawa Toyokuni, Inside a Kabuki Theater, Late eighteenth century, woodblock print ; *oban* triptych, The British museum (after Donald Jenkins, *Floating world revised*, Honolulu, 1993, fig. 20.)



Fig. 11. Rekisentei Eiri, *Shibaraku* Scene, c.1796, woodblock print : horizontal *oban* ; 26.7×38.4, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Duel Collection (after Donald Jenkins, *Floating world revised*, Honolulu, 1993, fig. 7)

18세기 일본 마사노부의 판화에 나타난 에도문화

박 아 립

에도시기에 발달한 극장문화와 에도의 요시하라(吉原)와 같은 遊樂里 문화는 부의 축적과 달리 정치, 신분면에서 억제되어 있던 에도 시기 상인들의 부를 과시하고 소비하는 장소로서 높은 인기를 누렸다.

그 중에서 가부키가 에도인들의 대표적 극문화였다면, 우끼요에는 에도인들의 미술문화를 대표했다. 동시에 많은 우끼요에들이 가부키 배우와 극장을 주제로 제작되었는데 대개 가부키 극장을 그린 판화들은 서양식 원근화법을 이용한 우끼에 양식인 것이 특징이다. 나가사키의 네덜란드인들을 통해 들어온 서양의 새로운 화법들은 일본의 전통적 화파인 狩野派나 上佐派와 달리 실험적이었던 우끼요에 판화가들에 의해 적극적으로 받아들여졌다.

필라델피아 미술관에 소장되어 있는 오쿠무라 마사노부의 “Large Perspective picture of the Kaomise Performance”는 가장 이른 시기에 그려진 우끼에 중의 하나로서 17·8세기의 에도의 유명한 삼대 극장의 하나인 나카무라 극장의 새해 공연, 이치가와 에비조의 “야노네 고로”와 극을 즐기는 관객들의 모습 등을 생생하게 묘사하고 있다.

에도시기 많이 만들어졌던 가부키 극장을 묘사한 다른 우끼에요에들과 마찬가지로 이 판화 역시 당시 에도인들의 주요한 오락 장소였던 가부키 극장의 내부를 자세하게 보여준다.

판화 속의 무대에서 공연되고 있는 가부키 장면은 유명한 중세 일본 문화작품의 하나인 “소가 모노가타리”의 일부분을 각색해 만든 “야노네 고로”이다. “소가 모노가타리”는 소가 고로와 소가 주로 두 형제가 아버지를 살해한 원수를 18년간의 기다림 끝에 복수, 응징한다는 내용으로 일본의 대표적 이상 - 희생, 효도, 의무, 용기, 인내, 명예 - 을 그리고 있다. “소가 모노가타리”는 무로마찌와 도쿠가와 시기에 가부키, 분라구, 우끼요에자시 등에 폭넓게 소재를 제공하였고 새해의 가부키 공연마다 연례적으로 공연되어지는 레파토리 중의 하나였다. 특히 가부키의 8대 중요작품 중에 “야노네 고로”와 “수케로구”가 “소가 모노가타리”에 바탕하고 있다.

마사노부의 판화에 그려진 “야노네 고로”는 “소가 모노가타리”의 한부분, “와다의 연회” 장면과 연관되어 있으나 그 내용면에서는 새해 연례 공연극으로서 에도 시기의 새해의 풍습 등이 가미되었고, 고로가 위협에 처한 형 주로를 예감하고 구하기 위해 급히 떠나는 것을 주 내용으로 하고 있다. 그 외 “야노네 고로”는 ‘아라고도’ 역할을 하는 이치가와 에비조

의 남성적인 면을 보다 강조하여 붉은 화장, 거대한 화살의 이용, 과장된 연기 등을 보여주는 연극이다. “야노네 고로” 극에서 아버지의 원수를 갚기 위해 화살을 다듬는 고로의 모습은 우끼요에세서 자주 그려진 소재 중 하나로서 에도 시기 새해 관습과 연관되어 하나의 부적과도 같이 쓰여지기도 했다.

또한 마사노부의 판화는 가부끼극과 함께 그것을 즐기는 관객에 대한 세밀한 관찰과 묘사를 보여준다. 발코니에 앉아 있는 사무라이와 부유한 상인 계급, 서로 잡담하거나, 극장 안을 돌아 다니는 잡상인들에게서 도시락, 사케 등을 즐기는 1층의 관람석에 다양한 모습의 평민들이 자세하게 그려져 있다.

그러므로 마사노부의 판화는 서양 화법의 영향을 보여주는 초기의 우끼에의 하나로서 1740년에 나카무라 극장에서 공연된 “야노네 고로” 공연과 가부끼를 즐기는 에도인들의 생생한 모습, 극장 공연의 두 가지 중요한 요소 ‘극과 관객’을 묘사하여 당시의 대표적 에도문화를 보여준다는 점에서 중요한 의의를 가진 판화라고 하겠다.