

JAPANESE DRAMA

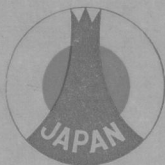
(SECOND EDITION)



TOKYO
MARUZEN COMPANY LTD.
1936

JAPANESE DRAMA

(SECOND EDITION)



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1936

JAPANESE DRAMA

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EDITORIAL NOTE

It is a common desire among tourists to learn something of the culture of the countries they visit, as well as to see their beautiful scenery. To see is naturally easier than to learn, but flying visits merely for sightseeing furnish neither the time nor opportunity for more than a passing acquaintance with the culture of any foreign people. This is specially true of Japan and her people.

The Board of Tourist Industry recognizes both the obligation and the difficulty of providing foreign tourists with accurate information regarding the various phases of Japan's culture. It is, therefore, endeavouring to meet this obligation, as far as possible, by publishing this series of brochures.

The present series will, when completed, consist of more than a hundred volumes, each dealing with a different subject, but all co-ordinated. By studying the entire series, the foreign student of Japan will gain an adequate knowledge of the unique culture that has evolved in this country through the ages.

For those who wish to follow up these studies with a closer investigation of more erudite works, we append bibliographies, which we can recommend as authoritative guides for study.

Board of Tourist Industry,
Japanese Government Railways

FOREWORD

The original of this brochure was prepared by the National Committee of Intellectual Co-operation of the International Association of Japan. In order that its precious record might not be lost to the world, a request was made to have it translated into English and published as a volume of the Tourist Library. In the course of publication it was felt that some revisions would be advisable, and these were therefore made. The Theatre Guide and Bibliography were also added.

We are indebted to Mr. Yoshio Yoshikawa for the revised original, and to Professors I. Matsuhara and E. T. Iglehart of Aoyama Gakuin for the translation. We must express our special gratitude to the translators for having duplicated their labours, and to Mr. A. F. Thomas for his general supervision.

Board of Tourist Industry

April, 1935

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Mask used in Gigaku

1. EARLIEST PERIOD OF THE JAPANESE DRAMA

The origin of the Japanese drama is said to have been the sacred dance which was performed before the heavenly cave, in which the great Ancestral Goddess had hid Herself, long ago, in the mythological age of the gods. In this respect, finding its origin in the ceremonies performed before the gods, Japanese drama may be said to resemble the Greek drama.

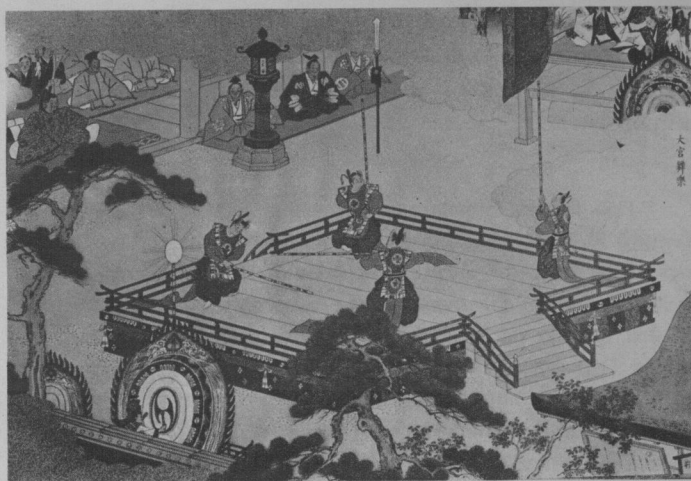
Gigaku. Later on, during the reign of the Empress Suiko, about 612 A.D., a naturalized citizen named Mimashi introduced a musical dance from South



Masks, costumes and musical instruments used in Bugaku

China. This was greatly encouraged by Prince Shōtoku, the Prince Regent of that time, a man of profound wisdom and deep faith. It was through him that this dance came to be conducted as part of the religious ceremonies of Buddhism. This form was called Gigaku. The masks used in this dance were artistically well advanced, and may still be seen, preserved in the Shōsōin* at Nara. It would be an interesting study to compare these masks with those of early Greece.

Bugaku. This form appeared a little later than the Gigaku, though still in the period of Prince Shōtoku. Bugaku superseded the Gigaku, and achieved its highest development in the Heian Period, about 850 A.D. Of course, during these long years there



Old picture representing Bugaku

were various improvements and new creations undertaken, similar to these original dramatic forms. This Bugaku had two forms, the left and the right. The left form reflected the traditions of the Chinese and Indian dance; the right reflected the traditions of Korea.

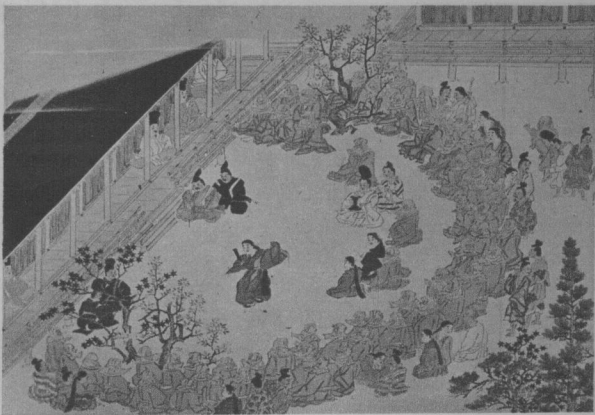
In general these may be described as being scenes from ancient tales. They may be termed the silent drama. In some cases masks were used, in others not. There were regular locations for the stage, set in the open air. The drama experienced varying fortunes during these years, but holds a unique position in the world drama as having survived from that early day. Its character is preserved today in the performance given by the Music Department of the Imperial Household.

Sangaku. This form, like the two mentioned above, arose from the popular art introduced from China, and for the most part it consisted of physical feats and humorous acts.

* This famous storehouse was built in the eighth year of Tempyō Shōhō (756 A. D.) for the purpose of holding the belongings of the Emperor Shōmu, and presented to the Nara Daibutsu as an offering for the repose of the Emperor's soul. Later, it was handed over to the Imperial Household, and it is now managed by the Department of the Imperial Household. The building has been preserved unchanged until this day. Every autumn the special airing of these precious relics is conducted, at which only those foreigners specially qualified are allowed to attend.



Ancient Greek comedians with mask.* Found on ancient Greek pitchers. Compare these masks with the mask of ancient Japan (vide P. 11)

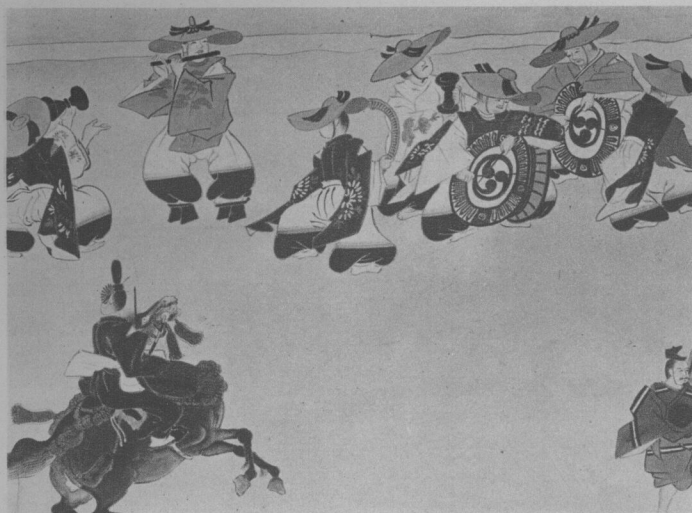


Children's dance called "Chigo Ennen-no-Mai"

II. FINAL FORM OF THE ANCIENT DRAMA

The time was approaching for our national drama, through imitation and assimilation of foreign drama, to achieve its final form. From the Heian Period (about 780 A.D.), the dramatic form became clarified, and various popular plays made their contribution to its basic forms. The chief among these are :

Ennen-no-Mai. This is the general name for the various performances presented by the priests after the religious ceremonies. They consisted of dances, songs, dialogues, and some of even a more dramatic form.



Picture representing Dengaku

Dengaku. By this is meant the music of the country-side. The song and dance performed by the people in ancient times appropriated, in some measure, the Gigaku and Sangaku, and gave them definite form.

Sarugaku. What had formerly been called Sangaku gradually came to be called Sarugaku, its nature being almost the same as that of the Dengaku. The only difference was that in Dengaku the performers were priests, whereas the performers in Sarugaku were other officers connected with the Shintō shrine. This Sarugaku, as well as the Dengaku, took over the dramatic elements of Shirabyōshi and Kuse-mai, and made remarkable progress, such as we can see in the Noh drama * of today. That is, it purified itself



Noh play—a scene from “Yuya”

by discarding all irrelevancies and retaining its intrinsic elements. This was in the Muromachi Period, about the year 1370, and was largely due to the efforts of the father and son, Kwan-Ami and Se-Ami. What is still more remarkable, these men combined in one the dramatist, the director and the actor. Se-Ami's Dramatic Essay may well be compared to the *Ars Poetica* of Aristotle. The comedy which is performed between the acts of the Noh drama is called *Kyōgen*. This also took on its form during this period. This Noh and *Kyōgen* became the progenitor of all forms of the later Japanese drama. It is also a well-known fact that their influence may be seen in the dramatic writings of Yeats, the Irish poet.

All the dramatic forms that led up to the above-



Kyōgen, sister performance of the Noh, is One-act Comic Interlude

mentioned Noh and Kyōgen were developed among the noble or the samurai classes ; but, on the contrary, it was the Kabuki or Shibai, the modern Japanese drama, that had its place among the common people. Let us remind ourselves that in contrast to the foreign drama, which developed under the patronage of rulers and nobility, our Japanese drama had to meet the persecution of the upper classes, reaching its highest development through the enthusiastic endorsement of the common people.

* See "Japanese Noh Plays," Volume 2 in Tourist Library.