Customs of the Meiji Period(1) and Kabuki's War Dramas

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Abstract
As a result of Japan’s push toward modernization in the second half of the 19th century, kabuki could remain aloof from new cultural elements no longer. Alongside characters donning the traditional kimono and topknot, newcomers in Western dress and short hair (zangiri: literally, “cropped hair” referencing Western-style haircuts as opposed to the topknot) began to appear on the stage of kabuki. We can find them, for example, waiting for a steam engine to arrive, consulting their wristwatches under the glow of gas lights. Performers such as Onoe Kikugorô V and Nakamura Ganjirô I, remembered today as consummate actors of the canon of classic kabuki, performed wholeheartedly in this theatrical crossroads of tradition and modernity.

A representative fûzokugeki (a drama of manners) with a predilection for realism was the kabuki war drama. Out of traditional kabuki production was engendered a curious entity representing the battles fought by a modern Japan. Displaying a coexistence of classic masterpieces and such hybrid new plays, the kabuki of this time rewards careful reconsideration of its inherent possibilities as an art.

Introduction
The relationship between “classic” and modern” in kabuki presents a curious balance. Ichikawa Danjûrô VIII(2) was a renowned actor of the Bakumatsu (the closing years of the Edo period: 1850s-1860s); but if his life had not been cut short, he would have been alive during the

(1) The Meiji period, which lasted from 1868 to 1912, saw the collapse of the old institutions through restoration of imperial rule and the beginning of Japan’s modernization. The previous Edo period had lasted from 1603 to 1867.
(2) Kabuki actor. 1823-1854.
Meiji period, equipped with Western dress. We often forget that the playwright Segawa Jokô III,\(^{(3)}\) author of Danjûrô's well-known role Kirare Yosa (The Slashed Yosa),\(^{(4)}\) lived until Meiji 14 (1881). Conversely, our understanding of Edo sodachi omatsuri Sashichi (Edo-raised Festival Sashichi),\(^{(5)}\) first performed in Meiji 31 (1898), as Edo kabuki is a modern sentiment. If this illusion of perspective (presented by the term Edo kabuki) is understood for what it is, however anachronistic, it can indeed serve as an expedient for discourse. To be sure, if products of the Meiji period are not allowed into the canon of classic works, the kyôgen-date (program structure) of kabuki for entertainment becomes untenable. Or rather, to the extent that the very concept of a program of “classic kabuki” is a construct of the late Meiji and beyond, it is rendered rather opaque from the start.

If pressed for the unique repertoire of Meiji kabuki, katsureki\(^{(6)}\) and zangiri\(^{(7)}\) are often given unceremoniously in response. The aspects of an age, however, are naturally multifaceted, and the singularly inscrutable Meiji period was home to an amalgamation and coexistence of various elements.

Regardless of the aspersions cast against the quality of katsureki or zangiri plays, it is a fact that they enriched the kabuki repertoire until the fourth decade of the Shôwa period (mid-1950s to mid-1960s). Herein was surely something more than a simple nostalgia by those that actually lived through the Meiji years – something intimately attached to bygone memories. Why would the memory of a group of plays lambasted as prosaic and foolish live on so persistently in those that experienced the Meiji period? To a surprising extent, these plays, regardless of popular recognition or lack thereof, were stored away in the memories of a wide spectrum of individuals. Katsureki and zangiri are frequently painted as impoverished and lacking content. Why, then, did these plays enrich the spectator’s memories and excite their audience? If we are to call the products of Meiji theatre impoverished, what vibrant collection of memories do we have today that we desire to talk about on end? When approaching katsureki and zangiri, it is important to remember that the audience was not analyzing and evaluating them as texts, but rather experiencing the theatre’s sensual power through their eyes and ears – they thus relived their memories of audio and visual enjoyment. Without a consideration of this physical function, a solely text-based anatomization would keep most of the plays under question here from inclusion into the discourse.

Additionally, a perspective informed by developmental history that views katsureki as

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\(^{(3)}\) Playwright. 1806-1881.
\(^{(4)}\) First performed in 1853. A fûzokugeki masterpiece of kabuki about the relationship between a ruffian and his lover of the late Edo period.
\(^{(5)}\) Edo period fûzokugeki based on the earlier work of Tsuruya Nanboku IV (1755-1829).
\(^{(6)}\) Historical kabuki plays born out of collaboration between Ichikawa Danjurô IX (1838-1903) and contemporary intellectuals that emphasized historical accuracy.
\(^{(7)}\) Zangiri (cropped hair) refers to the Western-style haircuts that appeared following the abolishment of the chonmage (topknot). Kabuki plays featuring contemporary customs and actors in Western-style dress and with such haircuts are thus called “cropped-hair plays.”
transforming into *shin-kabuki* and *zangiri* into *shinpa* makes an understanding of the pleasures of the Meiji kabuki repertoire difficult. The various kabuki plays of the Meiji period existed synchronistically: After the peak of *zangiri*, we notice the production of *Kagatobi* (The Kaga Firemen); following the height of the adaptations and war dramas, *Omitsuri Sashichi* was staged; and subsequent to the high-time of *shinpa*, *Tsukuda no yoarashi* (The Night Storm of the Field) was first performed. Inserted in the middle act of a certain Sino-Japanese War drama was *Ishikiri Kajiwara*, where the actor who had been playing a military role in the former then took the role of Kozue, the heroine daughter, in the latter, only to return to the war drama as a rank-and-file soldier. Today’s documentation tends to count these as individual works, but they were carved on the memories of the contemporary audience as multiple plays performed on the same day or by the same actor.

A performance is not to be considered a self-contained artwork, nor is it to be analyzed solely in terms of the charm of the actor. Put rather boldly, it must be considered within the context of all the comprising elements of theatre. Therein we find perceptual transformation of the audience, which is essential for a performance, changes in production approaches, and all the historical background and strength that silently moves these elements unnoticed. While a treatment of the whole relationship between these cannot be undertaken here, to the extent that a program is to be performed, the theatre cannot be considered without an understanding that it is predicated atop a collection of these factors. Looking at the printed theatre programs of Meiji theatre, we are surprised at the almost desultory or incoherent nature of its composition. This unlikely conflation, however, expresses the depth and breadth of Meiji theatre.

### 1 Customs as presented in *zangiri*

*Zangiri* is often dismissed as nothing more than the product of a Japan in transition – new customs interpolated within traditional methods. Essential here, however, is not to affirm the official view as prescribed by later generations, but to question its assumptions.

To begin with, *zangiri* is often criticized as relying on “traditional methods” as it incorporates new cultural elements into *togaki jôruri*, *yosogoto jôruri*, and the traditional

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8. *Shin-kabuki* or “New Kabuki” refers to a group of plays produced during the early 20th century that incorporated concepts from Western theatre.

9. *Shinpa* or “New School” developed in contrast to the “Old School” kabuki of the late 19th century.

10. Full name: *Mekura nagaya ume kagatobi*. Kabuki masterpiece written by Kawatake Mokuami (1886) featuring the customs of the previous generation.

11. See note 5.

12. Full name: *Ansei kibun tsukuda no yoarashi*. Written by Takeshiba Shinsui, etc., and first performed in 1914. Known for its realistic depiction of Edo-period prisons.

13. First performed in 1730 as *jôruri*, a historical play that treats the warrior disturbances of the 12th century.

14. *Togaki jôruri* is a type of kabuki stagecraft with *jôruri* roots in which the chanter (*gidayû*) narrates the stage directions (*togaki*).

15. A convention of background music in kabuki in which the music is presented as that of *jôruri* being per-
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rhetorical structure of the seven-five meter; as attested to by all contemporaneous fields, however, the incorporation of new civilization into a “traditional” system is everyday wisdom. Setting aside matters of scale, is it possible to find a field from the second decade of the Meiji period – a time that saw its framework of expression and perception shaken from its foundations – that survived without “traditional methods”?

Moreover, no matter how paradoxical it may sound, it was through these very traditional means that zangiri was able to secure its audience and comprehend their emotions, working in addition to the new era’s social slogan of enlightenment education. katsureki and zangiri thus maintained their lifeblood as performances until the fourth decade of the Shōwa period (mid 1960s) owing to faintly retained aural memories. In general terms, it is the natural function and role of theatre to treat new customs, social conditions, and practices; it is not “superficial” in the least to stress such social customs, both seen and unseen.

In that sense, let us first turn to the importance of zangiri customs. To begin with, from the perspective of theatrical presentation and for actors under the public gaze, cultural elements directly related to changes in costumes, wigs, stage properties, makeup and movements, and rhetoric were intimately interpreted as a matter of top priority of personal concern. Transforming for one’s role through Western clothing (as opposed to costumes) and short hair (as opposed to wigs) demanded a reorganization of the physical functions and performing framework of actors who had grown up in Edo. Moreover, the appearance of gas lights (lighting), watches (time), and steam engines (transportation) fundamentally changed traditional production system, theatre structure, and stage scenery and properties in addition to the visual perception and consciousness of the audience. The change in customs during Japan’s modernization prompted the fundamental transformation of kabuki.

Of additional interest is the fact that zangiri’s lifespan matches almost seamlessly with the period of transition of actual use on stage from oil lamps to gas lights. Until the appearance of electricity, lighting – an amenity of civilization – was at once of utilitarian use and at once a spectacle. The innovation and visual effects of gas lights often proved popular amongst the contemporary zangiri audience. Later, when the gas lights were first lit, Kobayashi Kiyochika,(16) whom Kinoshita Mokutarō(17) lauded alongside Kawatake Mokuami(18) as one of the two consummate artists who produced works redolent of the culture of the modernization period, was more surprised at the extent of the darkness of the steps they had hitherto trod than at the actual brightness of the lights. From this anecdote, it does not seem inappropriate to suggest that the people of the Meiji period possessed a much more sensual conception of lighting than we do today.

(16) 1847-1915. Woodblock printer called the “last ukiyo-e artist.”
(17) 1885-1945. Poet and playwright, in addition to being a medical school professor.
(18) 1816-1893. Representative kabuki dramatist of the 19th century.
In the Meiji 8 (1875) performance of *Kokoro no yami terasu gasu tô* (The Gas Light that Illuminates the Darkness of the Heart), the use of a real gas light in the scene in which the rich man played by Danjûrô(19) expounds on the nature of a strong country (fukoku) by drawing a parallel to a bright gas light and an impoverished and exhausted people unable to change with the times greatly excited spectators. In *Kanzen chôaku kôshi no homare* (Championing Good and Admonishing Evil – The Pride of a Filial Son),(20) Kikugorô(21) plays the role of Ii Yôhô’s(22) father, the photographer Kitaniwa Tsukuba; in one of the many instances in which optical technology such as lighting and photographs is utilized as a prop of cultural enlightenment, there is a scene in which he claims that photographers are capable of practicing physiognomy, able to deduce the intricacies of a person’s character through physical characteristics. These are much more than simple anecdotes from an age of efflorescence. The transformation of visual effects using the most cutting-edge technology of the time is extremely important in the history of theatre. *Zangiri* plays were not to be read and understood in print as independent texts; they remain unappreciated if a stratified perspective is not adopted that takes into consideration their exhibition of the visual pleasures of a new age.

It was also around this time that the premodern sideshows transitioned to the modern expositions. The government’s directive to the extent that reformed plays would “wash away the depraved customs and play a role in their gradual elimination” encouraged a transformation in the visual perception of the common people, more so than the conventional paradigm of *kanzen chôaku* (encouraging good and admonishing evil). While such artificial constructs can be disregarded, visual sensual pleasure is strongly invasive. Understood within this context, the significance of *zangiri* customs should come into focus. First of all, this is not simply an experience in reminiscence through modern eyes, but a product of the newest technology of the time; “enlightenment” through media featuring customs or manners that are gradually percolating into daily life happens unnoticed even today.

The purpose of realism is to visually transform the everyday. Compared with previous ages, the 19th century is considered to have been an age in which visual perception was given precedence over the other senses to a strange degree. Stepping away from the “official opinion” to reconsider the reaction to *katsureki* and *zangiri*, we are greeted by the powerful visual stimuli that struck the contemporary audience. The attachment to and admiration for realism and authenticity in the settings, stage properties, and costumes, as seen in the reviews and anecdotes of *katsureki* and *zangiri*, was an obsession of the 19th century that extended beyond simply the theatre. What is overlooked today as superficial customs was burned intensely in the memory of the contemporary audience. These superficial customs were inis-
tently merged into daily life as social habits much more effectively than outmoded ideas of the day, like *kanzen chōaku*, ever could.

In this regard, a watch – an amenity of enlightenment and a stage property often used in *zangiri* – cannot be dismissed as simply a new cultural element. In the famous *zangiri Shimo yo no kane jûji no tsujiura* (Tsujira Divinations on a Frosty Night),(23) policeman Sugita Kaoru pulls out his watch to check the time; he says, “it is already past twelve,” and “sounds like they haven’t heard the ordinance.” The commentary by Rokuniren, a theatre-going group active in early Meiji, records this closing scene as “immensely popular.” Novel elements of enlightenment – a watch, a square, glass-paneled lantern, a police officer, and the government’s proclamation – appear as a unit and speak volumes more to the ears and eyes of the audience than any official communication; they served to strongly impress viewers of the revolution in consciousness surrounding time that took place in the transition from the natural, organic time of the Edo period to the regulated, artificial time of the Meiji period.

Passage of time had traditionally been expressed theatrically through sound effects administered by *geza ongaku* (24) – such effects included the *tokidaiko*, *gari dokei*,(25) and *hontsurigane* (a small hanging bell struck with a wooden hammer). These are ultimately theatrical ‘conventions’ of time. Although Mokuami famously refers to a “hazy moon”(26) (oborozuki) that is supposed to rise at night, the audience does not wonder what time it actually is.

The audience was made visually conscious of the hour in *zangiri*, however. Actually portraying a hazy moon through gas lighting was a popular device. The very fact that Akashi no Shimazô, the main character of *Shima chidori tsuki no shiranami* (Plovers of the Island and White Waves of the Moon),(27) can ply his trade at night is thanks to the spread of gas lamps. What announces the time for his ten o’clock meeting with Senta, an old friend, however, is the hontsurigane. While Senta hopes to meet at Shôkonsha shrine(28) at just before eleven o’clock, Shimazô apologizes for being thirty minutes late. Herein we glimpse the synchronous flow of both organic and artificial time that characterized life. A consciousness of the passage of time down to thirty-minute increments made the audience aware of a measurable, manageable time that stood in relief to the relaxed time of Edo. While the written stage directions call for *toribue*(29) and *daibyôshi* (30) at play’s end, there is a line that specifies “routine cleaning every morning at four.” This stands distinct from the traditional vague convention of time to express the morning, such as “early dawn” or “already the rooster is crowing”; referenced

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(23) By Kawatake Mokuami (first performed in 1880).
(24) Music and sound effects played behind a curtain (*kuromisu*) on stage right in kabuki
(25) Sound effect of an old-style clock spring.
(26) A reference to a famous line in Mokuami’s *Sannin Kichisa* (1860) in which Ojô Kichisa, a thief disguised as a young girl, recites “In the spring sky a hazy moons is floating” after he robs a passerby.
(27) By Kawatake Mokuami. First performed in 1881.
(28) Shinto shrine established to pray for the repose of those that died serving the country. A major landmark in central Tokyo at the time. The current Yasukuni Shrine.
(29) A flute used in theatre to replicate a rooster’s call.
(30) Sound effect utilizing a drum and flute
instead is a logical passage of time discrete from traditional memories and mythological association with the cock’s crow. While this is not to say that the audiences of *Shima chidori* (31) and *Shimo yo no kane* (32) were devoted to the recommended spread of calculated, artificial time or the conservation of time, it informs us that the revolution in time consciousness is not only the sole purview of research on entertainment modes or general cultural theory; in its connection to lighting, the importance of this revolution is that it comes to bear on the construction of a plot, perception of the audience, and the physical bearing of the actors. Expressing through lighting the passage of time, a hazy moon, the moonlight, or the morning sun at dawn drew applause from *katsureki* and *zangiri* audiences. In fact, as seen in *Koi no yami ukai no kagaribi* (The Cormorant Fisherman and His Watch Light in the Darkness of Love) (33) or *Nakakuni*, (34) performed in Osaka, an obsession with regulating the lighting went so far as to make the stage dark to the point that the audience could not even see the actors and the actors could not recognize one another.

The characters of the *zangiri* stage expound on the value of the “civilization” that was being absorbed unconsciously in daily life. The famous lines from a *zangiri* by Mokuami, “ignorance of enlightenment is folly” and “the world is gradually becoming more open,” eventuated in something far surpassing their original intent. One may say that *zangiri* is characterized by customs, but one would be mistaken to claim it was only by mere customs. For even today, mankind’s perceptions are altered unwittingly, affected by customs both seen and unseen.

2 The physical elements of *zangiri*

The import of customs within the world of *zangiri* is that they bear directly on the body and dress of the actors, themselves. Often neglected as a subject of research, the written stage directions hold a variety of information concerning physical expression that comes to play on the actual conducting of a performance. Clothing and hair played an integral part in audience identification of roles: For example, villains could be characterized by the typical bushi (warrior) *aburatsuki* (35) wig or the asadaya wig characteristic of a particularly strong enemy, or by a hemp *kamishimo* (36) or woven garment (*orimon*) (37). Even simple passersby could be visually distinguished as respectable citizens with no disreputable associations or vagrants based on the makeup, delivery of the lines, way of walking, placement on the stage, and *geza*.

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(31) See note 26.
(32) See note 23.
(33) By Kawatake Mokuami. First performed in 1886.
(34) One play belonging to the *Shin-kabuki Jûhachiban* (“The New Compilation of Eighteen House Plays”). A kabuki adaptation of the nó play Kogô, which was based on *the Heike Monogatari* (The Tale of the Heike).
(35) A wig style used in period plays.
(36) Hempen garment for a samurai’s official duty.
(37) A beautified samurai garment found only on the kabuki stage.
While these conventions may be criticized as stereotypical, they represent, from the vantage of the economy of expression, the accumulation of professional and artistic wisdom, and constitute a veritable kabuki taxonomy.

The significance of expression in katsureki and zangiri is not simply in their interpretation as plays, but in their need to overturn such visual conventions and schemes.

To begin with, Western-style clothing becomes an issue in zangiri. To the extent that costumes possess the ability to display social order, such normative distinctions of class and occupation could be imbued into Western clothing, as well. Kikugorô V appears in refined Western dress in photographs, perhaps owing to a profound predilection for things Western attested to by accounts of him entering his dressing room in Western clothing and boots by Meiji 4 (1871) and sitting in Western-style chairs at home. Even contemporary stage reviews complimented his and other actors’ Western fashions to a surprising extent.

Onnagata (male actors playing female roles), however, posed a problem. Rokuniren’s Haiyū hyōbanki (actors’ critiques) contains the following critique of the female character of Wakaba, played by onnagata Sawamura Momonosuke in Hyōryū kidan seiyô kabuki (Wanderers’ Strange Story: A Tale of Western Kabuki) “When he [Sawamura] sits down in a chair, however, we notice the long torso of his male body and his unsightly behind. He later fixes this, thus hiding his behind, which was an improvement.” While Western-garbed onnagata continued to the time of shinpa and the future Ichikawa Shôchô II, it must not be overlooked that the theatrical depiction of modern times with onnagata was very much complicated by Western dress.

Theatre reform was, of course, implemented vigorously in the Kyoto-Osaka region, as well. Owing to the activities of his later years, Nakamura Ganjirô I often tends to be depicted as the “consummate Kamigata wagoto performer”; having experienced the age of “reform” during his youth, however, his acting career had taken him through a truly curious spectrum of roles: works depicting the Sino-Japanese War, a speech by Napoleon, and the schoolgirl in Tōsei shosei katagi (A Portrait of Modern Students), to survey a few. It was the trying experience of his youth, which demanded that he continue to perform such kiwamono and second-rate zangiri, that instilled in him a nonpareil strength that informed his later “Kamigata wagoto” – a strength capable of viscerally realizing perversion and privation that cannot be consigned to simple attractiveness, stage presence, or art.

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38. Musical accompaniment of an actor’s entrance and exit.
40. By Mokuami. First performed in 1879. The play-within-a-play features a Western character.
41. A kabuki actor renowned for his onnagata performance. 1886-1940. In addition to kabuki plays, he also portrayed Portia in The Merchant of Venice and Desdemona in Othello.
42. A representative Kamigata (area around Osaka and Kyoto) kabuki actor. 1860-1935.
43. Wagoto is a style of acting within kabuki that emphasizes the expression of delicate romantic emotions.
44. Influenced by Western realism, Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859-1935) published this novel in 1885. A leading literary critic of the time, Tsubouchi would later come to translate the complete works of Shakespeare.
45. Simple works that handled contemporary topics and aimed for quick, if not fleeting, theatrical success.
Nakamura Ganjirô I’s *Ganjirô jiden* (Autobiography of Nakamura Ganjirô) holds an interesting place within *zangiri* discourse. Ganjirô starred in numerous reform plays and *zangiri* during his early years and existed as the consummate actor in tune with the temper of the times. He admits, “treated as an actor of a completely new *kyōgen* or *zangiri*, I was asked to appear every time such a play was put on” (Nakamura Ganjirô 1935). Of course, Meiji’s Osaka was full of the new scripts and *zangiri* of Katsu Nôshin(46) and Katsu Genzô,(47) father and son. While Ganjirô’s rendition of an oration by Napoleon at the curious Academic Speech Conference (Gakujutsu enzetsukai) is famous, his appearance in the dramatization of Suehiro Tecchô’s political novel advocating Democratic rights, *Secchûbai*, won him infamy. In the role of the student Takeda Takeshi, he complained that things did not go to his liking with the wig, eventuating in him investing significant effort in the makeup and costume, doffing the wig, and appearing in his natural hair. To the extent that this led to Ganjirô’s being thought mad, it can be surmised just how foreign such a sight would have been in the contemporary stage’s framework of expression.

Curious from a modern perspective, however, is the fact that Ganjirô acted the part of Hanano Takako, a schoolgirl in the theatrical adaptation of Tsubouchi Shôyô’s *Tôsei shosei katagi*, mentioned above.(48) Here, as well, Ganjirô paid painstaking attention to his costumes and wigs; despite that, however, it is interesting to note his comment that production would, of course, “aim for realism.” Within the contemporary context, both the Western dress of Iwai Hanshirô,(49) renowned onnagata of the Bakumatsu (1850’s and 60’s), and Ganjirô’s schoolgirl both ostensibly belonged to the school of “realism.”

Furthermore, “Nakamura Jakuemon II, who plays Takako’s father, requested that *jôruri* and *gappô* (50) be inserted for the span from the outer gate to the inner door of the father’s house, to where Takako is returning to confess and beg for forgiveness.” In response, however, Ganjirô is said to have “firmly rejected the *chobo* (the shamisen player-chanter combination accompanying certain plays),” saying it “wouldn’t be a reformed play” and they would “perform it naturally, no matter how uncomfortable it may feel.”

The disparity in physical sensibilities in the actors between the newer and older generations is palpably observable here. Jakuemon II was born in Tenpô 12 (1841) and, true to the name, was a *Tenpô rôjin*.(51) To him and many others, for a daughter “returning to confess” only a *gappô* would do; neither a “schoolgirl” of the new generation nor a personage named Hanano Takako would suffice. (While this character name is allegorical, the same could be said even if this was

(47) Kabuki actor. 1844-1902
(48) See note 43.
(49) Iwai Hanshirô VIII. 1829-1882.
(50) Music (*gidayû bushi*) used in the *jôruri Sesshû gappôtsuji* (Gappô and his Daughter Tsuji; first performed 1773).
(51) Referring to an elderly person (rôjin) of the Tenpô era (1830-1843). A derogatory term for the older generation that remained behind the times in a quickly evolving Meiji Japan.
a more common name due to the context.) In short, to the extent that this would be a traditional kabuki role, it would not be complete without the requisite jôruri. Such a setting naturally called for the scene to be complemented by jôruri-accompanied shamisen that emphasizes the climax, known as potechin.(52) This physical sentiment was also shared by their contemporary Kikugorô, as well. No matter the height of enterprising spirit, even Danjûrô did not forsake jôruri – the body betrayed any inclination of the mind that it was no longer needed.

3 The visual sensations of the war pieces

The family of “war dramas” is an utterly neglected genre unique to the Meiji period. These war pieces are treated here because they played a decisive hand in kabuki’s inability to handle contemporary topics – betraying a problem running throughout zangiri. To be sure, war pieces can be considered a part of zangiri plays, as they contain numerous contemporary shin-engeki,(53) however, they will be considered a separate genre here. Of course, these war pieces belong to terrain that should theoretically be treated in comparison with shin-engeki; in this paper, however, I shall interpret them within the scope of the kabuki program.

While war pieces are a neglected field, numerous kiwamono(54) were produced in the Meiji period, including those covering the Battle of Ueno,(55) Satsuma Rebellion,(56) Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), and Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). While kiwamono are regarded today with negative connotations, the “canon” of classics contains many kiwamono masterpieces; additionally, it was a motif that was all-too-natural for an age when theatre functionally doubled as a medium of news. The diversification of media after entering the Meiji period also served to prompt changes in theatrical function and the programs of contemporary and subsequent plays.

Furthermore, war pieces of the Meiji period characteristically emphasized visual stimulation to heightened degrees. As is apparent in the panoramas and sensô nishiki-e (colorful woodblock prints in the ukiyo-e style treating war themes) prevalent at the time, the age was pregnant with an unusual and obstinate passion for realism and authenticity. This figured prominently in the visual element of Meiji plays, leading all the way to the spread of photographs, which exist as a tentative consummation of this desire.

According to Imao Tetsuya, the audience of Hazama gunki narumi no kikigaki (The Narumi Record of the Hazama Military Chronicle, Meiji 3; 1870)(57) “is shown a shop curtain of a teahouse

(52) Gidayû shamisen sound effect used to emphasize scenes of tragedy or climax. Accompanying acting may often be overacted or forced.
(53) The new type of theatre that took a markedly different trajectory than that popular at the time (kabuki), as seen in the case of Kawakami Otojirô.
(54) See note 44.
(55) Civil war battle during the 1868 revolution fought in Ueno, Edo (modern Tokyo), between the old and new military forces.
(56) Counter-revolution (1877) raised against the new government by Saigô Takamori (1826-1877), who had been a key figure in the 1868 revolution.
(57) By Kawatake Mokuami. Adhering to traditional kabuki conventions, this play superimposes the Battle of Ueno onto a well-known battle of the 16th century in Narumi.
bearing a design evocative of the Battle of Ueno” (Imao 1992). Several years later, in opening the Meiji nenkan azuma nikki (The Meiji Diary of the East) in Meiji 8 (1875), however, “the audience was shown actual battle scenes – albeit simple ones” (Atsumi 1937). We notice a traditional, playful naming convention in operation here, with characters bearing names evocative of Ueno, such as Shimizutani No Jô, Daibutsu Rokurô, and Todoroki Zakagorô. While numerous nishiki-e (colorful woodblock prints in the ukiyo-e style) floated about during the Satsuma Rebellion of Meiji 10, we notice likenesses of “Dan-Kiku-Sa” (Danjûrô IX, Kikugorô V, and Sadanji I) made up to look like Saigô, Kirino, and Shinohara, the leaders of the rebellion. There is no denying the visual impact of this lighthearted custom (in existence since the Edo period).

In the Meiji 11 (1878), Okige no kumo harau asagochi (The Spring Morning Wind that Sweeps away the Southwest Clouds) garnered great popularity for its “realistic display of war,” achieving a long run of an impressive eighty days. In the battlefield death scene of Shinohara, portrayed by Kikugorô, the “explosions of the Western-style fireworks” were “truly realistic... evocative of what real gunfire must be like” (Ibid); “it captivated the audience” (Tamura 1922). The fastidious Kikugorô is said to have rushed to the battlefield of the Battle of Ueno in fireman’s garb to see real warfare in action; there is something in his enthusiasm for realism, however, that cannot be simply dismissed as an anecdote concerning the spirit of an old-style actor. Danjûrô’s obstinateness for katsureki and Kikugorô’s persistence for details in kizewa and zangiri are in no way at odds. An actor such as Kikugorô naturally resonated with the demands of the time.

The First National Industrial Exhibition (Daiikkai Naikoku Kangyô Hakurankai), held in Meiji 10 (1877), witnessed a shift in visual perception from a curiosity toward sideshow (misemono) to the strong draw toward images of the enlightenment; it was during this time that the visuals of news-reporting shifted from the strange tales and macabre images of colored woodblock print newssheets (shimbun nishiki-e) to the immediacy of illustrated newspapers (e-iri shimbun). The “eyes of the audience” that widened in surprise at Okige no kumo harau asagochi were the same eyes that were swept away by enlightenment and immediacy. This also came to bear on the repertoire of kabuki. Kiwamono soon began to lose its identity, and, alongside such plays as inga-mono and dokufu-mono that visually spoke to traditional sideshow curiosity, engendered such enlightenment-focused fûzoku buyô (plays featuring everyday lives of the Edo period) as Hyôryû kidan seiyô kabuki, which showcased the “pseudo-travel” popular

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(58) By Kawatake Mokuami. First performed in 1875.
(59) The names of characters are derived from actual places and features of Ueno, such as Shimizutani, Todorokizaka, and Daibutsu; these suggestive names were designed to be quite evocative to the contemporary audience.
(60) By Kawatake Mokuami.
(61) Of the kabuki sewamono (domestic drama), those of particular realism.
(62) Plays based on the Buddhist concept of karma, in which parents’ misdeeds come to haunt their children with physical misfortune.
(63) Plays featuring a diabolical woman who deceives men through her sexual appeal.
at the time, and *Fūsen nori uwasa no takadono* (The Balloonist and the Tower of Repute)\(^{(64)}\) and *Narihibiku charine no kyokuba* (The Resonant Circus of Charini),\(^{(65)}\) which were set against the backdrops of Japan’s first skyscraper (the Ryōunkaku) in Asakusa\(^{(66)}\) and the Ueno museum.\(^{(67)}\) While Charini’s circus was nothing more than a sideshow, its foreign nature earned it imperial attendance.

Takeshiba Kisui’s\(^{(68)}\) *Satsuki bare Ueno no asakaze* (The Morning Wind of Clear Ueno Sky in the Fifth Month) debuted in Meiji 23 (1890), scheduled alongside the Third National Industrial Promotion Exposition, which was held in the very same Ueno locale as the Battle of Ueno. Its war scenes using actual fire and water drew considerable attention, and a scene at a goldfish vendor involved drawing actual water at a well and releasing real goldfish to swim in a pond. It all was enough to make Miki Takeji\(^{(69)}\) say, “to simply plug my ears and watch the burning building with my eyes and smell the gunpowder with my nose... I was impressed almost to the point of tears at the work of these realists” (Miki 1896).

Of particular interest, however, is that the last act is set in the exhibition venue with the “electric light pole.” The play’s *watari-zerifu*\(^{(70)}\) include one claiming “to inform our nation’s people of the improvement in our fortunes” and another stating that “the brick-house proclamation is a blindfold to hide the dirty town from view”; Chôkichi of Aizu,\(^{(71)}\) a member of the Shôgitai\(^{(72)}\) who had refused to cut his topknot, delivers a speech in which he decides to do it. Furthermore, the final curtain is lowered at the tinkle of a Western-style hand-bell in accord with the announcement of the play’s closing time. Although the scene was set in Ueno, site of the graves of the Tokugawa house, which normally resonated with the gongs of the large bells of Kan’ei Temple and Asakusa Temple, a bell was no longer used to announce the hour. This exhibition scene, a veritable consummation of *zangiri* visual and auditory effects, also signified the demise of those functions that *zangiri* had borne. To say something of the changing milieu, contemporary to the Exposition (considerable enough itself to have been adopted as a location in *Satsuki bare Ueno no asakaze* was the Ueno panorama house, whose indelible

\(^{(64)}\) By Kawatake Mokuami. Based on an incident in which British entertainer Spencer goes up in a gas balloon in Yokohama only to come down with a parachute. First performed in 1891. In the role of Spencer, Kikugorô V delivered a message from stage in English.

\(^{(65)}\) By Kawatake Mokuami. Kabuki based on the play performed by the Italian circus troupe Charini during their 1886 visit to Japan.

\(^{(66)}\) Twelve-story tower built in 1890 in the downtown area of Asakusa (Tokyo). Japan’s first skyscraper, it drew considerable attention.

\(^{(67)}\) Japan’s first Western museum, built in Ueno, Tokyo. A notable landmark of the time.

\(^{(68)}\) Kabuki actor. 1847-1923. Pupil of Kawatake Mokuami.

\(^{(69)}\) Representative theatre critic of the Meiji period. 1867-1908. Younger brother of Mori Ôgai, the famous novelist, critic, and translator of a modernizing Japan.

\(^{(70)}\) Literally passed-on dialogue, in which the characters speak lines antiphonally.

\(^{(71)}\) Province in northern Japan that ended up on the losing side of the 1868 revolution (modern Fukushima Prefecture).

\(^{(72)}\) Name of the troops that supported the former Tokugawa regime during the 1868 revolution (Battle of Ueno).
impression can be understood by Kikugorô’s appropriation of it as a landmark in his autobiography in his recounting of his trek to see the Battle of Ueno in person. The realism and palpable force felt by contemporary viewers of panoramas garnered a great deal of popularity particularly during the age when they featured wartime themes. Additionally, as panoramas began to be replaced by the spread of photographs and, after the Russo-Japanese War, by the new entertainment of moving pictures, the people’s visual perception greatly changed. This naturally came to affect the eyes of theatergoers and the consciousness of actors.

4. The war dramas and their physical elements

Setting aside the Nikudan San’yūshi(73) plays and the propaganda plays of the early Shôwa period (1930’s), the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) was an epoch-making event that veritably ended the efficacy of kabuki’s role as a pre-film medium relating contemporary events. The Sino-Japanese War plays, caught between competing old and new modalities of the stage, served to firmly canonize kabuki’s role as classical theatre.

Kabuki’s Sino-Japanese War plays began with Nihon shôri no kachidoki (Japan’s Cry of Victory), which was performed in September of Meiji 27 (1894) at the Haruki-za theatre. (74) According to Imadani Kyûhei (Atsumi Seitarô), “Being a work of Katsu Genzô, (75) the lines are mostly in the seven-five meter” and “to those of the old school accustomed to the Yanagi, Yamagata, or Chidori style of stage fighting (tachimawari), war plays are thoroughly unreasonable” (Okamoto 1937a). And as the recollection of Okamoto Kidô(76) reveals (“The showcase war scenes went the way of the old-school tachimawari, giving viewers no sense of realism.”), the action of the war scenes – the highlight of shin-engeki – no longer matched with the kabuki audience’s sense of realism. While often overlooked as a natural evolution, this is actually a fascinating development. The reason for this is that, of the previous plays handling the Battle of Ueno or the Satsuma Rebellion, even the kabuki war plays were considered to have offered “truly realistic scenes of war” and “visually excited the audience.” As already touched upon, this was partly due to the fact that the visual desires and senses of the audience had changed through the diversification and evolution of the theatre and media. An additional factor was the customs of the time. For example, while quite limited during the Satsuma Rebellion, military uniforms became standard through the Sino-Japanese War plays. Just as with the clothing and hairstyles of actual life, costumes and wigs greatly define our way of walking and sitting, our register of speech and vocabulary, and other aspects of our behavioral patterns. According to Okamoto Kidô,

In the scenes of ‘the Battle of Ueno’ and ‘the Rebellion at the Hamaguri Gate,’ everyone

(73) Literally, “The Three Human Bullets.” Three soldiers glorified as war heroes after dying in a military conflict between Japan and China in Shanghai in 1932. Their memory was deployed as a link in Japan’s propaganda efforts.
(74) Theatre built in Hongô, Tokyo, in 1873. Its main fare was kabuki plays.
(75) See note 31.
(76) A novelist of popular literature and shin-kabuki playwright. 1872-1939.
wears traditional topknots and long and short swords, dresses in *hakama* or dons armor. Even if this may be called ‘realism,’ they rely on expressionistic or physical theatrical conventions. As even the battle scenes rely on the use of the kabuki convention of *chobo*, even hackneyed acting can be disguised effectively behind tradition (Okamoto 1937b).

The stage directions for the war scenes of *Satsuki bare Ueno no asakaze* called for costumes reminiscent of the climax of a kabuki revenge play: Takagibaru Yuinosuke is to wear a headband tied in the back, don chain mail (*suami*), to fold the hem of his *hakama* up to aid in movement, and to wear long and short swords, with straw sandals; Takemoto Jirô is to wear an adolescent (*wakashû*) wig, headband, chest protection for sword practice, and to tuck up the sides of his *hakama*.” The audience could immediately decipher the tone the actors would deliver their lines in based on how they configured their faces or strutted across the stage. But the actors of Sino-Japanese War plays had to depart from ossified conventions and move their bodies.

Of course, the purpose of the physical training, gymnastics, and exercise promoted in school education and the army during the Meiji period was to “reform” Japanese posture and physical ability; as such, along with the daily life and customs of the Edo-born Japanese, this required a separation from “convention” and “form” accompanying traditional occupations and classes. Such common conceptions aside, only new, logical, physical movements for the troops and soldiers on the battlefield of Sino-Japanese War dramas would reflect true in the eyes of the audience. Kabuki movements virtually controlled by the accompanying jöruri music, however, stood in contrast to rationality that demanded direct progress in the shortest distance.

Jitsukawa Enjaku II, who was in the “Seinen shibai” (Youth Theatre) in Kyoto at the time of the Sino-Japanese War, recalls in detail “using *chobo* for several war dramas” (Jitsukawa 1937): After the “ringing of *chobo*” and beginning of *meriyasu*, the “whistle of the local spinning plant” would ring out with perfect timing just as the *chobo* would chant “just now, the sound from the spinning…”; this conventional procedure served to evoke lamentation at a loved one’s departure for the front. When playing the role of Lieutenant General Kataoka in the *shinpa* play *Hototogisu* (The Cuckoo), Ichikawa Sumizô is recorded to have said, “Please give this a listen,” and employed aikata.” (Nakamura 1937-2)

It was asking much of a body physically constrained by jöruri and aikata to employ logical,

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(77) An undershirt woven to look like chainmail. Actors would open the front of their garments to let the audience see it from underneath.
(78) Osaka-born kabuki actor. 1877-1951.
(79) Calm musical accompaniment to an actor’s silent displays of pensiveness or lamentation.
(80) An adaptation of a best-selling serial novel, which ran in the newspaper from 1889-99, that follows the unfortunate life of a soldier’s wife.
(81) Kabuki actor. 1845-1906.
(82) Music accompanying an actor’s entrance and exit from the stage.
direct action. According to the recollection of Kema Nanboku,(83) however, Ganjirô I, in the role of Captain Matsuzaki in *Nihon shōri no kachidoki* (Meiji 27:1894), shouted his command to charge from within the agemaku,(84) strode forth vigorously and, at the explosion of fireworks on the stage, brought down the final curtain crying, “Charge! Charge! Charge!” (Kema 1944). Such a direct action was a “remarkably novel stage direction” and a “daring endeavor.” This is reminiscent of the later Ichikawa Sadanji II’s(85) direct entrance onto the hanamichi in the role of Aoyama Harima(86) which caused such a stir for its novelty.

Around this time, Sadanji I’s portrayal of a Chinese in Takeshiba Kisui’s(87) *Aizusan Meiji no kumijû* (The Meiji Box from Aizu),(88) which was heavily praised by Okamoto Kidô, garnered a great deal of acclaim; additionally, *Kairiku renshô asahi no mihata* (Flag of the Rising Sun: Forever Victorious on Land and Sea)(89) saw a dual performance by Danjûrô IX and Kikugorô V. Danjûrô’s transformation into a nameless sailor, however, was criticized as “no more valiant than it was pitiful” (Ihara 1933). In contrast, *Domomata* (Stuttering Mata),(90) its entr’acte,(91) was highly praised. Haruki-za’s *Nihon shōri no kachidoki* was performed alongside *Ishikiri Kajiwara* (Stone-Cutting Kajiwara).(92) This was the reality of the programming arrangement (*kyōgen-date*). Even Sawamura Sôjûrô VII(93) acted the role of a soldier in Kawakami Otojirô’s *Bujinteki kyōiku* (A Warrior’s Education), his lines given in “his characteristically languid fashion” (Kotani 1937). This continued, however, only until the Sino-Japanese War.

During the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), moving pictures came onto the scene, and the “feeling of reality” of both the audience and performers developed even deeper. According to the reminiscence discussed previously of Enjaku II about the Russo-Japanese War, “we put our all into scenes of sword-fighting,” but it was “no longer reasonable for one actor to take on twenty or thirty opponents, as it had been during the time of the Sino-Japanese War.” Such displays were divorced from the reality now accepted by spectators.

It was after the death of Danjûrô IX and Kikugorô V that Tsubouchi Shôyô’s *Kiri hitoha* (A Paulownia Leaf)(94) debuted. It is again common to view the period after this as a separate age of kabuki. Often forgotten, however, is the fact that *Kiri hitoha* was performed alongside

(83) Kabuki dramatist. 1880-1957.
(84) Curtain located at the end of the hanamichi, which was drawn at an actor’s entrance and exit.
(85) One of the three leading kabuki actors of the Meiji period. 1880-1940.
(86) A character in the Okamoto Kidô drama *Banchô sarayashiki* (The Broken Dish; 1916).
(87) See note 51.
(89) First performed in 1894. Dramatization of the Sino-Japanese War.
(90) A section of *Keisei hangonkô* (The Courtesan and the Spirit-Conjuring Incense) by Chikamatsu Monzaemon. A classic work.
(91) The work staged between the first and second plays of a kabuki program in order to change the mood.
(92) See note 11.
(93) Kabuki actor. 1875-1949.
(94) First performed in 1904. This work by Tsubouchi Shôyô (see note 33) ushered in the genre of *shin-kabuki*, which owed a great deal of its identity to Western, modern theatre.
Nihon shōri no kachidoki, a play on the Russo-Japanese War. This is the reality of the Meiji program – a reality experienced by the audience of the time. Theatre did not exist solely as individual texts.

5 Memories of eyes and ears: Conclusion

The Meiji period witnessed a diverse array of programs – more than what has been covered here. There were numerous sewamono, bolstered by the intimate memories of Edo held by Mokuami and his pupils Kawatake Shinshichi III and Takeshiba Kisui, in addition to the plays of Katsu Nōshin and Katsu Genzō, prominent Kamigata playwrights with robust oeuvres. Included therein are the dramatizations of San’yūtei Enchô’s ninjō-banashi (a genre of human interest storytelling) and kaidan-banashi (ghost stories) and the dramatizations of newsworthy stories and newspaper-based serial novels. Moreover, while it is simple to criticize adaptations of foreign works from a modern perspective, the contemporary context has couched numerous intriguing issues, including relations with neighboring countries. We have also touched upon several fûzoku buyô. Additionally, nô torimono and kyôgen buyô, which presented kabuki versions of nô and kyôgen performances that remain immensely popular today, are also products of the Meiji period.

There appear to be several reasons as to why there are numerous plays from the Meiji repertoire that have ceased to be performed over the past thirty years. Some plays cannot be produced because of their inappropriate subject matters or settings. Over these same thirty years, however, kabuki has achieved yet greater acclaim – this securing of its image surely has come to bear heavily on this trend. The more that kabuki has gained popular or international acclaim, the more respect there has been for its masterpieces and the greater the value that has accrued to its content and images; katsureki and zangiri – far from kabuki’s “traditional” and “classical” image, not being “masterpieces,” and tasting both bitter and tart – have practically vanished from the stage. They are no longer the kabuki sought by a new generation. To the extent that theatre is a social being, the kabuki program is subject to influence from its enveloping milieu. The rapid change in lifestyles and perceptions witnessed after the Tokyo Olympics has etiolated the visual and aural memories of a common world jointly shared, albeit unwittingly, by audiences since the Meiji period. While theater is fundamentally a vehicle for the expression of voice, the reminiscences of Kiyomasa and the palpable emotions and voice of Shimazō no longer register in the ears of today’s audiences, which are functionally only a shadow of what they once were. A history of theatre buttressed only by masterpieces is impossible; disregarding katsureki and zangiri as unworthy in favor

(95) See notes 31 and 32.
(96) A rakugo (comic storytelling) artist. 1839-1900. Produced numerous new rakugo and contributed to the establishment of modern written Japanese.
(97) A character in Kawatake Mokuami’s Zôho momoyama monogatari (The Expanded Tale of Momoyama; first staged in 1873) performed by Danjûrô IX. A famous element of Danjûrô IX’s character repertoire.
(98) A famous character in Kawatake Mokuami’s Shima chidori tsuki no shiranami (first staged in 1881) performed by Kikugorô V.
of “tradition” and “the classics” is fruitless. We are able to preserve the form of traditional, classic theatre; we cannot, however, preserve the pain and feeling of defeat felt by the lambasted Meiji-period actors of katsureki, jitsuroku-mono (a variety of kabuki based on dramatized true events), zangiri, and kiwamono. It is the “grand failures” of the Meiji actors – far surpassing their small successes – that reward our attention.

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