Meiji Theatre Design:
from communal participation to refined appreciation

RACHEL M PAYNE

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RACHEL PAYNE

Rachel Payne is Laming Junior Research Fellow at Queens College, Oxford. Her recently completed D.Phil. dissertation was entitled, "Kabuki Reform in the Early Meiji Period". This article is based on a presentation given at the Nissan Institute Seminar on 15 June, 2001.

Mark Rebick
Editor

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Introduction

In 1872, the fifth year of the Meiji Era, one of Tokyo's major Kabuki theatres moved to the centre of the capital's new Western-style business district. With its refined design and modern facilities, the new building was among the first in Tokyo to embrace the spirit of the popular slogan *bunmei kaika* meaning 'civilisation and enlightenment'. This theatre was the Morita-za, which was renamed the Shintomi-za in 1875. In Kabuki history the term 'Shintomi-za Era' refers to the years from the early 1870' to late 1880's when this theatre pioneered advances in artistic, architectural and managerial fields.

The theatre's manager, Morita Kan'ya XII (1846-1897), was the twelfth generation of the Morita family to manage the 250-year-old Kabuki entertainment business. He lived through interesting times. As a young man, Kan'ya witnessed the Meiji Restoration and experienced the social and ideological upheaval created as Japan was exposed to increased Western influence.[1] Heightened awareness of the opportunities and challenges facing the nation prompted a major shift in national consciousness, and the new Imperial regime undertook to reform and modernise almost every aspect of society, from its financial and education systems to its eating habits and dress code.

It was as part of these widespread reform movements that efforts were made to transform Kabuki into an entertainment that could reflect the spirit of the new age. The exact nature of the conflicting progressive and conservative pressures that shaped Kan'ya's managerial style would be the subject of essays in themselves, as would an analysis of their effect on the development of new artistic genres launched at the Shintomi-za. This paper will focus on the architectural history of Kan'ya's theatre building, in particular the motivations for the design reforms and their impact on performances and audiences. The discussion will be divided into three sections dealing with pre-Meiji Kabuki theatre design, and the two main nodes of architectural reform that coincided with the building's complete reconstruction in 1872 and 1878.

The term 'performance' is used here as defined by the drama theorist Richard Schechner, as, 'the whole constellation of events, most passing unnoticed, that takes place in / among both performers and audience from the time the first spectator enters the field of performance - the precinct where the theatre takes place - to the time the last spectator leaves'.[2] Schechner's research into the cultural context of various Asian theatre genres has highlighted the importance of the practices and rituals surrounding any theatrical show. Although these procedures vary between cultures, they serve the same function of framing and defining the performance. This approach is particularly useful when applied to the integral events associated with Kabuki, which extended beyond the conventional theatrical area. I will examine developments in the following areas of the audience's experience of the performance:

1) rituals associated with the audience's attendance
2) the audience's experience of its physical surroundings
3) the direction and depth of their attention
4) the definition of physical and psychological boundaries between the stage and auditorium, and between the general public and fee-paying audience.

An architectural study of any theatre covers both its external and internal features. The exterior is seen by both spectators and the general public alike, and stands as the manifestation of the theatre's public presence. Accessibility and external publicity methods give an indication of the theatre's relationship to its wider surroundings and to society. The theatre's interior can be further divided into the foyer, auditorium and stage. The foyer area channels spectators to and from their seats, and is the location of the procurement and provision of any extra services they require. The auditorium is the domain of the spectator: the seating form, access, layout, sightlines and decorations all shape the nature of the theatrical experience. Finally there is the stage, which is the working space of the actors and the major focus of the audience's attention. Its size, shape and the definition of its

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[1] For a comprehensive account of Morita Kan'ya's life and career see: Kimura Kinka, Morita Kan'ya, Shin Taishû-sha, Tokyo, 1943.
[2] Schechner, R., Performance Theory, (rev. edn. of Essays on Performance Theory, Drama Books Specialists, 1977) Routledge, London, 1988. p72.

boundaries determine the actor-audience relationship and the audience's perception of the play.

1 Pre-Meiji Kabuki

Before examining these architectural aspects of the Morita-za and Shintomi-za, it would be helpful to refer briefly to pre-Meiji Kabuki and its performance environment. It is only once a clear picture of this traditional form has been established that we can understand the significance of Kan'ya's moves to restyle it. During the late Edo Era the capital's licensed theatres were banished by the *bakufu* authorities from the city centre to Saruwaka-machi, a remote northern suburb. The aim was to limit Kabuki's perceived unsavory influence on its predominantly *chônin* merchant class audience. However, despite or perhaps because of this official discouragement, Kabuki flourished as one of the best-loved elements of *chônin* life. Spectators came in many forms: families with children, *geisha* with clients, serving maids from *samurai* residencies, rich merchant patrons, lowly artisans and even a few disguised *samurai* fans.

The *bakufu* permitted theatres to be built as two-storey structures of the *dozô-tsukuri* 'storehouse style' with plastered walls and a fully tiled roof. *Kanban* advertisement posters virtually obscured the whole frontage, and a number of other external publicity methods were also used. On raised platforms at the entrance low-ranking actors called *kappa* performed sketches of the day's plays to attract passers-by. *Okuri* escorts accompanied higher-ranking actors, ostensibly to clear the way through the crowds, but their flamboyant clothes and loud calls also served to advertise the actors and the theatre they served. On the roof was a *yagura* tower which housed the drum that signalled the start of performances. The *yagura* was an important feature of an Edo theatre, standing as proof of its official performance licence and containing the ceremonial weapons that were thought to ward off fire and other evils.

Surrounding the theatre were the affiliated teahouses which provided a range of services from food to rooms for intimate meetings between actors and their

patrons. This was where ccustomers could purchase their tickets, take refreshment before and during the performance, and hire an usher to conduct them to their seats. The theatre had several front entrances, including the low *nezumi-kido* (literally 'rat door') through which spectators in the pit were made to stoop in single file in order to prevent rowdy surges at busy times. The theatre lobby was a hive of activity, with ushers, *dekata* attendants and front-of-house managers all overseeing the spectators' movements and attending to their requirements. Well-connected fans preferred to enter via the actor's backstage dressing-rooms and then cut across the stage itself to their seats. Even during performances the stage was commonly used by spectators as a thoroughfare to the outside world, teahouses and toilets.

Within the theatre building, the main acting area was the *tsukebutai* thrust stage. This extended further into the auditorium along the two *hanamichi* walkways, which were used for main actors' entries and exits. These structures were part of the Kabuki interior that brought the actors and audience into close proximity. The boundary between the acting and seating areas was further blurred by the presence of *yoshino* seats behind the stage. Prices for this seating area were cheap because it offered limited views, looking out as it did into the main auditorium over the backs and heads of the actors.[3] The *doma* auditorium pit was divided by low wooden railings into *masu* partitions in which six or seven people sat on hired cushions.[4] On either side of the *doma* were rows of raised *takadoma masu* seating which afforded a better view of the stage. Behind these, situated along the three sidewalls were the *sajiki* gallery boxes. They retained the bamboo lattice supporting the blinds that sectioned this expensive seating area into private boxes in which the theatre's major clients could entertain their guests and watch in

[3] The name *yoshino* comes from an area near Nara famed for its cherry blossoms. Spectators sitting in this area had the best view of the artificial blossom decorations, but not much else.
[4] Zushi Yoshihiko, Nihon no Gekijô Kaiko, Sagami Shobô, Tokyo, 1947. p65.
Describing a traditional Kabuki auditorium for his British readers, one journalist wrote:
'Theatre-going being essentially a family arrangement, places are disposed of according. There are, of course, no chairs, every one squatting on the floor. But in Tokio [sic] Theatre the auditorium is broken up into something like a series of sheep-pens, in which family circles or companies of friends squat'. (*The Graphic*, London, 27 September, 1884.)

private. The upper storey *sajiki* retained the vestiges of the roof dating from when this was the only seating area to enjoy any protection from the elements.

A trip to the theatre was a day-long event. Especially for the female spectators, preparing their attire and coiffure were integral parts of the whole event: they were going to be seen just as much as to see. Their experience of the performance in its broadest meaning started with these preparations and continued with the long journey to the Saruwaka-machi theatre district, where the tension mounted on hearing the *yagura* drum and seeing the *okuri* escorts and *kappa* performances. The distinction between spectator and non-spectator in Saruwaka-machi was blurred by their shared experience of these public external elements of the performance.

Within the theatre, the boundary between stage and auditorium was indistinct because of the division of the acting space into the main stage, thrust stage and two *hanamichi* and the use of all these by spectators and *dekata* attendants as both thoroughfares and shelves for their picnics and utensils. The audience's attention was divided between the action on stage, their immediate surroundings and the auditorium in general. Fellow spectators were clearly visible as the galleries faced each other across the well-lit auditorium. Food vendors touted their wares in loud voices that contended with the play, and fans often participated in the drama on stage by shouting praise or abuse at the actors. These distractions hindered any serious concentrated appreciation of the drama, but were considered as much part of the performance as the play itself. They strengthened the bonds between actor and audience, and within the audience community as a whole.

Following Schechner's analysis, we can classify pre-Meiji Kabuki as a multi-focus, multi-experience and multi-directional form of theatre. This is a style common to many non-Western theatre genres, and also, interestingly, to many pre-seventeenth century Western forms. The building design ensured that the actors and audience maintained close physical and psychological proximity, which contributed much to the intimate nature of the performance. Furthermore,

Kabuki's traditional entrance procedures and audience participation, and the community spirit engendered by these conventions, lent the whole performance a festive atmosphere which was in some ways closer to a joyous ritual than the serious appreciation of an artistic event. Schechner classes spectator groups of this kind as 'integral' connoisseur audiences, which have a close personal interest in the performance, and are comfortable with its conventions. This is in contrast to what he calls the 'accidental' audiences characteristic of modern Western drama, who tend to be less familiar with the theatre's performance rituals but exhibit an impartial but concentrated interest in the staged performance.[5]

2 The 1872 Morita-za

Historical circumstances dictated that the experiences of Kabuki's theatre community did not continue undisturbed for long into the Meiji Era. Morita Kan'ya was the first manager to respond successfully to the Meiji government's lifting of the *bafuku's* banishment order, having realised the advantage of relocating to Shintomi-chô, a central venue closer to new potentially lucrative sources of custom and within easy walking distance of the government's showpiece modern Western brick-built area in the Ginza. In this new venue Kan'ya could also rid himself of the overbearing influence from Kabuki's conservative *renjû* fan clubs and teahouse managers whom he felt stifled innovation.[6]

Throughout his career, Kan'ya's approach to his theatre and audience differed considerably from that of his rivals: Tokyo's two other major Kabuki theatres, Ichimura-za and Nakamura-za, did not attempt to leave the Saruwaka-machi theatre ghetto or extend its audience base until much later. The origins of Kan'ya's unique enterprising spirit lay in his childhood and family circumstances. The Morita family's theatre had always been the least powerful of Tokyo's three

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[5] Schechner, pp193-94.

[6] Kan'ya did not consult the Morita-za's affiliated teahouses concerning the move to central Tokyo. This angered many of them, especially the seven loyal establishments that had supported the Morita family throughout its inheritance dispute in the 1850s. He was warned of the danger of this unprecedented insult by the manager of another Edo theatre, but calls to respect these traditional

licensed Kabuki venues, and a series of damaging succession disputes and financial crises in the late Edo Era had further weakened its stance. When Kan'ya's father and adoptive father, who served as the Morita-za's financial director and manager respectively, both died in 1863, the young Kan'ya inherited the family business and its considerable debts at the age of just seventeen. He was several decades younger than his main rivals, of whom one, Kawarazaki Gon'nosuke VI (1814-1868), still resented the Morita-za after losing the most recent inheritance dispute there. It was Gon'nosuke merciless bullying, backed by several powerful *renjû* and teahouses, that persuaded the ambitious Kan'ya to break free from Kabuki's traditional institutional confines at the first opportunity. His early attempts to apply his father's entrepreneurial and financial skills to the entertainment business were highly successful: the Morita-za soon led the way in introducing new financial arrangements and architectural innovations, in addition to pioneering several new theatre genres and fostering relationships with the new class of high society consumers.[7]

This was the background to Kan'ya's bold move to Shintomi-chô in May 1872. The relocation necessitated the construction of a new building, and Kan'ya was instrumental in designing a structure that could realise his aspirations for modernity and wider social recognition. Whereas most of the design conformed to Kabuki's conventional architectural style, it also included modifications that attracted much attention. These alterations were intended primarily to economise on frivolities and standardise the whole theatre-going experience to make it safer, cleaner, better organised and more comfortable. In this way what can be seen as innovative concepts of theatre management and service were introduced to make Kabuki more attractive to the upper classes, who were less familiar with its conventions. Until recently, the Japanese elite had avoided Kabuki and shunned it as the vulgar entertainment of the masses. Kan'ya did not have to wait long for official recognition of his theatre's improved role in society, for elite politicians soon organised gala shows there for their Western guests. According to

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bonds of mutual responsibility only strengthened Kan'ya's desire to be free of their demands and accept them into his new theatre on his own terms.

[7] Ôtsuki Nyoden, Daijûnisei Morita Kan'ya, Morita Kôsaku, Tokyo, 1906. passim.

contemporary sources, these new elite contacts encouraged Kan'ya's efforts to modernise and refine his theatre so that it too could reflect the pervading spirit of *bunmei kaika*.[8]

2.1 External Features

With theatre building regulations now lifted, Kan'ya was free to expand his theatre, and the new Morita-za was the largest in Tokyo: a position that it retained for the next thirteen years. The exterior walls were plaster and the tiled roof was lined with lead to improve its fire-resistance. The entrance was simplified so that there were just two openings leading to the lobby, which now housed a central ticket office. Kan'ya's stricter approach to entrance procedures meant that all spectators, no matter how privileged, now passed through the same regulated front entrances. Entrance was not permitted through the actors' backstage doors or via the neighbouring teahouses. This had the effect of halting the practice of freeloading, which had until then been a constant drain on profits. These alterations also served to distance the new theatre from conventions redolent of Kabuki's less disciplined past. They soon became the norm for all Kabuki theatres.[9]

Few Saruwaka-machi theatre teahouses followed Kan'ya to the city centre, and those that did found their function reduced to the provision of refreshments and a few limited extra services. This was not an attempt to curb the tradition of eating, drinking and smoking within the auditorium. Rather Kan'ya was trying to ensure that the basic entrance fee included everything that a spectator would require except refreshments. By making all spectators pass through the front entrances

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[8] Ôtsuki, passim.
Ôtsuki was a close personal friend of Kan'ya's. He mentions several members of Tokyo's socio-political elite whom he considered to have exerted considerable influence on Kan'ya's drama reform programme. These included the statesmen Ôkubo Toshimichi (1830-1878), Inoue Kaoru (1836-1915) and the future Prime Minister Itô Hirobumi (1841-1909). Ôtsuki notes how Kan'ya gradually became addicted to the glamorous lifestyle of this new class of consumers and their progressive reform ideals for all aspects of theatre and its social function. He ascribes Kan'ya's eventual bankruptcy and professional failure to his addiction to entertaining high society, which he could neither afford nor combine well with his theatre's major function as the popular entertainment of the middle class urban masses.
[9] Ihara Toshirô provides a detailed description of the 1872 Morita-za and 1878 Shintomi-za in his classic reference work, Meiji Engeki-shi, Waseda University, Tokyo, 1933.

Kan'ya prevented teahouses from conducting clients to their seats via the adjoining corridors or charging them to use the teahouse toilets, as, for the first time ever, toilets were provided within the theatre building.

Opinions vary as to the extent of Kan'ya's modifications of the *yagura* tower. Several primary sources suggest that he abolished it in 1872, presumably as a sign that Kabuki no longer required a *bakufu* license. However, the alternative theory supported by contemporary blockprints suggests that a modified copper-covered *yagura* was retained. This lends further support to the argument that Kan'ya was setting large store by his efforts to make his new theatre fireproof, for a copper *yagura* would stand as a symbol of the theatre's indestructibility. It is said that the *okuri* escorts and *kappa* preview sketches were abolished because they were deemed expensive luxuries that were not conducive to the serious appreciation of the play. However, questions remain over the extent to which such rationalising was achieved in 1872, for there are several early Meiji block print pictures showing what appear to be *kappa* performers outside the new Morita-za.[10] A number of explanations exist for this apparent contradiction: perhaps the artists were working from memory of the conventional stage rather than from accurate knowledge of the new theatre. Alternatively, these reforms were introduced more gradually than is generally assumed.

2.2 Internal Features

The theatre's acting area was increased considerably by deepening and widening the main stage and both *hanamichi*. Improvements were also made to the underground passage linking the stage and the far end of the *hanamichi*. This was done to minimise disturbances caused when actors accessed the *hanamichi* via the auditorium corridor. However, the most significant modification was the removal of the *tsukebutai* thrust stage so that the new stage was flush with the first rows of *sajiki* boxes. The flattening of the *tsukebutai* increased the effectiveness of the curtain, which could now be drawn across the whole stage. Thus the stage became one architecturally undifferentiated unit, framed by what can be described in

[10] Suda Atsuo, Nihon Gekijô-shi no Kenkyû, Sagami Shobô, Tokyo, 1957, No. 69.

Western terms as a psuedo-proscenium arch. This design was gradually adopted as the norm for new Kabuki theatres.

In the past, little effort had been made to encourage the audience to treat the performance as a representation of a believable event. Seeing the scene changes and bumping into actors in the auditorium corridors reinforced the audience's awareness that they were watching a presentation of a fictional piece of drama. Kan'ya now wished to encourage his audiences to suspend their disbelief and for the time of the performance regard the drama on stage as believable action. It was with this in mind that he isolated the fictional stage so that the audience only saw the actors in their character roles. This was also the motivation behind modifications to the ceiling design which improved the acoustics, thereby enhancing the audience's appreciation of the textual elements of the performance. The alterations also had the benefit of reducing the amount of dust falling onto the heads of the spectators!

In the new Morita-za, the two *hanamichi* lay parallel to the *masu* divisions in the pit and perpendicular to the stage. This meant that all *masu* were now uniform in size and shape, which was clearly a practical measure to maximise the auditorium capacity and standardise its layout. In an effort to boost profits, Kan'ya also increased the size and capacity of the *doma* pit, but nevertheless ensured that the average distance between the spectators and actors remained unchanged by enlarging the auditorium width along the stage, rather than the depth away from the stage. Thus the conventional physical proximity of actor and audience was maintained.

The comfort of the expensive *sajiki* boxes was increased by a number of measures: they were equipped with doors to separate the spectators from the corridor behind, and screen off the audience from actors still using the corridor to reach the *hanamichi*. These doors signalled the end of the standing area behind the *sajiki*, which had caused problems for *sajiki* spectators who risked having their possessions, in particular hairpins, stolen by thieves standing behind. The lattices

across the front of the *sajiki* were abolished so that the distinction between the main auditorium and side boxes was reduced, and the *sajiki* spectators' view of the stage was enhanced through the removal of unnecessary obstructions. This was also thought to be the motive behind the replacement of the wooden pillars supporting the *sajiki* balcony with wider-spaced thinner iron supports.

The boundary between stage and auditorium was clarified by retaining only a small triangular area of the *yoshino* seating behind the stage. This alteration also served to remove from the main audience's view a distracting feature that was not part of the play. For the first time in Kabuki's history, space was reserved at the front of the balcony for twenty Western chairs. Opinion is divided between those scholars who assume that the chairs were for the sole use of Westerners, and others suggesting that the chairs were for the use of anyone, either Japanese or foreigner, who was wearing Western dress and would therefore find sitting on the floor uncomfortable. I consider the latter suggestion more plausible, for by 1872 it was becoming increasingly common for members of Japan's social and political elite to wear Western clothes to formal engagements, and foreign visitors were often accompanied by distinguished members of the Japanese elite, who would have shared the box and Western furniture with them.

2.3 Impact on Audiences

These alterations to the traditional theatre building had several noticeable effects on the audience. The change of location altered many of the pre-performance rituals of travel and entertainment within the larger Saruwaka-machi theatre community. The abolition, albeit gradually, of several forms of external advertisement and the end to the general confusion of the entrance area served to localise the performance to within the theatre building, thereby clarifying the boundaries between participator and non-participator and between the performance area and public space. The modernisations that simplified and standardised the entrance procedure also limited the audience's range of experiences and encounters. This was further increased by the definition of the boundary between

the actors' and audience's domains, to the detriment of the conventional intimacy between them.

The reduction of visual and auditory disturbances, coupled with the enlarged acting area and the improvements made to sightlines and acoustics, all focused more attention onto the stage. This prompted the start of a shift from what Schechner describes as a multi-focus performance to one with unanimity of focus.[11] We can assume that this stimulated a change in the audience's attitude from selective inattention to longer times of more concentrated attention on the action on stage. Parallels can be drawn to similar developments in European theatres of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. This was the time when audiences and actors were gradually separated by the advent of the proscenium arch, the abolition of the thrust stage and the definition of the external and internal boundaries of the performance area. European theatres had also witnessed a channelling of the audience's attention away from fellow spectators and onto the drama itself. By the time Kan'ya started his reforms in Japan, the Western norm was a proscenium theatre, a tightly-boundaried individual building with controlled access from the street, and the building, like the performance itself, strictly compartmentalised.

These factors may lead one to wonder whether the West was the major model Kan'ya chose for his own theatre reforms. Indeed certain alterations, especially the introduction of Western chairs, have been hailed by some as evidence of direct overseas influence. We know that by 1872 Kan'ya had established contact with members of the upper classes, some of whom had some first-hand knowledge of Western entertainments. However, I would argue for caution in drawing strong parallels with Western trends. We must remember that Kan'ya designed his theatre at a time when no one in the Kabuki world had any substantial knowledge of Western theatres, let alone seen one themselves. He may have been aware of the depth of attention Westerners usually focused on the stage, and the more refined nature of their entrance procedures and auditorium atmosphere, but I

[11] Schechner, passim.

would maintain that many of the reforms that effectively brought the Morita-za closer to its European counterparts were introduced as practical measures to economise, standardise and improve the theatre, rather than to replicate Western styles. Furthermore, no architectural features showed an application of foreign design techniques or building materials, whereas the nearby Ginza was clearly designed to recreate a Western style. We must also remember that the chairs at the Morita-za occupied only one small separated area, and they never wholly replaced the conventional floor seating.

3 The 1878 Shintomi-za

By the time Kan'ya's theatre was destroyed by fire in late 1876, it had been renamed as the Shintomi-za and re-launched as a joint stock company. Performances continued in a temporary structure until 1878, when a resounding success with a new play generated sufficient profits to fund the construction of a magnificent new building. This play was highly significant in the history of the Shintomi-za because research for it brought Kan'ya into close contact with keen reformers from Tokyo's educated social elite, who introduced him to the current trends in Japanese and Western high society. Furthermore, the success of the new play was in part due to its mature use of contemporary materials that glorified the government. This attracted the attention of politicians and convinced them of the positive role theatre could play in society, which brought about an increase in official use of the Shintomi-za as part of Japan's state entertainment for visiting foreign dignitaries.[12]

Like the new building itself, its grand opening ceremony of July 1878 was an eclectic mixture of Japanese and Western, modern and traditional elements. The invited elite guests were treated to music from Western military bands and fine speeches by the major actors promising that Kan'ya's theatre would lead a bold movement to edify Kabuki and cleanse it of its uncouth conventions.

[12] The play, entitled *Okige no Kumo Harau Asagochi* (March 1878), concerned the recent Seinan War in southern Kyûshû. Kan'ya negotiated with the Meiji authorities for permission to use genuine Western uniforms and sensitive official information in order to achieve a new degree of realism and authenticity.

3.1 External features

The new Shintomi-za was approximately the same size as its predecessor, and construction materials were the same as before, ensuring a continuation of the high standards of quality and fire safety. However, the roof differed considerably, for a silver design of the Morita crest covered the gable end where the *yagura* tower had once stood. The building had a neat latticed plaster façade and simplified shape minus the conventional external structures for *kappa* performances. Modifications were made to the *kanban* advertisement boards, which were now limited in size, style and number. In the past theatres had competed over the beauty and brightness of their *kanban* and seasonal decorations, but Kan'ya's rationalisation policy effectively halted the Shintomi-za's participation in these traditions. Surely the most popular exterior additions were the gas lamps, which were still a novelty at this time. One historian records that these lamps became the theatre's symbol, and continued to be lit during performances throughout Kan'ya's time as manager.[13]

3.2 Internal features

At the new theatre's backstage entrances Kan'ya again erected signs forbidding public access to the auditorium, which suggests that his previous efforts had not been fully successful. The front entrances were once more modified, this time to add two entrances leading directly to the *sajiki* galleries via small gardens to a corridor housing the toilets and small shops. This area provided spectators in the *sajiki* galleries with a place in which to take a breath of fresh air. Relaxation areas of this type were soon copied in other new theatres. Within the theatre lobby the ticket checkpoint and box office were modified to ensure that no managerial areas protruded into the street to disturb the simplified design of the façade. This area was no longer used to display the presents received from patrons and fans. Kan'ya changed the theatre's relationship to its affiliated teahouses by further reducing their number, size and permitted functions. They were all required to restrict their external decoration to a simple menu and price list. Their modified functions were

[13] Fans sadly recognised that their dismantling after Kan'ya's death signalled the end of the Shintomi-za's reign as Japan's foremost theatre and its regression to a venue for more common entertainment.

clearly less lucrative than in earlier times when they rented out many accessories and provided a whole range of refreshments. Now fewer spectators visited teahouses during the performance as most of their services were provided within the theatre itself.

Although the overall dimensions of the Shintomi-za did not increase much, the stage was further widened to the characteristic long thin shape we can still see in today's Kabuki theatres. The stage front was simplified by the elimination of the decorated curtains that had traditionally hung across the top and sides of the stage, which were now reduced to a single Morita family crest. Like other Kabuki theatres, the Shintomi-za displayed *hikimaku* draw curtains that were presented to the theatre by its major fans and patrons. Kan'ya had offended his theatre's *renjû* fan clubs by moving without consulting them, and in retaliation they stopped providing any of the gifts traditionally displayed within the theatre. However, from 1878 onwards the Shintomi-za received many gifts of stage curtains from overseas guests, newspaper companies and the like. Kan'ya proudly displayed these before performances as proof of his theatre's high status and international recognition. Thus the convention of gift giving, which had once been a celebration of the theatre's close links to its *chônin* heritage, was altered by Kan'ya so he could display his theatre's new elite patronage.

The theatre interior was further simplified by the removal of the pillars and roof over the *sajiki* balcony, thereby incorporating this area fully into the auditorium. This ensured an unrestricted view of the stage, at the cost of reducing the privacy of this area. For the first time in Kabuki history, a central aisle provided an alternative to the *masu* wooden partitions and *hanamichi* for access to the pit. Other seating alterations included a small increase in the number of Western chairs and the complete abolition of the *yoshino* seating behind the stage, which had already been severely reduced in 1872. Sightlines were improved in the construction process by running strings from the various seating sections to the centre stage, and then adjusting the seating partitions so that the strings were

straight and unhindered.[14] The significance of this technique lies in the fact that the audience's attention was now clearly expected to follow the line of those strings, namely onto the stage rather than into the auditorium. The most important and popular internal reform in the 1878 reconstruction was the installation of gas-lit chandeliers. The reliance of Edo theatres on natural light meant they had performed only during daylight hours, but gas lighting enabled Kan'ya to host spectacular evening performances.[15]

What were the implications of these latest reforms? Choice of geographical location was now no longer an issue for the theatre, for the move of 1872 had established it in a convenient location close to the capital's modernising and westernising forces. This area had become even more synonymous with the *bunmei kaika* reform style after the reconstruction of the whole area in 1878 to include many fine Western-style buildings. The Meiji Era was a time of great visual symbols, and Kan'ya's addition of gas lighting and his efforts to modify the theatre's exterior style and limit both its traditional decorative features and external activities can all be regarded as attempts to ensure his theatre remained a visual symbol of the new age. However, although the building appeared radically modern to the Tokyo public of 1878, he did not transgress the architectural norms, preferring to refine the conventional form rather than introduce alien designs based on foreign or non-Kabuki styles.

The additional fire precautions introduced by Kan'ya illustrate his continued responsible attitude towards the theatre's safety. His efforts proved remarkably successful, as the Shintomi-za building survived with only slight modifications until it was destroyed in the Kantô Earthquake of 1923. Its longevity, which was

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[14] This innovation was called the 'Amida' after the paintings of Amida Buddha with strings attached that were used as devotional pictures in the Jôdo Pureland Sect.

[15] It is commonly assumed that the Shintomi-za was the first theatre to use gas lighting, and the first to perform at night. However, through his thorough investigation of Meiji newspapers in Yokohama and Tokyo, Kobitsu Matsuo has shown conclusively that several minor theatres in Yokohama that had staged gas-lit evening performances before 1878. Thus we can say that significance of the Shintomi-za's innovations was as Tokyo's first major Kabuki theatre to offer these attractions, and as the first theatre to receive widespread recognition for these modifications. Kobitsu Matsuo, Nihon Shingeki Rinen-shi, Hakusui-sha, Tokyo, 1988, Vol. 1: 'Meiji Zenki-hen: Meiji no Engeki Kairyô Undô to sono Rinen' pp 106-108.

unparalleled among Meiji Tokyo theatres, secured it a special fondness with the Tokyo public. Certain reforms, like the simplification of the *kanban*, the austerity of the external design and the abolition of the balcony's internal roof, may resemble economising measures on the part of the management. However, I would argue that they were stimulated more by a desire to enhance the theatre-going experience and standardise its management. Where necessary, investments were made to install new design features and facilities that would improve the theatre's services.

3.3 Impact on audiences

Kan'ya continued to focus on enhancing the audience's appreciation of the play in comfort, through modifications such as: improved access to *doma* pit seats, better toilets, brighter lighting, fewer distractions and improved ventilation. This latter factor was vital if Kan'ya were to succeed in attracting upper class spectators who were less tolerant of the discomfort of the heat of midsummer performances and the smells of food and tobacco consumed in the auditorium. Alterations aimed at improving comfort and service can be regarded as proof of Kan'ya's increased efforts to impress upon Tokyo's elite the potential of his theatre as a venue for edified entertainment. The audience make-up of the Morita-za had already been altered by the loss of many of its boisterous *renjû* fan clubs, and this increase in newcomers at the Shintomi-za stimulated a weakening of the bonds within the integral community of *chônin* connoisseurs.

We can see that the rituals of entrance were further limited and localised by the tightening of the boundary between theatre and street, and the further reduction of the preparatory dealings with teahouses and attendants before entering the auditorium. The simplification and standardisation of this procedure made it less personal and introduced a more commercial and business-like feel. Likewise a number of measures continued the segregation of stage and auditorium as started in 1872. These included the removal of the last of the spectators from the acting areas, the placing of most action behind the psuedo-proscenium arch and the provision of separate spectator gangways in the pit. The enhanced view of the

stage, the abolition of much internal decoration and the application of the 'Amida' construction process can all be regarded as having stimulated a move towards the creation of a unanimity of focus on the stage. This was a clear change from the traditional multi-focus form. Furthermore, with the flexibility of performance times facilitated by the gas lighting, the theatre could now provide shorter evening performances closer to the European model where the norm for a shorter high-tension concentrated attention span that was much more focused on the stage than on fellow spectators.

Certain aspects of the 1878 reconstruction could be interpreted as evidence of Kan'ya's desire to redesign the theatre along Western lines. The theatre's gas lamps, simple façade and lack of internal roof over the balcony *sajiki* clearly increased the Kabuki theatre's resemblance to a European opera house. One can also detect a Western influence in the general aim for comfort, refinement, a focusing of attention, unhindered sightlines and the desire to ensure the audience were treated well but disturbed little. These concepts were new to the Japanese theatre-going ethos until 1872, but they had formed the mainstay of Kan'ya's reforms by 1878, when he made use of them in his conscious effort to distil the dramatic elements from Kabuki's conventional all-inclusive performance experience. Although we can assume that Kan'ya was by now aware of some aspects of Western theatre culture, theories of overseas influence must remain speculative as there is no documentation to prove which aspects of his reforms were based intentionally on accounts of the West. I would therefore argue that the modifications are best considered as an outgrowth of the characteristic architecture of the Kabuki theatre, and therefore only partly stimulated by vague knowledge of similar Western features.

The innovative design of the 1878 Shintomi-za and the high quality of its performances secured its position as the lead reform theatre of the 1870's and 80's. However, a number of financial and artistic mistakes later led to a decline in its economic viability, which weakened its ability to keep abreast of the changing artistic and architectural trends. Gradually other lesser theatres began to overtake

the Shintomi-za in various architectural and technological matters, but none could offer a serious challenge to Kan'ya until the 1890's. In August 1897 Morita Kan'ya XII died aged 52, leaving behind tremendous debts. During the last five years of his life his theatre had become a somewhat dilapidated venue for lesser Kabuki by young inexperienced actors, and it continued as a second-rate theatre until its destruction in the 1923 earthquake. The theatre that took over from the Shintomi-za as Tokyo's leading Kabuki venue was the Kabuki-za, constructed in 1889. Its external design shows a radical departure from the traditional Kabuki style towards a Western opera-house form. The interior was much larger than before, with the proximity between actor and audience finally broken by the construction of a third floor gallery. As yet there was still no replacement of the *masu* floor seating: this came later in 1911 with the construction of the Imperial Theatre.

The architecture and atmosphere of today's Tokyo Kabuki-za, built in 1951, differ considerably from the Edo theatre interior mentioned at the start of this discussion. The majority of seats are Western chairs, and although some people do eat in their seats, there are no distractions from food vendors. The community spirit has been replaced to some extent by an audience of individuals who concentrate on the stage during performances and on each other and their refreshments during the intervals. There is still some traditional audience participation, but in most productions this is limited to a dwindling number of elderly fans, mostly male, who call out the actors' *yagô* acting names at moments of high dramatic tension. However, some conventions have been retained: the auditorium is fully lit for all but the most modern plays, one *hanamichi* is still used and there are some *tatami* matted *sajiki* boxes facing into the auditorium.

Conclusion

The years when Morita Kan'ya was experimenting with theatre designs were a time of great social flux, and some of the pressures and influences characteristic of the era both impacted on and were reflected in his architectural reform programme. Several designs pioneered at the Shintomi-za initiated developmental

processes which were continued by the next generation of progressive theatre designers. These created today's modified Kabuki theatres, which retain only a smaller portion of Kabuki's conventional architectural features. Kan'ya's design reforms lessened the intimacy between actor and audience and reduced the ritual elements of the performance. The audience's attention narrowed from multi-focus to single focus, and interest in the action on stage shifted from selective inattention to shorter periods of focused attention. Meanwhile the building took on some aspects typical of a Western-style proscenium theatre, and the conventional wide undefined performance area evolved into one with controlled defined boundaries of compartmentalised space.

We can conclude that the architectural reforms at the Morita-za and Shintomi-za were primary factors in determining the changes in the audience's experience of Kabuki performances in the early Meiji Era. To some extent one can say that Kabuki's traditional community audience has come to resemble what Schechner classifies as an accidental audience type, where spectators participate less in the performance and exhibit a more impersonal and impartial interest in the drama. The concept of the 'accidental audience' is useful as a contrast to the integral audience of more ritual-based events, but I apply the term to Kabuki with some reluctance. Even today's Kabuki audiences are not truly 'accidental' in the Western sense, as applied to modern Western proscenium theatres, for many Kabuki fans still attend as part of *dantai* organised groups, wealthy patrons can once again visit the backstage area, and spectators still eat in their seats and show only minimal interest in the action on stage until the main actor's entrance. Theatre architecture still shapes the dynamics of the Kabuki audience, and many of the differences between today's experience and that of an Edo audience can be traced back to changes initiated by Morita Kan'ya at the Shintomi-za.

Glossary of Japanese terms

amida	the method of ensuring good sightlines from all areas of the auditorium developed at the Shintomi-za
bakufu	the Edo Era military government and feudal power structure presided over by the Shogun
bunmei kaika	'civilisation and enlightenment', buzzwords and statements of aspiration for the reform movements of the early Meiji Era
chônin	the merchant and artisan urban masses of the Edo Era
dekata	theatre attendants / ushers who conducted clients to and from their seats in theatre and served them food and drink from neighbouring teahouses
doma	the pit area on the ground floor of the auditorium which was divided into *masu* individual boxed seating areas
dozô-tsukuri	'storehouse construction', the two-storey wooden structure with plastered external walls and a fully tiled roof typical of Saruwaka-machi Kabuki theatres
hanamichi	the raised walkway joining the west side of the stage to the back of the auditorium, along which major actors make entrances and exits. It is the most characteristic element of the Kabuki stage and an integral part of the acting area
hiradoma	'level pit area', the central ground floor area of the auditorium, a term used to differentiate it from the two rows of raised *takadoma* at the east and west edges of the *doma*
kanban	billboard posters displayed outside the theatre to advertise the plays and actors featured there
kappa	low-ranking actors who performed sketches of the day's plays to attract passers-by, located on raised platforms at the entrances to the theatre
masu	boxed partitions in the *doma* pit, in which small groups of spectators sat on cushions laid over the coarse matting
okuri	the flamboyantly dressed escorts who accompanied high-ranking actors to clear a way for them through the crowds in Saruwaka-machi
renjû	boisterous organised fan clubs that supported individual actors or whole theatres with hand-clapping sequences, songs and presents of decorative gifts
sajiki	the most expensive raised gallery and balcony seating areas in the Kabuki auditorium, which were screened off from the *doma* area until the late Edo Era

shin-takadoma	'new raised pit area' introduced into the Shintomi-za in 1878 as the highest elevated tier of *masu* seating located along the far west and east edges of the doma parallel to the two *hanamichi*
takadoma	'raised pit area' two rows of raised *masu* seating running parallel to the *hanamichi*, located at the far east and west edges of the ground floor *doma* seating area
tsukebutai	the forestage, the main acting area that protruded into the auditorium
yagura	the decorated drum tower on the roof of a traditional Edo Era Kabuki theatre, standing as a symbol of its performance rights and housing objects thought to ward off evil
yoshino	a cheaply priced gallery seating section located on and behind the stage on the west side

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