

Introduction

MINAMI RYUTA, IAN CARRUTHERS, AND JOHN GILLIES

In her book *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan*, Ikegami Eiko asks how Meiji Japan could have reconstructed its society so quickly in response to the threat of the west. She rejects the notion that Japan was “simply a passive recipient of Western influence” in favor of the argument that “it was transformed from within by the determination and ambition of a number of individuals . . . who undertook significant social, psychological and physical risks.”¹ Ikegami’s argument provides a useful point of departure for discussion of the Japanese encounter with Shakespeare. This volume provides continuing evidence of theatre artists, from the Meiji period to the present, who extend our expectations of what it means to do Shakespeare through the adventurousness of their responses to the question of what it means to be Japanese.

Traditional Japanese theatre has been extensively studied this century by a long list of western scholars, but modern Japanese theatre, despite its richness and variety, and the fact that it has undergone an astonishing renaissance in the last thirty years, has so far attracted relatively little scholarly attention. In the field of Shakespeare as performance, much the same holds true. Studies of the literary or monocultural object prevail over studies of the theatrical or intercultural object. While the relative lack of attention paid to modern Japanese theatre (in which we include productions of Shakespeare) may seem an anomaly of western scholarship, it is also true of Japanese scholarship. Modern Japanese theatre is a subject rarely taught in Japanese universities, and though Shakespeare is ubiquitous (there are well over 800 members of The Shakespeare Society of Japan), his plays are generally not discussed in terms of their local theatrical manifestations. “Shakespeare in Japan” is currently as marginalized a topic of Japanese academic discourse as it is abroad.

In *Hamlet in Japan*, edited by Ueno Yoshiko (New York: AMS Press, 1995), actual productions are considered in three out of fifteen articles. Yet, anywhere between fifty to one hundred productions of Shakespeare can be seen in Tokyo every year. In *Shakespeare East and West*, edited by Fujita Minoru and Leonard Pronko (Tokyo: Japan Library, 1996), performance is entirely ignored.

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Excellent as this work is in proposing alternative models of comparable stature to Shakespeare in Zeami and Chikamatsu, the book as a whole nevertheless runs the risk of unconsciously orienting modern Japanese production of Shakespeare by over-emphasizing comparisons between Shakespeare, Noh, and Kabuki, and largely ignoring the important contributions made by modern theatre producers. Fortunately, *Shakespeare and the Japanese Stage*, edited by Sasayama Takashi, J. R. Mulryne, and Margaret Shewring (Cambridge, 1998) has now gone some way towards rectifying that imbalance since it not only includes seven articles on “Shakespeare and the Japanese Stage” but a further seven on “Shakespeare our Japanese Contemporary.”

This volume seeks further to extend such pioneering work in two ways: by including articles on a wider variety of individual Japanese theatre artists who have negotiated modernity and postmodernity in terms of tradition, and by offering in-depth interviews with four major theatre directors (Deguchi, Ninagawa, Suzuki, Noda) and a major actor (Hira), as well as separate studies of their individual work. Unlike the earlier studies, we concentrate far more extensively on the modern and postmodern period. Thus, nine out of our fifteen essays, and all five interviews, are concerned with postwar Shakespeare performances.

Before profiling the essays and interviews in detail, it might be helpful to outline their broad cultural and theatrical context. The Shakespeare of the Japanese theatre may be thought of as defined by a number of interlocking cultural modalities and theatrical forces:

- (1) translation and adaptation
- (2) the rise of Shingeki (New Drama) in the 1900s and the so-called “Shōgekijō Undō” (Little Theatre Movement) of the late 1960s
- (3) international theatrical contact, Western and Asian

(1) Translation and adaptation

Translating Shakespeare has always been culturally complicated in Japan. Tsubouchi Shōyō’s 1884 translation of *Julius Caesar* should be seen primarily as an extension of Kabuki, rather than as a linguistic and cultural importation of Shakespeare. However, his translations of *The Merchant of Venice* and *Hamlet* early in the new century were aimed at his own Bungei Kyōkai (Literary Association) thus helping to stimulate the rise of “Shingeki Shakespeare,” in which performance is more closely linked to the authority of translation on the one hand and the act of reading on the other. To some extent this priority followed that of Shingeki (New Drama) per se, a movement dedicated to the

performance of western drama in translation.² In the 1920s, Shakespeare came to be read and studied rather than performed. It was in this atmosphere that Tsubouchi's translations of Shakespeare's Complete Works were published in pocket editions in 1933–35 and widely read.³ Ironically thereby, Shakespeare first took root in Japanese culture in the slightly archaic image of Kabuki – still detectable in Tsubouchi, the predominant translation until 1955.⁴

Since then, the translations of Fukuda Tsuneari, Odashima Yūshi, and Matsuoka Kazuko have followed – at shorter intervals and with a corresponding dispersal of cultural authority. These have all attempted to reinvent “Shakespeare” by keying him to different cultural registers, including that of performance. In 1955, Fukuda Tsuneari (playwright, director, and scholar of English literature) produced his own translation of *Hamlet* for the Bungakuza company in a flawed attempt to find a way out of the Shingeki impasse (the production was virtually a reproduction of the 1953 Old Vic production he had seen in England). Distinctive features of Fukuda's rendering were his brisk, rhythmical, and dramatic style designed to release actors from conventional realistic acting.⁵ Its impact is attested by the fact that Shakespeare performances by Shingeki companies in the late 1950s and 1960s were mostly done in Fukuda's rendering.

Odashima's translation (pub. 1973–80) represents the major breakthrough in the history of Shakespeare translation in Japan. The Shakespeare Theatre's staging of Odashima's translation of *The Complete Works* successfully served to popularize Shakespeare by attracting younger readers and audiences.⁶ Like Fukuda's, Odashima's translation has a crisp and rhythmical style, yet what distinguishes his work is its phraseology, the use of colloquialisms, and abundant word-play. Unlike earlier translators, Odashima gave up trying to create an equivalent for blank verse and instead introduced the rapid tempo of daily conversation, which had been accelerating since the mid-1950s, prioritizing dramatic and theatrical effects over poetic ones.⁷

Since 1995, Odashima's dominance has in turn been challenged by Matsuoka Kazuko, the first female translator of Shakespeare in Japan. A strong point of Matsuoka's translations is that they are written for and revised during rehearsals with specific directors, such as David Leveaux. Another is her use of language to foreground gender issues. As a Shakespeare scholar and drama critic with strong sympathy for works of the Shōgekijō (Little Theatre) movement, Matsuoka's work is more closely linked to performance process.

Even on so summary a view, it should be clear that translation is always keyed to wider cultural effects and strategies, and either draws heavily from or bears heavily upon performance culture and practice.

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While to a western eye, adaptation (considered as taking liberties with and thus challenging the cultural authority of the text) may appear a kind of antithesis to translation, the phenomenon is not quite so clear cut in Japan. Crucial here is the question of cultural motive. Shakespeare can be assimilated to the conventional world of an indigenous performance genre – as in the Noh Shakespeares of Ueda Munakata Kuniyoshi. Alternatively, Shakespeare may be adapted towards an indigenous performance genre in order to meet a perceived need to modernize – as in *Sakuradoki Zeni no yononaka* (Life is as fragile as cherry blossoms in a world of money), a pioneering Kabuki adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* (Osaka, 1885). Takahashi Yasunari's *Kyogen Merry Wives of Windsor* (1991) also fits this category. Again, Shakespeare may be adapted in accord with an entirely new theatrical form (based on a fusion of Japanese performance traditions and western dramaturgy) as in the work of Suzuki Tadashi. This leads to a consideration of “new” theatre movements.

(2) The rise of Shingeki (New Drama) in the 1900s and the Shôgekijô Undô (Little Theatre Movement) in the sixties

While *Sakuradoki Zeni no yononaka* (hereafter, *Zeni*) was commercially successful as well as conceptually bold, Kabuki's theatrical and dramaturgical limitations appear to have prevented it from accommodating Shakespeare.⁸ For a brief time, *Shimpa* became the host that Kabuki did not. From its origins in the first two decades of this century as amateur performance for the purpose of political propaganda, *Shimpa* was unrestrained by Kabuki conventions or by a Shingeki ethic of fidelity to the text.⁹ *Shimpa* Shakespeare was inaugurated with a partial production of *Julius Caesar* in 1901, followed by Kawakami Otojirô's monumental stagings of *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Hamlet* in 1903. Anticipating Jan Kott by over half a century, *Shimpa* productions of Shakespeare were set in contemporary Meiji Japan (as were other plays in the repertoire). *Shimpa*'s adaptive, experimental and modernizing spirit was however superseded by Shingeki Shakespeare. Increasing familiarity with western culture (through for example the influx of silent films from the 1910s) and a greater respect for textual authenticity appear to have led to a corresponding loss of confidence in the *Shimpa* hybrids.

The Shingeki (New Drama) Movement started with the foundation of the first Bungei Kyôkai (The Literary Society) in 1906, and that of the Jiyû Gekijô (The Liberal Theatre) in 1909. Shingeki, which principally mounted translations of modern western plays in their original western styles, aimed at creating a modern realist theatre in Japan to “enlighten the public.” Although

modern realist plays by Ibsen, Chekhov, and Gorky were preferred, Shingeki started with the production of Shakespeare's plays. The Bungei Kyōkai's *Hamlet* of 1911 was the first Japanese production of a western play in which female roles were uniformly played by actresses of a recognizably western type.¹⁰ Yet, with the increasing popularity of modern European playwrights in the early 1920s, Shingeki companies came to stage Shakespeare less frequently than modern drama, and (in the 1930s) turned increasingly to socialist realism. With the rise of militarism in Japan, most Shingeki companies, and the foreign drama they represented, were inevitably repressed by the government.

The first two decades after World War II saw the re-emergence of Shingeki under the Occupation; ironically as the more violent (and “undemocratic”) elements of Kabuki were repressed and western drama encouraged. Yet, as Shingeki established itself as mainstream and came to neglect its political and experimental commitments in the late 1950s, a new generation rose in opposition. The rebellion against Shingeki was first stirred up in conjunction with the leftist movement against the renewal of the US–Japan Security Treaty in 1960, and led to a wider theatre movement at the time of the next renewal in 1970. This movement, the “Shōgekijō Undō” [Little Theatre Movement] or “Angura Engeki” [Underground Theatre], has continued for the following three decades, producing such eminent theatre practitioners as Terayama Shūji, Kara Jūrō, Suzuki Tadashi, Ninagawa Yukio (those Senda Akihiko calls the first generation), and Ryūzanji Shō, Kisaragi Koharu, Noda Hideki, Kawamura Takeshi, and Iijima Sanae (in later generations).¹¹

The Little Theatre Movement took shape as a denial of Shingeki, turning its back upon western plays.¹² The distinctive but general features of this Little Theatre movement can be summarized as follows:

- 1 denial of the modern idea of realism, or the invisible fourth-wall dividing audience and proscenium stage
- 2 denial of the supremacy of the dramatic text
- 3 re-evaluation of traditional Japanese theatre forms and popular entertainment.

It would seem self-evident that no one in this Movement would want to work on Shakespeare; and, initially, most did not.¹³ Yet, as the Shōgekijō movement began to lose its original energy and creativity in the 1980s and 1990s, its practitioners increasingly turned to Shakespeare as a resource for their own creativity, thus creating new Shakespeares.¹⁴

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(3) International theatrical contact, western and Asian

The first opportunity for Japanese to see a foreign production on home soil – and a complete performance of a Shakespeare play – was in 1891, when a touring American theatre troupe entertained the foreign residents in Yokohama.¹⁵ Shakespearean productions by British/American touring companies at the Gaiety Theatre in Yokohama came to exert considerable influence upon Japanese intellectuals such as Tsubouchi Shōyō, Osanai Kaoru, and other advocates of early Shingeki. The significance of such touring companies can be surmised from a short essay written by Tsubouchi Shōyō. About the Miln Company he maintains: “. . . I saw only *Hamlet* and *The Merchant of Venice*. As they were presented rather conservatively, a few performances were enough for me to imagine how dozens of other Shakespeare plays might be presented. They were useful not only when I read the Bard’s plays but also when I later produced *Hamlet* and *The Merchant of Venice*.”¹⁶ In reference to Mrs. Janet Waldorf’s performance of Shakespearean extracts at the Gaiety in Yokohama, Tsubouchi observed:

I learnt the differences in gesture, facial expression and elocution between the Japanese theatre and its Western counterpart. Particularly I became clearly aware for the first time that there was a great difference between naturalistic and artistic expression of laughter and sighs. Of course, in preparation for my lectures, I had already extensively read foreign books and records on drama and learned how leading British and American actors performed Shakespeare. As far as artistic details went, I found seeing was believing. (*Works*, XII, 376)

Such first-hand experiences of Shakespeare and other modern western plays at the Gaiety were a vital influence on the formation of Shingeki.

Foreign troupes would again vitally influence Japanese performance with the visits of leading international companies such as the RSC from the 1970s.¹⁷ In this case, however, the foreign influence would be (paradoxically) in the direction of performative inventiveness and self-reliance rather than imitativeness. This can be safely inferred from comments made by Suzuki Tadashi in interview with Trevor Nunn at that time: “Now that I have seen your *Winter’s Tale*, all Shakespeare performances by our Shingeki companies seem nothing but dull and shoddy imitations of Western productions. Since such imitations can never surpass the originals, I think we have no choice but to start tackling Shakespeare with our uniquely Japanese sense of theatre.”¹⁸ Suzuki’s recognition of the pointlessness of imitating British Shakespeare was ubiquitous among Japanese theatre practitioners in the Little Theatre Movement in the early 1970s.

Perhaps more in the tradition of the earlier, more ministerial, model of

foreign influence are the sojourns of British directors with mainstream Japanese companies.¹⁹ One of the earliest “visiting” directors was Michael Benthol, whose 1953 production of *Hamlet* at the Aldwich Fukuda Tsuneari had tried to imitate in 1955. Benthol was invited to direct *Romeo and Juliet* for the Kumo Theatre Company in Fukuda’s translation as early as 1965. In the 1970s, several Shingeki companies and commercial theatres such as Tōhō and Shōchiku invited British directors such as Jeffrey Leavis (1974) and John David (1972, 1973, and 1975). Some directors worked with Japanese actors in almost the same way as with British actors, though in translation. This was, and still is, probably what the Japanese companies expected such directors to do, for, with a British director, their productions could claim a greater measure of “authenticity.” A twist is provided by visiting directors who have tried to localize Shakespeare for Japanese actors and audiences. One of the earliest examples was Jeffrey Leavis who, in collaboration with Deguchi Norio and the Bungaku-za Company, set *Troilus and Cressida* in ancient Japan.²⁰

The Japanese theatre scene has been greatly changed by the opening of the Tokyo Globe in 1988. Its opening season included The English Shakespeare Company’s *The Wars of the Roses* and the National Theatre’s productions of Peter Hall’s *Cymbeline*, *The Winter’s Tale*, and *The Tempest*. The Tokyo Globe has not only provided Japanese audiences with many opportunities to see British and other foreign productions of Shakespeare, but also afforded chances for young actors from the Shōgekijō movement to work with foreign directors. The success of such productions at the Tokyo Globe has encouraged other commercial theatres such as Theatre Cocoon and Ginza Saison Theatre to invite companies and directors from abroad.

One of the most important changes that the Tokyo Globe has brought about is its policy of inviting Shakespeare productions not only from Britain but from other countries as well. Such productions have included Ingmar Bergman’s *Hamlet* (Sweden), Silviu Purcarete’s *Titus Andronicus* (Romania), Robert Lepage’s *The Tempest* and *Coriolanus* (Canada), and Lin Zhaohua’s *Hamlet* (China). These non-British productions have encouraged Japanese audiences to question the “authenticity” and “canonicity” of British Shakespeare performance, and paved the way for new developments.

An important recent development in Shakespearean production is the collaboration of artists from different Asian countries and theatres (possibly inspired by innovative collaborations between Japanese actors from Kabuki, Noh, Shingeki and Shōgekijō in the sixties). The point to be registered here perhaps is that the more deeply localized Japanese Shakespeare productions of the 1980s and 1990s have become a medium for pan-Asian communication. Notable examples are Korean director Kim Johng Oku’s

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King Lear, staged with actors from six different countries in 1997; and Filipino director Nonon Padilla's 1998 *Romeo and Juliet*, which included a Kyogen actor and Shôgekijô actress. Among Asian Shakespeares, Ong Ken Sen's production of *Lear*, in Kishida Rio's adaptation, can be seen as epoch-making in several ways. In this production, actors from five countries (China, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, and Japan) teamed up to create an "Asian *Lear*" under a Singapore director. This was more than mere cultural exchange. Actors spoke their lines in their respective languages, and the Noh and Beijing Opera actors in the cast retained their own acting styles throughout performance, thus intentionally creating "discords" on various levels. In the program for this performance, Ong Ken Sen maintains:

In this production of *Lear*, I have attempted to search for a new world, a new Asia. This new Asia will continue to have a dialogue with the old, with traditions, with history. But its spirit should contain the youth and freshness that the present world so desperately needs as it progresses into the new millennium. Harmony is not what I seek but discord. A discord which will be symbolic of the complexity of the new millennium. There are no simple answers anymore. We have to deal with difference as we face the new millennium. We can no longer hold onto simple visions of the outside world and "the other."²¹

The essays: early modern and traditional theatre productions

What, then, "do we mean by Japanese Shakespeare?" The question posed by Anzai Tetsuo's provocative essay is a root problematic to which many essays in this volume return. In one sense, only plural answers are possible. "Shakespeare production in Japan," Anzai remarks, "has its own history now as long as a century"; in all of which time Shakespeare has been a radically divergent or unstable cultural and theatrical quantity.

The tentative cultural negotiations between Kabuki and Shakespeare are richly documented in James Brandon's "Shakespeare in Kabuki." To begin with, in the Meiji period, these were strictly on Kabuki's terms. In order to feature in Kabuki at all, Shakespearean content had to be assimilated into a Kabuki "world." In such a "world," Shakespeare was culturally invisible, surviving only in the form of plot trace or motif. Complete translation – as distinct from adaptation – of a Shakespeare play denied the actors the improvisation that was integral to their performances. Accordingly, the meeting between Shakespeare and Kabuki did not produce lasting results.

Zeni, the early Kabuki *Merchant of Venice*, is the exclusive focus of Yoshihara Yukari's avowedly postcolonial "Japan as 'Half Civilized.'" In this nationalistic 1885 adaptation, Shakespeare's play is not merely Japanized – the

characters given Japanese names and the situation transposed into a Japan of the Edo era – but turned into a parable of the western money economy that Meiji Japan was struggling to accommodate. A later stage of the encounter between Shakespeare, Kabuki, and Shimpa is described by Matsumoto Shinko, who sees Osanai Kaoru's 1904 production of *Romeo and Juliet* as intermediate between audacious Kabuki adaptations such as *Zeni* and bold Shimpa adaptations such as Kawakami Otojirô's *Othello* (1903). Osanai eventually discovered that Kabuki actors could play Shakespeare as long as they spoke rather than chanted, and walked rather than danced (or, in other words, as long as they refrained from Kabuki acting). Matsumoto argues that this helped pave the way for canonic or Shingeki Shakespeare in 1918, when *Romeo and Juliet* was staged in Tsubouchi Shôyô's translation by the Bungei-za Company.

If Kabuki has tended to resist Shakespeare, so (to an even greater degree) has Noh. Ueda Munakata Kuniyoshi follows Zeami in insisting that Noh cannot be considered Noh unless it retains its traditional song, dance, and tripartite-role structure (warrior, old person, woman). His own contemporary adaptations are accordingly attentive to the stylistic needs of Noh. A contrasting kind of generic encounter is described by Michael Shapiro's essay on *The Braggart Samurai*, a Kyogen version of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. In the words of its author Takahashi Yasunari: "You cannot kyogenize Shakespeare without Shakespeareanizing kyogen." Less formalized and more plebeian than Noh, Kyogen has perhaps proven more supple than its more aristocratic counterpart in adapting to contemporary democratic tastes.

The essays: post World War II productions

As the first Japanese director (albeit of film) to produce internationally acclaimed interpretations of Shakespeare, Kurosawa Akira fittingly heads this section. Paula von Loewenfeldt's close analysis of *Kumonosu-jô* (*Throne of Blood*) exposes the Eurocentrism of an earlier generation of western appreciations by stressing Kurosawa's interpretative sophistication equally with his Japanization (particularly the use of Noh conventions). Kurosawa's development of the role of his Banquo inaugurates a distinctive post-Meiji type of adaptation in which close textual attention is balanced by a deeply personal (almost autobiographical) inspiration.

We have already noted the theatrical revolution effected by the combination of Odashima's demotic translation of the canon with the "contemporary" and urbanized Shakespeare of Deguchi Norio. Deguchi's work with the

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-78244-9 - Performing Shakespeare in Japan
 Edited by Minami Ryuta, Ian Carruthers, and John Gillies
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Shakespeare Company is surveyed by Suematsu Michiko. While the importance of Deguchi's early contribution at the JeanJean Little Theatre is properly stressed, so too is the harder-won theatrical self-reinvention of his later period, that of the three parallel productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Globe-za (1994).

Intercultural adaptation is also the hallmark of Suzuki Tadashi. In one of two papers on this important director, Takahashi Yasunari discusses *The Tale of Lear*, Suzuki's first work to "build . . . itself 'single-mindedly' upon a Shakespearean play." Fidelity to the original is not, however, an end in itself. Shakespeare's play is not merely Japanized but recontextualized as the day-dreaming of an old man in a mental home. More is at issue here than relevance or even localization. Shakespeare's tragic aesthetic is cited within an absurdist framing action. The effect, argues Takahashi, is to lead us to ask fundamental questions of the tragic experience, as of the place of the "classic" in postmodern culture. Ian Carruthers considers Suzuki's *The Chronicle of Macbeth*, produced in Australia and toured to Tokyo in 1992. He focuses on Suzuki's rehearsal interactions with Australian actors (and one American) as they negotiate his postmodern adaptation and stylized method of acting with varying degrees of success.

Of a later generation than Suzuki, Noda Hideki adapts Shakespeare more in the sense of rewriting than of cultural reframing. Suzuki Masae unpacks *Sandaime Richâdo*, perhaps Noda's most radical rewriting of a Shakespeare play (*Richard III*). At the conclusion of this extended dramatic dialogue (indeed argument), Shakespeare is completely dismantled and re-edified. Noda himself, however, is contextualized by Minami Ryuta, who reads Noda's earlier adaptations of *Twelfth Night* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* against Iijima Sanae's *Arigachina Hanashi* (an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*). Noda's attitude of treating Shakespeare as source material rather than as authority is thereby seen as representative of the younger generation of *Shôgekijô* playwrights to which both Noda and Iijima belong.

No collection could be complete without mention of Takarazuka, the all-female theatre company. Founded in 1913, it is one of the oldest of modern theatre companies in Japan and, to western critics at least, one of the hardest to categorize conceptually. Reading Takarazuka's *Romeo and Juliet* against the horizon of *shôjo* (young girls) culture, Ohtani Tomoko finds Takarazuka both deconstructing the premodern Japanese form of patriarchy within which it had originally arisen as a theatre institution, and yet reconstructing it in the form of the postmodern Japanese consumerist image of the "cute."

In the context of these progressively more radical destabilizations of Shakespeare, Ted Motohashi's article on Gerard Murphy's production of *The*