

Lectures 06-07 Taking the Kink Out of Kabuki

(Excerpted passages are from article "Bakufu vs. Kabuki")

1. Sex, Art, and Edo's *Akusho*

a. Review of "Sex, Art, and Edo Culture"

- Define and characterize "akusho"
- What does this mean: "both types of 'notorious places' commodified sex by transforming it into performance and it is sex and performance which most steadfastly resist systematization, hence control." (pp. 5-6)
- How does gender fit in?

2. Kabuki's kinkiness

- a. The word "kabuki" ---> inclined to one side, crooked, out of line, wild
- b. Govt. regulation of this kinkiness

3. Onna kabuki: streetdancer/walkers

- a. Transvestitism & prostitution in onna kabuki troupes
- b. Succubi of samurai

"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."

--Hayashi Razan (1583- 1657), Neo-Confucian scholar and advisor to the Tokugawa shōgunate

- c. Banning onna kabuki (women from all stages 1629, 30, 40, 45, 46)

". . . when theaters were built for the prostitutes to give kabuki performances, the impetuous eccentrics among the high and 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."

From *Edo meishoki* (Record of famous places in Edo, 1662)

4. Youth's kabuki: male bonding

- a. Homosexuality among the ranks
- b. Regulating female impersonators (*onnagata*)

“From the time that youth's kabuki began with youths beautifully gotten up, there was homosexual dallying. Still again [as in the case 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.” --From *Kyô warabe*

“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.”

5. “Fellow's kabuki”: better than the real thing

- a. Forelock play:

“The appearance of their faces was smooth and like cats with their ears cut off, and they were a sorry sight. [So] 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.”

- b. Headwear and wigs

“When these fellows, 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!” And from the sides others called: “Oh that smile! It overflows with sweetness. Good! good!” and the like, and there was shouting and commotion.” --From *Edo meishoki*

6. Playground rules

- a. Placement of theaters & brothels
- b. Professionalization
- c. Policing “theater teahouses”; hidden spaces, lighting exposed.
- d. Regulating clothes, materials, comportment
- e. Content of plays: tone down bawdiness and no politics!
- e. No outright suppression: that would anger the masses