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BAKUFU VERSUS KABUKI

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The *kabuki* drama of the Tokugawa period was an art form which represented the taste and interests of the class of townsmen. Deprived of political and social opportunities, the townsmen tended toward grosser pleasures, and evolved a theater which was gaudy, graphic, and emotionally unrestrained. It contrasted with the drama of their social superiors, the military class of shogun, feudal lords, and upper samurai, who patronized *nō* drama: subtle, symbolic, a form already made static by tradition. Of all the lively forms of entertainment and art for which the culture of the townsmen is well known, none excited so much interest in all classes of society as early *kabuki*. Certainly there was none which ran so blatantly counter to the social and moral principles espoused by the Tokugawa government, the *bakufu*, nor which was more disruptive to the structure of Confucian relationships which the *bakufu* strove to maintain.

The traditional date for the first performance of *kabuki* is 1603, by coincidence the year Ieyasu received the title of shogun and the Tokugawa *bakufu* began officially. From the start, the government was appalled at the popularity of *kabuki* and its disruptive influence, and took steps to control it. The running duel between the *bakufu* and *kabuki* lasted the entire 250 years of the Tokugawa period, the *bakufu* constantly thrusting with restrictive laws, the *kabuki* parrying with ingenious devices.

Of particular interest is the nature of these restrictions and the effect they had on the development of *kabuki* as a dramatic form. As might be expected, the harassing measures of the *bakufu* circumscribed *kabuki* in some respects, and forced it into some strange avenues. But most extraordinary, in some ways the effect was artistically beneficial.

A review of the origins of *kabuki* will help to explain the government's attitude. It began as open-air performances of dances

and farces by women, who used it to advertise their secondary, if not primary, profession of prostitution. Among the most popular themes for the skits of the early period were those demonstrating techniques used by prostitutes in accosting clients, or by clients in accosting prostitutes, and scenes of revelry in brothels¹—all matters in which the actresses had professional competence. Contemporary notices leave no doubt that the dialogue was alive with indecent lines, the dances with suggestive movements. In most of the troupes of *onna kabuki* 女歌舞伎 (“women’s *kabuki*,”) there were male actors, but distressingly enough, they often took the female roles while the actresses played the male roles, providing the opportunity for much improper pantomime. The young actors were involved in homosexual prostitution, which had become widespread in Japan during the campaigns of the medieval period, and particularly during the century and a half of intermittent warfare which ended in 1600. Among the early *kabuki* actors and promoters there were other dubious types—ruffians, gamblers, and panderers. The government seems to have been fully justified in considering those connected with *kabuki* an undesirable element in society.

The *kabuki* troupes were an immediate success, not only with townsmen, but perhaps even more with military personnel. With the close of the Korean campaigns and the restoration of peace after the battle of Sekigahara, the large numbers of men who had entered the military profession craved abandoned entertainment, and they had money to pay for it. The early *kabuki* performances, tailored to attract them, were crude and down to earth. As might be expected, the famous Confucian scholar HAYASHI Razan 林羅山 (1583-1657) was not complimentary in his description of these shows:

The men wear women’s clothing; the women wear men’s clothing, cut their hair and wear it in a man’s topknot, have swords at their sides and carry purses. They sing base songs and dance vulgar dances; their lewd voices are clamorous, like the buzzing of flies and the crying of cicadas. The men and women sing and dance together.²

¹ TAKANO Tatsuyuki 高野辰之, *Nihon engeki shi* 日本演劇史 2(1948).20, 39.

² *Razan bunshū* 羅山文集, quoted in TAKANO 2.23.

An early seventeenth-century work provides a description of an actress-dancer's stage entrance in Edo:

When a high placard was put up at Nakabashi announcing that there would be a *kabuki* by Ikushima Tango-no-kami, people gathered, and the high and the low thronged to it. After they had waited impatiently for her appearance, the curtain was flung up, the leading dancer appeared and came along the runway. She was gaily dressed, wore a long and a short sword worked in gold, and had a flint-bag and gourd hung from her waist. She had Saruwaka as a companion. The figure, as it sauntered on in high spirits, did not appear to be that of a woman but of a true-hearted man: it was indeed the image of Narihira,³ who long ago was called the spirit of *yin* and *yang*. The people in the pit and in the boxes craned their necks and, slapping their heads, rocked about forgetting themselves. When she reached the stage, her face, which when seen more closely was even better, was indeed that of a YANG Kuei-fei. It was as though you could say that one of her smiles would throw the six Imperial consorts into the shade. The outer corners of her eyes were like the hibiscus, her lips like red flowers. . . . Anyone who would not fall in love with such a beautiful figure is more to be feared than a ghost.⁴

Then fifty or sixty people danced on the stage, while the samisen accompanied songs meant to arouse a desire for dissipation with such words as:

Be in a frenzy
In this dream-like floating world.
Even the thunder
That rumbles and rumbles
Cannot put you and me
Asunder.⁵

There is no doubt about the excitement that *kabuki* created during its early years. The same book says: "Although there are many different things which are popular in Edo now, there is nothing to compare with the *kabuki* women of Yoshiwarachō."⁶ A guidebook of Kyōto, *Kyō-warabe* 京童 (1658), describes the effect of the actresses on the audience at the height of women's *kabuki*:

³ ARIWARA no Narihira 在原業平 (825-880), whose amorous exploits are the subject of the *Ise monogatari*.

⁴ (*Keichō kemmon shū* (慶長) 見聞集 by MIURA Jōshin 三浦淨心 (Shigemasa 茂正) (1565-1644); *kan* 5, in *Shiseki shūran* 10 (1901), "Sanroku" ["Miscellaneous Notes"] No. 42, p. 144.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 143

They afflicted the six sense-organs of people, they captivated their hearts by appealing to their six senses. Men threw away their wealth, some forgot their fathers and mothers, others did not care if the mothers of their children were jealous. Day and night they had their hearts on [the actresses], and exhausted the money-boxes in their godowns. They did not tire of dallying as long as their wealth lasted. Although they concealed this from their parents and deceived their wives, it became known, [just as nothing escapes] the meshes of the many nets pulled up on the beach of Akogi. Because this was so disturbing to the country and an affliction of the people, the *kabuki* of prostitutes was banned.⁷

A guidebook to Edo, the *Edo meishoki* 江戸名所記 (1662), in reviewing the history of women's *kabuki*, says:

... when theaters were built for the prostitutes to give *kabuki* performances, the impetuous eccentrics among the high and the low became infatuated with them and thronged and jostled one another in the boxes of the theaters. Still unsatisfied, they constantly engaged them, consummated their trysts, squandered their inheritance, and ruined their names. Some, engaging in brawls and arguments, were taken to court. Women's *kabuki* was banned because it disturbed the country, caused deterioration in various ways, and was the cause of calamities.⁸

Where the heavy-drinking, pleasure-bent veterans congregated, trouble was quick to flare up. These samurai, foot-soldiers, and *rōnin* (unemployed samurai), were pugnacious and unruly. In the crowd around the stage the accidental brush of sword scabbards or an unintentional touch with a foot might be enough to set off a brawl among the quick-tempered warriors. Heckling of a favorite actor often started quarrels. Sword fights broke out because of rivalries and jealousies over the attentions of actresses and young actors. Because *kabuki* performances so often led to disorders and even to bloodshed, TOKUGAWA Ieyasu himself ordered the troupes expelled from his base at Suruga in 1608.⁹

In other areas local reform measures were taken in the attempt to halt the subverting of public morals by actresses and actors. They were so much the rage in the capital that even court ladies were said to have been influenced by their style of behavior. In

⁷ By NAKAGAWA Kiun 中川喜雲 (1636-1705); in *Kyōto sōsho* 3 (1914).7.

⁸ By ASAI Ryōi 浅井了意 (d. 1709?); in *Zoku zoku gunsho ruijū* (Kokusho Kankōkai ed.) 8 (1906).756.

⁹ IHARA Toshiro 伊原敏郎, *Nihon engeki shi* 1 (1904).28-29.

1608-1609 five ladies of the Imperial court, of whom two were favorites of the Emperor, went strolling about the city after the manner of prostitutes and *kabuki* actresses, and holding a rendezvous with nine courtiers, drank and made love with them. The Emperor was so displeased that he sent a messenger to Ieyasu, asking him to punish the participants; the principals were executed or banished.¹⁰

In 1628 the *kabuki* dancer Azuma was ordered out of Edo when her performance resulted in a fight, and all women *kabuki* performers, women dancers, and women *jōruri* reciters were banned.¹¹

When such local measures failed to solve the problem, and when women appeared in *kabuki* in Edo again the next year, in 1629 the Tokugawa government took the decisive step of prohibiting women's *kabuki* and banning all women from the stage.¹² At first this ban was not always strictly enforced, for there are reports of women appearing on the stage in Edo as late as 1642 or 1643.¹³ This is also evident from the fact that the ban was repeatedly reissued, as in 1630, 1640, 1645, and 1646.¹⁴ The next year, when women appeared again on the stage of KASAYA Sankatsu's 笠屋三勝 theater, the manager was thrown in prison.¹⁵ After this time the ban was more rigorously enforced, and in effect, women were kept off the *kabuki* stage in the principal cities for 250 years—until after the Meiji Restoration. Only in some provincial areas and around Ise did women continue to appear on the stage.

¹⁰ TAKANO 2.45.

¹¹ IHARA 29.

¹² The law of the 10th month, 1629 read: "In theater performances we hear that heretofore men and women have been mixed. As this is improper, it will not be done henceforth." Cf. IHARA 30-31.

¹³ TAKANO 2.45.

¹⁴ SEKINE Shisei 關根只誠 (1825-1893), *Tōto gekijō enkaku shi* 東都劇場沿革誌 (Chinsho Kankōkai ed.) 1(1916).31b; IHARA 87-88. The law of 1645 said: "Although notification was given during the year 1640 that it is a misdemeanor for men and women to appear together in *kabuki* dancing, lately not only were women dancers being employed and subjected to a bitter life [i. e., prostitution], but men and women were being mixed in *kabuki* performances, and consequently the employers and dancers were punished. Hereafter those who violate this law will receive severe punishment." (IHARA 87.)

¹⁵ IHARA 88.

Dancing girls were repeatedly proscribed in the principal cities, but the authorities were unable to check entirely their appearance for private entertainment.

More than a decade before women were banned from the stage, at least as early as 1612 there had appeared troupes composed entirely of young men, performing what was called *wakashū* 若衆 *kabuki* (“youth’s *kabuki*”). The popularity of the young actors is attested to by the *Kyō warabe*:

From the time that “youth’s *kabuki*” began with youths beautifully gotten up, there was homosexual dallying. Still again [as in the instance of actresses] men had their souls so stolen by them that when they ate their meals they did not taste them. Moreover they became partners of the thighs and arms. Some young women asked to marry these beautiful youths, or were watchful for an arrow shot from Aizen’s bow. How much more the monks of the various temples, who, wishing to get them, decided to use the *mameita* coins they received as offerings for theater tickets, and gave these bewitching creatures as gifts the *chōgin* coins received as subscriptions. . . .¹⁶

The description in the *Edo meishoki* says:

. . . “youth’s *kabuki*” began, with beautiful youths being made to sing and dance, whereupon droll fools again had their hearts captivated and their souls stolen. As they rapturously gave themselves up to visiting the youths in high spirits, the early depletion of even substantial fortunes was like light snow exposed to the spring sun. How much worse it was for those whose fortunes were slight to begin with. There were many of these men who soon had run through their fortunes and who, making for Nambu Sakata, concealed their tracks; others became novice monks although their hearts were not in it, and clothing themselves in black robes, wandered about the various provinces. I have heard that men of the capital have also done this. . . . Even though the lineage of every one of the youths was extremely base, these beautiful youths were respected by the stupid; they flapped about like kites and owls and, going into the presence of the exalted, befouled the presence; and these were scoundrels who, saying insolent things as it pleased them, ruined men and held them in contempt; moreover, they polluted the high-born on the sly. This made them a canker twice over. . . .¹⁷

It is said also that the sons and grandsons of the military heroes of the campaigns of Hideyoshi and Ieyasu had lost their interest in the martial arts, and were not as familiar with the names of

¹⁶ *Kyōto sōsho* 3.7. A silver *mameita* piece was 1 to 5 *momme* (which is 3.75 grams), and a *chōgin* was 43 *momme*.

¹⁷ *Zoku zoku gunsho ruijū* 8.756.

the feudal lords as they were with those of actors and prostitutes. The passion of both the military and townsmen for the young actors so alarmed the authorities, that in 1642 they banned all female impersonation from the stage.¹⁸ In 1644, upon the petition of the theater people, they relented to the extent of permitting female impersonations on condition that a clear distinction would be made between the actors who played female roles and those who played male, that the gender of their roles would be clearly made known, and that there would be no action on the stage which would confuse the audience as to this distinction.¹⁹ In 1648 and repeatedly thereafter decrees forbade homosexual practices by dancers and actors.²⁰ Although the government looked upon the theater as an evil influence, and upon the actors as little better than the pariah class, there was no denying the fascination they held. Occasionally troupes were even called to the shogun's castle for command performances, as in the ninth month of 1650 and three times early the next year, on each occasion receiving money and gifts in compensation for their services. However, with the death of the third shogun Iemitsu (1604-1651) in the fourth month, the new regime under Ietsuna (1641-1680), as part of its sweeping reform movement, dealt severely with *kabuki*. The authorities were concerned not only with the effect of the young actors on the morality of the public at large, and on the morale of the samurai (which they considered to be waning from indulgence in luxuries and pleasures), but also with the fact that certain feudal lords and their retainers had become infatuated with the young actors.²¹

In 1652 the *bakufu* took steps considered second in importance only to the banning of women. "Youth's *kabuki*" was ordered stopped in the sixth month,²² and in the twelfth month the more drastic action was taken of closing the twelve *kabuki* and puppet

¹⁸ SEKINE 1.32a. The order of the 8th month, 1642, read: "To call *kabuki* plays 'sarugaku,' and for the men to play as women and act voluptuously, is prohibited."

¹⁹ SEKINE 1.32ab; IHARA 88 says 1643.

²⁰ IHARA 92.

²¹ *Tokugawa jikki* 徳川實紀 3 (1902) .55b, in *Zoku kokushi taikēi*, vol. 11.

²² SEKINE 1.34b-35a; cf. also TAKAYANAGI Shinzō 高柳眞三 and ISHII Ryōsuke

theaters in Edo.²³ As a result of repeated pleas by the troupe managers, a formula was worked out which enabled the theaters to reopen in the third month of the next year.

The chief concern of the *bakufu* seems to have been to reduce the attractiveness of the players of women's roles, the *onnagata* 女方, and the key reform it required to this end was to shave the actors' forelocks and require them to dress their hair like men instead of women. To the society of that day which took such interest in hair-styles, and in which the dressed forelock could be highly alluring, apparently this was a change of major importance. This and lesser reforms were the basic agreement under which *yarō* 野郎 *kabuki* ("fellow's *kabuki*"), as it was thereafter called, was permitted to operate for over two centuries until the Meiji Restoration.

The effect of the shaven forelock evidently was most disenchanting:

They somehow looked precocious, as a man who, at forty, would wear a persimmon-color loin cloth. The appearance of their faces was smooth and like cats with their ears cut off, and they were a sorry sight. It is said that these persons, sad, mournful, and plaintive, wept tears of blood. However true this was in the beginning, it seems that later they were not thought so ugly. They were accorded a welcome again, and they placed a wrap-around hood on their foreheads, arranging it so that they were not displeasing to look at, and so appeared on the stage.²⁴

To hide their shaven forelock when playing women's roles, the young actors began to wear scarfs or small caps. At first scarfs of cotton or silk were draped over their heads to appear

石井良助, compilers, *Ofuregaki Kampo shūsei* 御觸書寛保集成 (hereafter *Ofure*) (1934) No. 2685 (p. 1239a).

The government's action was provoked, according to the *Tokugawa jikki* (3.55b), by a fight which broke out in the Ōsaka residence of a *daimyō*, HOSHINA Masasada 保科正貞 (1588-1661), arising from a drinking affair involving a young actor. According to another explanation, the order was issued by the Edo town commissioner when he found young actors at a banquet he attended (IHARA 93). Such explanations of what brought official action should be regarded more as symptomatic than as factual.

²³ IHARA 93-94. The explanation for the action in this instance is that the wife of a certain feudal lord had an affair with an actor, and the two planned to commit suicide together. It is also said that homosexual scandals were again prevalent.

²⁴ *Edo meishoki*, *Zoku zoku gunsho ruijū* 8.756.

like a casually-placed kerchief; even this practise was at times prohibited.²⁵ Some wore brocade caps, and later a close-fitting patch of purple silk was placed over the shaven area to give the illusion of a woman's lustrous hair. Within a few years they surreptitiously began to use wigs in place of the disenchanting cloth patches. The hair wigs used in *kabuki* before this time had been only the crude ones taken from *nō* and *kyōgen*, such as the ones used for demon roles or the drab wigs used for the parts of old men and women. In the latter years of the 1650's, the cloth patches began to be replaced by crude hair wigs called *maegami-gatsura* 前髮鬘, "front hair wigs." The use of any hair wigs was forbidden in 1664, but it was conceded at that time that there would be no objection to the use of cotton caps or scarfs.²⁶ That this order was not always strictly enforced is indicated by some contemporary woodblock prints which show actors wearing wigs. A book about Kyōto customs published in 1681 says: "Long ago when EBISUYA Kichirōbei and UKON Genza were popular, they wore on their heads pieces of silk like hand-towels, and they called themselves *onnagata*. Now what actors do is to use helmets of copper on which hair is attached, and these are called wigs (*katsura*)."²⁷ The copper-lined *kabuki* wig developed from this time, and references to wigs in the literature and art thereafter suggest that they were probably in continual use.

To make themselves appear more feminine off the stage, the actors let their forelocks grow as long as they dared. There is even mention of *onnagata* of the early 1670's whose forelocks were unshaven.²⁸ Periodically the actors were required to appear at a government office to pass inspection to show that their forelocks were not more than a half-inch long.²⁹ There were orders

²⁵ In the 8th month of 1641 MURAYAMA Sakondayū 村山左近太夫 appeared in a dance piece at the Saruwaka-za with a silk scarf draped over his head, carrying a branch of artificial flowers to which were attached poem cards. The performance was much applauded, but it was banned (SEKINE 1.32a).

²⁶ IHARA 436, 98. For illustrations of the styles of scarfs and caps used, see IHARA 99.

²⁷ *Miyako fuzoku kagami* 都風俗鑑 (1681), quoted in IHARA 458.

²⁸ IHARA 100.

²⁹ See for example one of the many orders of the 5th month, 1689, quoted in IHARA 437.

issued from time to time, directing the actors to shave their heads more closely or to shave a wider area.³⁰

In “fellow’s *kabuki*” the old abuses continued, if less openly, and the madness of the audience for the youths remained unabated. Describing the performances, the Edo guidebook says:

When these youths, their hair beautifully done up, with light make-up, and wearing splendid padded robes, moved slowly along the runway, singing songs in delicate voices, the spectators in front bounced up and down on their buttocks, those in back reared up, while those in the boxes opened their mouths up to their ears and drooled; unable to contain themselves, they shouted: “Look, look. Their figures are like emanations of the deities, they are (?) heavenly stallions (天道馬)!” And from the sides others called: “Oh, that smile! It overflows with sweetness. Good! good!” and the like, and there was shouting and commotion.³¹

A book on actors entitled *Yarō mushi* 野郎虫 [*Fellow Bugs*] (ca. 1660), gives us a satirical account of the young ones:

In these times in the capital there is a great number of what are called “fellow bugs” who eat away the bamboo and wood of the five monasteries and ten abbeys, the books of the learned priests, and even the purses of fathers and grandfathers. . . . “Fellow bugs” are about the size of a human being fifteen or sixteen years old; they are equipped with arms, legs, mouth, nose, ears, and eyes, wear a black cap on the head, fly around Gion, Maruyama, and Ryōzen, and have their eyes on people’s purses. When I asked someone: “Are those not the young *kabuki* actors of Shijō-gawara?” he clapped his hands, laughed, and said: “You are right.” These young *kabuki* actors have multiplied in number especially in the past year and this year. The handsome among the children of lowly outcastes and beggars are selected; and when, their faces never without powder, and dressed in clothes of silk gauze and damask, they are put on the stage to dance and sing, the old and the young, men and women, become weak-kneed and call out: “Gosaku! Good! good! I’ll die!” Not only do they call to them, but seduced by their alluring eyes, after the performance they go with them to Higashiyama; borne away in woven litters and palanquins, they proceed in high spirits, calling: “Here, here! A palanquin, a palanquin.” Ah! what grateful affection! Bilked of a large amount of gold and silver for one night’s troth, the droll priests of the temples, their bodies wasting away day by day, desire only to engage the fellows. Having no money, they sell the treasures of paintings and tea-ceremony utensils that have been handed down generation after generation in the temples, and if these do not suffice, they cut down the bamboo and trees, and with that money, engage fellows.³²

³⁰ 8/1694 and 1/1697 (IHARA 438); 4/1699 (*Ofure* 2711).

³¹ *Edo meishōki*, *Zoku zoku gunsho ruijū* 8.757-758.

³² Quoted by TAKANO 2.57-58; facsimile ed. 1b-2b, in the *Kisho Fukusei Kai* 稀書

The critical booklets on actors, the *yakusha hyōbanki* 役者評判記, give more attention to the physical attributes of the actors than to acting ability until the end of the seventeenth century; it was only by gradual stages that art gained ground on sex.³³ Those characteristics of early *kabuki* which were considered to have a corrosive effect on society and morals continued throughout the Tokugawa period, but were kept within certain limits by the intermittent harassing.

If the officials considered that *kabuki* constantly poured into society the poisons of immorality and extravagance, why did they not abolish *kabuki* outright? The attitude of the *bakufu* seems to have been that *kabuki* was, like prostitution, a necessary evil. These were the two wheels of the vehicle of pleasure, useful to assuage the people and divert them from more serious mischief. The document known as Ieyasu's legacy, a basic guide for *bakufu* policy, states:

複製會 Series, No. 3. Another account of the young actors, appearing in the *Edo meishoki* (cf. *Zoku zoku gunsho ruijū* 8.756-757), seems to draw some of its material from the *Yarō mushi*, to which it had referred earlier:

While [the fellows] parade down the runway, they sing songs in voices like that of Kalavinka, said to be a bird in Paradise; the sight as they open their fans and perform a dance leads one to think that the fluttering of the sleeves of the feather robe of the heavenly maiden who descended from the sky at Udo Bay long ago must have been like this. The blind eccentrics, who think nothing of spending great amounts of money, consummate frequent rendezvous as their memories of the floating world. It is especially the exalted and noble monks of the various temples, and in addition, the acolytes of the various monasteries who, each and every one of them, are captivated and lured by these youths and go to visit them with their hopes pinned on a meeting. Each time they see them they feel as though the three Holy Ones [Amida, Kannon, and Seishi] were coming to receive them. When they accomplish their end, they feel like the carp of Lung-men who have leapt up the three-fold falls. Since they are still unsated, they go again and again. In the end, lacking the money with which to engage them, they sell their sutras and holy teachings to raise the fee; they pawn Buddhist utensils and their surplices, steal and carry away the age-old treasures of the temples, and present them to the youths to curry favor with them for a thousand-year troth. It is sad that on account of this they receive scandalous reputations, their virtue is damaged, and they are reduced to flight. Although I may not indicate who they are, there are among the *kabuki* youths of today, those who are beautiful in face and form and resemble Narihira, but whose appearance when they take a fan and dance is like boars swimming. Or there are those who are gentle in voice and speech, but whose manners are coarse and movements unrefined like untrained, fledgling falcons, or like calves newly muzzled. Again there are those who have a fearful look about the eyes, being cross-eyed. Then there are those whose mouths are large with thick lips, resembling rain-water jars. They are all as foul-tempered as starving dogs, and in their greed for things they resemble cats guarding their food. Now the "way of youth" flourished in China and it has existed in Japan since ancient times, but the very name for the *kabuki* youths today is *onnagata* and in all ways they behave like prostitutes, having as their chief aim to seduce men and to take things. Furthermore, even though they contrive to sweeten their dispositions, their efforts easily fall apart, and they are like inexperienced foxes disguising themselves as beautiful women. When they reveal their tails from time to time, ridiculous things happen. Nevertheless the devotees are blind to their good and bad points, and indeed it is only after they have unswervingly spent everything that they finally awake from their dreams . . .

³³ TAKANO 2.57-59, 200-201, 304.

Courtesans, dancers, catamites, streetwalkers, and the like always come to the cities and prospering places of the country. Although the conduct of many is corrupted by them, if they are rigorously suppressed, serious crimes will occur daily, and there will be punishments for gambling, drunken frenzies, and lasciviousness.³⁴

Although *kabuki* and prostitution constituted social problems, if they were suppressed completely—if the professionals were thrown out of work and their patrons were disgruntled—still more serious social, if not criminal, results would follow. If Edo became the deadest town in Japan, the professionals and many others would move elsewhere. There were also economic and political reasons for not suppressing *kabuki* and prostitution. Instead, the government segregated and isolated them in certain quarters of the cities so that society as a whole would not be contaminated.

The government went beyond geographical segregation and attempted to draw and maintain distinctions between the professions of the prostitutes, dancers, and actors. As these professions were traditionally one, it was difficult to check their continual tendency to drift toward each other. It was also an innovation for the government to regard prostitution and homosexuality as evils. These had long been accepted in Japan and the attempt of the Confucian-inspired bureaucrat to curb them resulted in a tiresome repetition of laws of limited effectiveness.

The *bakufu's* laws concerning *kabuki*, like so many of its laws, were ordinances primarily for the city of Edo, but they stood as models which other areas were encouraged to emulate. Some concluded with the phrase: "The above is ordered sent also to Kyōto and Ōsaka."³⁵ In most cases, however, the commissioners in Ōsaka and Kyōto did not issue the Edo edicts at once, but waited for an opportune moment, when an incident occurred which would make the new restriction accepted with less discontent. The same month of 1652 in which the forelocks of the Edo actors were ordered shaven, a swordfight in an Ōsaka theater

³⁴ "Tokugawa seiken hyakkajō" 徳川成憲百箇條. *Tokugawa kinrei kō* 禁令考 (hereafter *Kinrei*) 1 (1931).88.

³⁵ *Ofure* 2707.

brought about the closing of the theaters there until the next year.⁸⁶ The Kyōto commissioner had to wait four years for an appropriate pretext; this was provided when a samurai, jealous over the favors of one of the actors, provoked a swordfight in a box of one of the theaters. It seems that the Kyōto theaters were closed longer than those of Edo and Ōsaka.⁸⁷ However, judging from the similarity of conditions in the *kabuki* theaters of the three cities, it is apparent that the prohibitions and the tacit permission were roughly the same.

The Tokugawa laws issued to the common people, known as *ofuregaki* 御觸書, were to a considerable extent hortatory. The government's attitude was that the townsmen were "stupid people" (*gumin* 愚民) who had to be talked to like children. The officials summoned together all the theater managers and actors once a year and read them the regulations. When they considered that the customary infringing of a law had become too blatant, another was issued to the same effect, prefaced with some phrases, such as: "There are rumors of violations. If these occur again, there will be swift and severe prosecutions." The leniency that the officials generally showed in enforcing the laws, preferring to issue warnings rather than to prosecute, is illustrated by a passage in another *ofuregaki*: ". . . as this is most improper, if an investigation were made it would call for strict punishment; but since

⁸⁶ IHARA 95.

⁸⁷ IHARA 94-95. The precise year of the ban is in doubt. One tradition says the 2nd month of 1656, another 1657.

Typical of the fanciful tales associated with Tokugawa period literary and theatrical figures is the account that a Kyōto manager, MURAYAMA Matabei 村山又兵衛, petitioned so earnestly and tenaciously for the reopening of the theaters that he remained ten-odd years in front of the town commissioner's office, never returning home, ignoring rain and dew, until his clothes were in tatters. Many of the actors went into other trades or moved to other areas, but those who remained in Kyōto took food to him, and he persevered until at last in 1668 his plea was granted. However, whatever the basis for this story, the *Kyō warabe* (published in 1658) describes the Kyōto theaters as in thriving condition; the *Yarō mushi* (ca. 1659) mentions three theaters, and ASAI Ryōi's *Tōkaidō meishoki* 東海道名所記 (1662) (*kan* 6, *Onchi sōsho* 1[1891].243-244) mentions a fourth. Cf. TAKANO 2.356-357; also the "Gei kagami" 藝鑑 by TOMINAGA Heibei 富永平兵衛 in *Yakusha rongō* 役者論語 (1776), *Shin gunsho ruijū* (Kokusho Kankōkai ed.) 3(1908).6b.

all this is known by rumor, it will not be made a legal case this time. . . ."³⁸ One order concluded with the curious statement:

In general, after there has been a prosecution, orders are issued; but in no time there are those who violate them, and it is not well that they have not been prosecuted. Since such has been the case, hereafter constantly and without remiss it should be kept in mind that investigations will be carried through.³⁹

There is no comprehensive collection of these laws concerning the theater, and most of them must have been lost. However, there are well over a hundred still to be found in the collections of Tokugawa laws or scattered through Tokugawa encyclopaedias, guidebooks, diaries, and miscellanea. Those already discussed were largely intended to curb prostitution and homosexual practices. The remainder fall into three general categories: first, those designed to segregate the theater and its actors from the rest of society; second, sumptuary laws attempting to restrict the costumes and architecture of the theater to an austerity appropriate to the townsmen class; and third, those forbidding subject matter in plays which would have a subversive political or moral influence. All were designed to preserve the morality of the state and its people, since political, social, and ethical morality were considered one, all subsumed under proper observance of human relationships, with particular stress on conduct appropriate to one's status. The Tokugawa official, then, would consider these to be not repressive but reform measures.

Fundamental to the segregation policy was the concentration of the large theaters in two quarters of the city. This was facilitated in Edo by the fires of the 1650's, especially that of 1657, which leveled large areas of the city. Thereafter the government required that all the main theaters be located in a quarter comprised of Sakai-chō 堺町 and Fukiya-chō 葎屋町, or in Kobiki-chō 木挽町.⁴⁰ The same occasion was utilized to concentrate the houses of prostitution farther from the center of Edo by moving

³⁸ Undated law in *Kinrei* 5.700-701.

³⁹ 3/1714; cf. *Ofure* 2733.

⁴⁰ 12/1661: "Henceforth *kabuki* will not be performed except in Sakai-chō, Fukiya-chō [i. e., Upper Sakai-chō], and Kobiki-chō 5-chōme and 6-chōme." (*Ofure* 2690.) The former two were located northeast of Nihonbashi, the latter south of Kyōbashi.

the licensed quarter to Asakusa, where it became known as the New Yoshiwara. The number of large theaters (*ō-shibai* 大芝居) was restricted to four (not increased during the Tokugawa period), and there were allowed eight small theaters (*ko-shibai*), as well as those of temples and shrines, which could put on performances for limited periods of time upon receipt of a permit from the town commissioner (*machi bugyō* 町奉行). Punishment was threatened for the staging of unauthorized performances.⁴¹ The number of actors in a troupe was also restricted, as in 1694 when each large theater was limited to twenty actors and ten apprentice actors.⁴²

The same procedures were followed in Kyōto and Ōsaka. In Kyōto the large theaters were restricted to Shijō-gawara 四條河原, and were gradually reduced in number, as opportunities permitted, from seven to three. In Ōsaka there were three theaters in Dōtombori 道頓堀 and one in Horie 堀江.⁴³ In addition there were some medium- and small-sized theaters in both cities.

In order to protect society at large from the corrupting influence of actors, great care was taken to separate them professionally and physically from the rest of society. Just as prostitutes were restricted to their respective quarters of the cities, actors were not permitted to leave the theater quarters. They were required to live in the close neighborhood of the district, and could not reside in the homes of non-actors, nor allow those of other professions to live in their residences.⁴⁴ The authorities were interested primarily in preventing the actors from accepting invitations to entertain outside the quarter, particularly in the mansions of the feudal lords (*daimyō*) in Edo, or in the residences of samurai or wealthy merchants. It is evident that the actors were much in demand at private parties, and that the attempt to keep them restricted was a continuous and largely unsuccessful battle. Countless arrests, imprisonments and banishments seem to have

⁴¹ 5/1708 (*Ojūre* 2726); in 1662 the "bamboo-grass walled theaters" at temples and shrines were ordered not to stage performances for more than 100 days a year. See *Kiyū shōran* 嬉遊笑覽, *kan* 5b (ca. 1830), by KITAMURA Nobuyo 喜多村信節 (1784-1856), I (1926) 587 in *Nihon geirin sōsho* vol. 6.

⁴² IHARA 438.

⁴³ IHARA 449.

⁴⁴ 3/1678 (IHARA 437).

been insufficient deterrents. That violations persisted is apparent from the fact that between 1648 and 1709 edicts ordering that actors should not leave the theater quarters were issued so repeatedly that the texts of at least twenty can be found.⁴⁵

It is evident that even the second of these, issued in 1655, had been preceded by many others:

Laws have been issued time after time that even if *kabuki* actors are invited to feudal lords' residences, they must not go. Of course they must not wear sumptuous costumes. . . . Minstrels, if invited to residences, must not do imitations of *kabuki*, nor imitate the Shimabara style. Even if one or two *kabuki* actors are invited to residences, they must not go nor perform imitations of Shimabara.⁴⁶

The order of 1668 said:

After the actors of Sakai-chō and Kobiki-chō finish the plays on the stage, they must not meet government employees [i. e. samurai]; farmers and townsmen must not visit them indiscriminately and stay long.⁴⁷

That of 1678 said:

We hear that actors go to the homes of samurai and townsmen, and not only stay a long time, but also sometimes even stay overnight. This is most improper. Henceforth, even though they be summoned, they must not go.⁴⁸

The edict of 1695 said:

It has been strictly forbidden by law over and over that *kabuki* actors, *rōnin yarō*, those with unshaven forelocks who do not appear as actors, women dancers, and homosexual youths, go out. It is hereby ordered that henceforth such people must not be sent out at all. We hear that recently there has been some going out, and that the above persons have also been sent out on boats. This is outrageous. Henceforth, more than ever before, it is prohibited to send the above persons anywhere. Of course they may absolutely not be sent out in boats. Anyone who violates this will, upon discovery, be arrested. . . .⁴⁹

⁴⁵ 2/1648 (*Kinrei* 5.521), 5/1655 (*Ofure* 2688), 1/1661 (IHARA 436), 12/1661 (*Ofure* 2690), 1/1662 (IHARA 436), 3/1668 (*Ofure* 2695), 4/1671 (IHARA 437), 3/1678 (IHARA 437), 5/1689 (*Ofure* 2704), 5/1689 (*Ofure* 2705), 5/1689 (*Ofure* 2706), 8/1695 (*Kinrei* 5.695), 1/1697 (*Ofure* 2709), 4/1699 (*Ofure* 2711), 2/1703 (IHARA 438), 4/1703 (*Ofure* 2716), 3/1706 (*Ofure* 2793), 3/1706 (IHARA 438), 6/1706 (*Ofure* 2719), 6/1706 (*Ofure* 2720), 7/1709 (*Ofure* 2729).

⁴⁶ *Ofure* 2688.

⁴⁷ *Ofure* 2695.

⁴⁸ IHARA 437.

⁴⁹ *Kinrei* 5.695.

There were also orders warning actors not to disguise themselves as ordinary townsmen in the attempt to slip out of the quarter to answer calls to residences. There were also numerous prohibitions against those not registered as actors to dress like them, or to put on performances, or to go to private residences to entertain. There were such prohibitions concerning not only youths but also women dancers.⁵⁰

From time to time the government weeded out unauthorized entertainers, as in an order of 1689:

Hereafter, as the law on actors provides, only actors of Sakai-chō and Kobiki-chō, and with their forelocks shaved, are permitted to appear in theaters. As to the other youths, the money paid for them will be their master's loss, and they will be returned to their guarantor or parent. If they should be sold again, it will be an offence.⁵¹

An order of 1706 said:

Although it has been ordered over and over that women dancers must not be sent around, in recent years it has become rife, and this is outrageous. Hereafter women dancers are prohibited. Some word has been heard to the effect that they are being called "maids" and are being sent to feudal lords' mansions and townsmen's homes. The same applies to this as to the preceding.⁵²

In 1703 the following was issued:

As ordered repeatedly before, Sakai-chō and Kobiki-chō actors may not go out, but it is heard that recently there has been lax observation of the prohibitions against groups of townsmen who have entertaining skills going to feudal lords' mansions, and also the employing of women dancers and sending them about here and there. This is improper. . . .⁵³

The distinction between actors and the rest of society was emphasized by prohibiting any amateur dramatics, except at those two most important festivals, New Year and Bon.

In its efforts to enforce observance of laws concerning actors, the *bakufu* utilized informers and the devices of group and cor-

⁵⁰ 6/1652 (*Ofure* 2685), 6/1666 (*Ofure* 2694), 5/1689 (*Ofure* 2703-2706), 5/1689 (*Kinrei* 5.694), 1/1697 (*Ihara* 438), 4/1699 (*Ofure* 2711), 4/1703 (*Ofure* 2716), 6/1705 (*Ofure* 2719), 6/1706 (*Ofure* 2720).

⁵¹ *Ihara* 437-438.

⁵² *Ofure* 2720.

⁵³ *Ofure* 2716.

porate responsibility on which it relied in much of its law enforcement. Most of the ordinances concerning the segregation of actors or prohibiting the keeping of female dancers and youths ended with clauses specifying the extent of responsibility, as for example:

The contents of the above is to be passed throughout the quarters (*chō*) to house-owners and renters and all those on their premises. Quarter representatives (*nanushi*), five-man groups, and house-owner groups should investigate, and should leave no one at all of the above types. From this [office] men will be sent around, and if there are such people, as soon as they see them or hear of them they will arrest them, and so this should be strictly observed. If there are those who violate this they should be reported at once. If they are concealed and we learn of them from other sources, the person in question, needless to say, and even the house-owner, five-man group, and quarter representative will be strictly prosecuted for the offence. Hence the purport of this should continue to be observed.⁵⁴

Because of the attention the *bakufu* gave to proper relations between classes, it was most anxious to stop the type of fraternization implied by the visits of actors to the residences of lords and samurai. As each class had its own professions, its style of living and amusements, *kabuki* was not supposed to be completely public theater, but was intended only for townsmen. The theater of the upper classes was *nō*, which was intended for them exclusively. When it was discovered that a special performance of *nō* was put on for townsmen in the Yoshiwara, those involved were punished. So that high personages could attend in secrecy, boxes were built in the Edo *kabuki* theaters in 1646, raised above the pit and screened with bamboo blinds. Three years later, and repeatedly thereafter, blinds and standing screens were prohibited.⁵⁵ The clever managers devised a means of slipping vertical lattices hastily in place to make sheltering partitions when a feudal lord or high-ranking samurai attended; they could be quickly dismantled when he left.

But men of such rank might lose status or even be punished for attending, and as *bakufu* surveillance increased late in the seventeenth century, they probably came rarely. The lords' wives, daughters, and ladies of the shogun's court were consumed with

⁵⁴ 6/1706 (*Ofure* 2720).

⁵⁵ IHARA 89; also law of 3/1668 (*Kinrei* 5.693).

eagerness to have a glimpse of actors on the stage. Most did not have the nerve to go in, but stopped their palanquins in front of the entrance and had their footmen part the curtains so that they could have a glimpse. This practice became so common that there was a law forbidding it. Such was the envy of the upper classes for the townsmen's *kabuki*. The lower samurai, although forbidden to attend the theater, seem to have gone quite openly—when they could afford the price of proper seats, which was considerable.

Adjoining the theaters or in their close vicinity were many small establishments called "theater teahouses" (*shibai-jaya* 芝居茶屋). Here theater-goers could eat and drink, arrange for reservations at the theaters, check their wraps while they went to see the plays, or sit and visit with their friends. But "teahouse" was also a euphemism for a house of assignation. Since the actors were forbidden to leave the quarter, these establishments served as places to which their patrons could invite them. The furnishings of such teahouses become more and more luxurious, and the parties there were a concern to the authorities. They placed restrictions on the teahouses, but they did not abolish them outright because they also had their legitimate functions, and eating and drinking were considered to be an important part of theater-going. The actors were ordered not to meet patrons there, or backstage, or in the boxes, but such prohibitions were essentially unenforceable.⁵⁶

The second category of prohibitions is related to the system of sumptuary laws by which the officials attempted to curb extravagance and conspicuous consumptions by all classes. It specified for each class what sort of clothes, personal adornments, houses, and furnishings could be used. The government was particularly anxious to prevent any show of high living by the merchants which would excite the envy of the theoretically superior samurai.

Many of the sumptuary laws "governing" the *kabuki* forbade the use of expensive costumes. The love of expensive clothes is

⁵⁶ 4/1671 (IHARA 437).

a dominating interest in traditional Japanese culture. Throughout Japanese literature from the *Genji monogatari* on, there are minute descriptions of clothes, their style, color, and texture. This interest increased as the art of weaving developed in Japan after the immigration of Chinese weavers into Sakai late in the sixteenth century, and the establishment by Hideyoshi of the Nishijin quarter of Kyōto as the major center of weaving. During the seventeenth century new developments in the arts of weaving and dyeing raised the interest in fine clothes to a passion.

Rich brocade and silk costumes were an essential part of *nō* drama, and, as the only colorful and luxurious element, were heavily relied on for effect. But *kabuki*, as the theater of the townsmen, was prohibited from using brocade or other expensive costumes. In addition to the sumptuary laws concerning the clothes townsmen could wear, specific orders were issued concerning *kabuki* costumes. In 1636 the manager and an actor of the Saruwaka-za 猿若座 were jailed for using costumes that were too sumptuous in a *kabuki* dance piece. The same year, when the manager of a puppet troupe, SATSUMA Koheita 薩摩小平太, who had arrived in Edo advertising "the country's best, down from the capital," hung purple silk curtains bearing the crest of the Lord of Satsuma and used rich costumes on his puppets, he too was jailed.⁵⁷ The use of silk and other rich materials was forbidden repeatedly, as in 1649, 1650, 1655, 1662, etc.,⁵⁸ but it is evident that by 1668 the authorities were making concessions on this front also. The order of the third month of that year reads:

1. The shows in Sakai-chō and Kobiki-chō must not be extravagant. In general the actors may wear clothes of silk, pongee, and cotton, and on the stage, they may wear costumes of *hirashima*, *habutae*, silk, and pongee. Goods dyed to order, purple linings, red linings, purple caps, and embroidered articles are prohibited. Further, on the stage silk crepe and cotton curtains are permissible, but purple silk crepe is not permitted.

2. Puppet costumes must not be sumptuous. Gold and silver leaf must not be used on anything. But puppet generals only may wear gold and silver hats.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ SEKINE 1.31b-32a; IHARA 89.

⁵⁸ 2/1649 (IHARA 89), 3/1650 (IHARA 89), 5/1655 (*Ofure* 2688), 1/1662 (IHARA 436), etc.

⁵⁹ 3/1668 (*Ofure* 2695).

Another order reads:

[The observance of] what has been ordered over and over has lately become lax. Actors' costumes have gradually become more gorgeous. Gold and silver threads have been used to embroider all over. Chinese-style weaving has been seen. It is improper for samurai costumes to use ceremonial kimono, long skirt and tunic, of course, and figured satin, *habutae*, and crests, and to have long and short swords and other articles of intricate work. . . . Actors' costumes should be of silk, pongee, and cotton, and should not be gorgeous. Long and short swords and other articles of intricate work must not be used.⁶⁰

Theater managers were required to take oaths that they would not permit any of the prohibited materials to be used, and periodically a number of actors were given thirty days in jail for violations.⁶¹ In certain periods there were annual, semi-annual, or even monthly inspections of the theaters and their properties.⁶² The managers seem usually to have had prior intelligence of the inspection so that they were able to conceal the proscribed items. The officials, during most years, seem to have taken a generous attitude, not interpreting the law strictly. The inspection was an occasion to remind the managers and actors about the prohibitions and to warn them of the intention to give swift punishment for infractions in the future.

An example of the minuteness of the regulations is that realistic sword blades could not be used; it was prohibited to cover the wooden blades with silver foil or paper, but they could be painted.⁶³ Actors were forbidden to ride in palanquins or litters of any kind (as were all townsmen) or on horses, but the frequency with which this order was issued suggests the prevalence of violations.⁶⁴

Concerning the architecture and furnishings of the theaters, the

⁶⁰ Undated (*Kinrei* 5.700-701).

⁶¹ In 9/1708, for example, 4 actors were jailed for 30 days for wearing prohibited costumes (SEKINE 2.82b).

⁶² 2/1726 (SEKINE 2.100b).

⁶³ 2/1704 (IHARA 438). The incident which provoked the law against the use of real swords, however, was of another order. In that month the great actor, the first ICHIKAWA Danjūrō 市川團十郎 (1660-1704) was stabbed and killed on the stage during a performance by another actor who had a grudge against him (TAKANO 2.258-259).

⁶⁴ 3/1650 (IHARA 89), 1665 (*Kinrei* 5.695-696) et al., 8/1695 (*Ofure* 2708).

bakufu fought a protracted rearguard action against the shrewd theater owners. The earliest *kabuki* was performed on a small, uncovered stage, the audience enclosed by a bamboo paling or a bunting on four sides after the manner of a sideshow tent without a top. Later just the stage was covered by a roof as in the *nō*. A drawing of 1639 shows the audience sitting on matting spread on the floor; overhead were installed reed blinds over which matting was placed, so that performances could go on even in a light rain. Despite the disapproval of the authorities the theater and its appointments steadily developed in size and elaborateness. A drawing of 1646 shows the bamboo paling replaced by a board fence.⁶⁵ Although the use of boxes, blinds, and screens was repeatedly forbidden, even periodic inspections of the theaters failed to halt completely the use of detachable partitions used to form boxes, or the use of blinds; and at most times permanent boxes seem to have been in use.

After the fire of 1657, the Edo theaters were rebuilt on a more substantial scale. In the next decade the evolution of longer plays with several acts led to the development of different types of drawn and drop curtains to separate acts and scenes, and to the designing of more elaborate stage sets. By 1677 the side runway (*hashigakari*) derived from the *nō*, developed into the runway through the audience (*hanamichi*). A picture of 1677 shows actors making up, seated about on the second floor of the greenroom much as they do today. We see boxes equipped with screens and blinds extending on three sides of the pit. The area that a theater was permitted to occupy was restricted by ordinances, and upon the petitions of the theater managers, was gradually increased as the Tokugawa period progressed. At the front of the theater stood a tower in which a drum was beaten from early in the morning on days when performances were to be given in order to draw a crowd. Townspeople were thus provided with a sort of weather forecast. This practice of drum-beating was forbidden in 1679 and again in 1684.⁶⁶ By the end of the century, despite laws to the contrary, the theater had a roof,

⁶⁵ TAKANO 2.62.

⁶⁶ IHARA 454.

three levels of boxes, three stories of dressing rooms, and luxurious theater teahouses.⁶⁷ *Kabuki* was flourishing in defiance of the law when the greatest scandal in its history broke.

During the early years of the eighteenth century the most talked-about actor in Edo was IKUSHIMA Shingorō 生島新五郎 (1671-1743). A contemporary work on actors says that he specialized in love scenes, of which he was considered the founder, and that he played them "realistically" and provocatively.⁶⁸ Another book says he "presented love scenes on the stage, causing the ladies in the audience to be pleased."⁶⁹ He is said to have been extraordinarily handsome, and that the women of Edo were wild about him. The one among them most smitten was Ejima 江 (~繪) 島 (sometimes called Enoshima), one of the highest lady officials of the women's quarters of the shogun's castle, who served the mother of the seventh shogun, Ietsugu (1709-1716).

There are a number of differing accounts of the incident which brought this sensational affair to light, and they appear to have been so embroidered that the details of none of them are to be too seriously regarded. In essence what happened was that on the twelfth day of the first month of 1714, Ejima was ordered to make a proxy pilgrimage to the mausoleum at Zōjōji in Shiba, accompanied by a considerable number of attendants. The established precedent was that after they had attended to their duties, they would be feted in the abbot's quarters. However, on this day Ejima left the temple without stopping at the abbot's quarters, and with eleven others from the entourage, went to the Yamamura-za to see the plays. They called the actors to their box and drank with them. Among the actors was Ejima's lover, IKUSHIMA Shingorō. News of the theater party leaked out, and an investigation resulted in a full exposure, not only of the party,

⁶⁷ Miyako no Nishiki (1675-?1710) wrote in the *Genroku taiheiki* 元祿太平記 (1702): "The theaters of Edo, differing from those of Kyōto and Ōsaka, have three tiers of boxes, and are even more flourishing than has been heard. The ticket and seat charges are double those of Kamigata (Kyōto-Ōsaka), and you must even pay for fire for smoking." Cf. *Saikaku zenshū* 2 (1893).1019 in *Teikoku bunko*, vol. 24.

⁶⁸ *Yakusha za furumai* 役者座振舞 (1713), quoted in TAKANO 2.337.

⁶⁹ *Yarō nigiri kobushi*, quoted in TAKANO 2.337.

but that a love affair between Ejima and IKUSHIMA had been in progress for nine years. All those implicated in the affair and the party were given punishments ranging from banishment to death. The lady officials were placed in the custody of different lords, and IKUSHIMA was banished to Miyake-jima, where he remained eighteen years until he was pardoned the year before his death.⁷⁰

The most serious consequence for the history of *kabuki* was that the Yamamura-za, which had been the most popular among the Edo theaters for more than a decade, was closed on the sixth day of the second month, the building demolished, and the assets confiscated. For the remaining 150 years of the Tokugawa period there were three instead of four large theaters in Edo. All of the theaters were closed until the ninth day of the fourth month, when they were permitted to reopen under stringent conditions. The twenty-four leading actors of the Edo stage were required to submit written statements that they would not violate any of the orders of the *bakufu*. The regulations imposed upon the managers were set forth in a document of the ninth day of the third month:

⁷⁰ TAKANO 2.338-339. For a highly colorful, if undocumented, account of the Ejima-Ikushima affair, see *Chiyoda-jō ōoku* 千代田城大奥 by NAGASHIMA Imashirō 永島今四郎 and ŌTA Yoshio 太田賛雄, 2 (1892).69-106. This work (pp. 86-94) quotes an unnamed source for a description of Ejima's theater party, which it claims included 130 persons:

The aspect of this day was a hubbub which cannot be described. In the boxes were spread carpets, and the theater owner, Nagadayu, IKUSHIMA Shingorō, and NAKAMURA Seigorō, wearing *hakama* and *haori*, were invited to be drinking partners. The uproar of the party was such that the sounds of the play could not be heard. . . . At this time in a lower box was a retainer of MATSUDAIRA Satsuma-no-kami, a person called TANGUCHI Shimpei, watching the play with his wife. In the upper box, Ejima, quite intoxicated and not knowing what she was doing, spilled her *sake*, and it poured on Shimpei's head. He sent a messenger to the upper box. The *kachi-metsuke*, OKAMOTO Gorōemon, made the apologies, but this did not satisfy Shimpei. Gorōemon apologized over and over, and finally Shimpei accepted the apologies, and although it was about midday he and his wife left the theater. . . . Thereafter Gorōemon several times urged Lady Ejima to leave, but she would not consent, and instead became very angry. At 2 P. M. a passageway was installed from the second-floor box by which they went to YAMAMURA Nagadayū's house, and the capers of the many maids who went were beyond words. . . . For the entertainment of Ejima, many actors, young actors, and youths were summoned to be drinking partners. . . . When it had become 4 P. M., they left Nagadayū's rooms and went to a teahouse on the street behind called Yamaya. On the second floor the maids and actors came and went and there was a great hubbub. . . . They finally left Kobiki-chō and returned by the Hirakawaguchi Gate [of the castle] at 8 P. M.

This account also says that some of the robes and money, which had been intended as offerings to the Zōjōji, were presented to the actors, youths, and teahouse people.

1. The boxes of the theaters have been made two and three stories in recent years. As formerly not more than one story will be permitted.

2. It is prohibited to construct private passages from the boxes or to construct parlors for merry-making backstage, in the theater manager's residence, or in teahouses and such places. Nothing at all should be done by the actors other than performing plays on the stage, even if they are called to the boxes or teahouses or the like. Of course pleasure-making patrons must not be invited to the actors' own houses.

3. In the boxes it is not permitted to hang bamboo blinds, curtains, or screens, and to enclose them in any way is prohibited. They must be made so that they can be seen through.

4. In recent years the roofs of theaters have been made so that even on rainy days plays can be performed. In this matter also roofs must be lightly constructed as was done formerly.

5. The costumes of actors in recent years have been sumptuous; this is prohibited. Hereafter silk, pongee, and cotton will be used.

6. It is strictly prohibited that plays continue into the evening and torches be set up. It should be planned so that they will end at 5 P. M.

7. Teahouses in the vicinity of the theaters should be lightly constructed, and parlor-like accommodations are entirely prohibited. Concerning those which are in existence at present, petitions should be submitted to the town commissioner's office, and upon inspection, a decision will be given.

The above must be observed without fail. If there are violations, the principals, of course, and even the representative of that quarter and five-man group will be considered offenders.⁷¹

Four years later, in 1718, when the theater owners pleaded that rainy days were bankrupting them, wooden shingle roofs were permitted over the stage and boxes.⁷² Five years later, to reduce the fire hazard, the theaters were actually ordered to lay tile roofs and construct the outside walls of plaster.⁷³ The wily theater managers pleaded that they could not afford this construction unless their income could be increased by the construction of a second tier of boxes on three sides around the pit—a request which was grudgingly granted. The same year the Nahamura-za was permitted to enlarge substantially the size of its stage and the length of its runway.⁷⁴ It is of course conceivable that the officials

⁷¹ *Ojure* 2734; see also 2733.

⁷² *SEKINE* 2.87b; *TAKANO* 2.340-341.

⁷³ *IHARA* 454-455. Because the Kobiki-chō theaters were situated near the Hamagoden, a detached residence of the TOKUGAWA family, they were directed in 1705 to have the buildings plastered and to cover the towers with copper sheeting as a fire-prevention measure.

⁷⁴ *TAKANO* 2.341.

were encouraged to sanction these steps by gifts or entertainment provided by the managers.

Another restriction which the theaters encountered came in 1707 when they were instructed not to hold performances on days when the shogun proceeded out of the castle. In replies to pleas that this worked a financial hardship, the theaters were permitted, the next year, to begin performances after the shogun's return to the castle. On these occasions the program would last until after dark, and pine torches were used to illuminate the stage. Because of the fire hazard, by 1716 performances were permitted daily regardless of the movements of the shogun.⁷⁵

The practice of using torches to light the stage must have been recurrent. In 1707 an order said that on days when the wind was strong, *kabuki* performances must be stopped to reduce the danger of fire.⁷⁶ After wooden roofs were permitted, it was no longer required to stop performances on windy days. An undated order complains that there were rumors of performances lasting until midnight. Because of the danger of fire as well as the impropriety of the late hour, the theaters were instructed to begin their performances early in the morning if necessary so as not to continue after dark.⁷⁷

The third type of restrictive law forbade the introduction into plays of subject matter which would have an undesirable political or moral influence. The same restrictions were applied to playwrights as to other kinds of authors, that matters concerning the government must not be published, that the names of contemporary members of the samurai class and above must not be mentioned,⁷⁸ nor any incidents involving samurai occurring after 1600. In 1644 the order was issued: "In plays the names of contemporary persons will not be used."⁷⁹ By "contemporary persons" was meant, of course, the people who counted. It is believed that this order was issued as a result of a fight which

⁷⁵ SEKINE 2.81b-82a.

⁷⁶ SEKINE 2.81b.

⁷⁷ *Kinrei* 5.700-701.

⁷⁸ 5/1673 (*Ofure* 2220).

⁷⁹ IHARA 90.

broke out in the Yamamura-za earlier that year when a living person of importance was mentioned in a play. An order of the second month of 1703 read:

1. As ordered repeatedly before concerning unusual events of the times, it is prohibited still more henceforth to make them into songs or publish and sell them.

2. In the Sakai-chō and Kobiki-chō theaters also, unusual events of the times or [action] resembling them must not be acted out.⁸⁰

This ban of 1703 was issued when dramatizations of the revenge of the 47 *rōnin* were performed within a few months of the event. The playwrights were nimble in deceiving the censors, for they changed all the names and recast contemporary events in the Kamakura or Ashikaga period. It became a stock convention of the *kabuki* and puppet theater that when Hōjō Tokimasa 北條時政 (1138-1215) appeared in a play he was really TOKUGAWA Ieyasu (1542-1616); Kamakura was substituted for Edo, the Inase River near Kamakura for the Sumida River, the Hanamizu Bridge near Kamakura for the Eitai Bridge in Edo, and so forth.⁸¹ By such camouflage, some playwrights were clever enough to attempt political satire and get away with it. Of the several plays in which CHIKAMATSU Monzaemon (1653-1725) used this device, the most extensive use of contemporary materials was in his *Sagami nyūdō sembiki inu* 相模入道千疋犬 (*The Sagami Lay Monk and the Thousand Dogs*) (1714), in which he satirized TOKUGAWA Tsunayoshi (1646-1709) and his legislation protecting dogs.⁸²

For moral reasons the *bakufu* disapproved of the too suggestive treatment of the gay quarters and its prostitutes. These quarters were the scene of much of the social life as well as entertainment of townsmen, and were much frequented by the samurai. They served as the setting of the most flowery scenes in practically all of the history plays as well as the domestic plays, providing the excuse to depict beautiful courtesans, romantic rivalries and

⁸⁰ 2/1703 (*Ofure* 2668); see also 4/1703 (*Ofure* 2716).

⁸¹ IHARA 458.

⁸² See the author's "Chikamatsu's Satire on the Dog Shogun," *HJAS* 18 (1955), 159-180.

intrigues, luxurious living, and riotous behavior. The types of action specifically proscribed were depiction of the style of walk and behavior of courtesans of the Shimabara quarter of Kyōto, or episodes demonstrating the techniques of accosting and winning the favor of high-ranking prostitutes. Such miming had been an important part of *kabuki* from the time of the earliest skits, and despite the bans of 1655 and 1664 forbidding such scenes in any type of theater, including the puppet stage,⁸³ they continued to be stock episodes in play after play. The effect of the ban seems to have been to prevent this action from becoming excessively salacious rather than to deny the audience the vicarious pleasure. Related to the sumptuary laws were the provisions that the houses of the gay quarter should not be made to appear luxurious. To make that life appear too glamorous would tend to undermine not only moral behavior but also the hierarchal social system.

Another favorite theme which was banned, but effectively only for a few years, was the double "love suicide." The sensational and romantic treatment of such suicides by playwrights like CHIKAMATSU seems to have been too suggestive to thwarted lovers. Rash young men and women anticipated that their deaths would be publicized, if not immortalized, in prose and drama. In addition to banning the publication of stories on this theme in 1723,⁸⁴ the *bakufu* attempted to discourage the acts by imposing punishments on those who survived unsuccessful attempts and by heaping dishonor on the corpses of those who succeeded. Within a few years, however, love suicide plays were again written and performed, and have continued to the present day to be a favorite theme of the *kabuki* and puppet theater; nor did the disapproval of the Tokugawa government by any means eliminate from Japanese life the practice of committing double suicides.⁸⁵

In the foregoing survey of the laws with which the *bakufu*

⁸³ 5/1655 (*Ofure* 2688), 1/1664 (IHARA 436).

⁸⁴ 12th month, Kyōho 7[Jan. 1723] (*Ofure* 2022).

⁸⁵ On love suicide plays see Serge ELISSÉEV, "Le double suicide (Shinjū)," *Japon et Extrême-Orient*, 9 (Sept. 1924).107-122; and the author's *The Love Suicide at Amijima* (1953), esp. 18-29.

attempted to reform or restrict the development of *kabuki*, the pattern which emerges is the tendency of the government to yield to the persistent pressure of the theater interests. The officials were subjected not only to the pleas and petitions of the theater managers, but were constantly faced with non-observance of the laws in varying degrees of flagrancy, not only by the managers, but by the actors, playwrights, and even the audience. Since the reason for permitting *kabuki* to continue to exist was to assuage and divert the lower classes, it was only during certain determined reform movements, when the leaders of the administration were attempting to rally the moral fiber of the country, that the laws were enforced as harshly as the letter might suggest. Because a more permissive attitude generally prevailed, it was difficult for the authorities to establish any specific line to hold against the constant pressure, motivated not only by commercial interests, but by the pleasure-loving, excitement-seeking propensities of the irrepressible townsmen. The government lost ground on almost every front: the increasingly substantial construction of the theaters, the luxurious teahouses, the elaborate staging, the use of wigs and rich costumes, and the introduction of "subversive" subject-matter into the plays. The appeal of *kabuki* to all classes could not be checked. It is a symptom of the trend that by the early nineteenth century the women attendants of the lords' mansions and even of the shogun's castle were openly sent to the theater to learn *kabuki* dances so that they could perform them for their lords.

If we are to assess the effect of the *bakufu's* measures on the development of *kabuki*, we must give primary attention to the banning of women, as it led to the development of players of women's roles, the *onnagata*. Incredibly skilled in impersonating women, they analyzed the characteristics of female motor habits, and abstracting the essential gestures, developed in their acting a peculiar type of eroticism never completely divorced from homosexualism. After women's parts had been played by *onnagata* for two and a half centuries, the conventions were so well established that the attempt to reintroduce actresses into *kabuki*, following the Meiji Restoration, was a failure. Actresses seem

less feminine, in part because of certain conventions which men hold about what makes women attractive, and which women, of course, cannot be expected to understand. From the point of view of the aesthetics of acting, women seemed too natural, and so were incapable of emphasizing the essential characteristics of women. This required a more detached order of understanding and execution. The extent to which the institution of *onnagata* has affected the development of *kabuki* can be illustrated by saying that if actresses were now to be substituted for *onnagata*, they would have to play their parts, not as women imitating women, but as women imitating *onnagata* imitating women.

An effect of the laws which was more clearly to the disadvantage of *kabuki* was that the actors were despised, at least officially. There had been some patronage by the second and third Tokugawa shoguns, notably in 1633 and 1650-1651, but because of scandalous incidents and the increasingly rigid attitude of the government toward ethics, this patronage ceased. In 1719 a *kabuki* troupe was invited to perform at the castle, but when an official protested, citing the Ejima affair of 1714, the invitation was withdrawn, and a puppet troupe was invited instead.⁸⁶ The official attitude was that actors were a social group lower than merchants, and only a little above the pariah class. This type of social persecution prevented overt patronage by men of education and position, and gave the actors little opportunity or incentive to raise their art to levels which were potentially attainable.

The censorship eliminated any possibility of writing plays of real social or political significance. The isolated examples which touched on such subjects were intended more to electrify the audience with the playwright's daring, than to influence it with his criticism.

It is futile to predict what the development of *kabuki* might have been without government interference, because this repression was present from the time of the *kabuki*'s crude beginnings. We can only observe that the effect of the interference was beneficial in forcing *kabuki* to mature more quickly—that it separated

⁸⁶ IHARA 447.

kabuki from female prostitution, and that the continued supervision made for more emphasis, for lack of choice, on art. The *bakufu* must be given credit for accelerating or even causing the turn from vaudeville and burlesque toward dramatic art, from one-act dance pieces at best toward dramatically structured plays of five acts or more. The banning of women also quickened the development of make-up, costuming, and staging.

We lack the information to be able to evaluate what potentialities for development *kabuki* might have had if it had been unrestricted in the environment of Tokugawa culture, and to weigh it against the *kabuki* which actually developed and which was so profoundly affected by the repression. In the balance it may be that the repression was beneficial to the development of *kabuki* as a dramatic form.