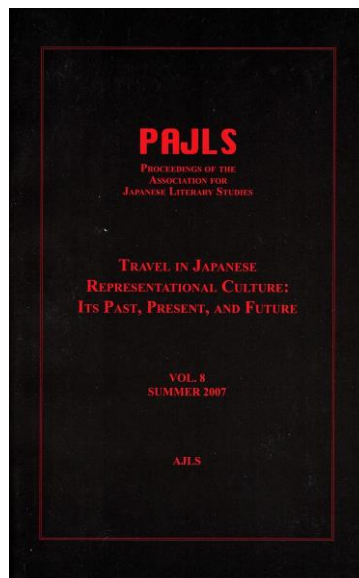


“Kabuki Encounters the West: Iwakura Embassy
and *Hyōryū kitan Seiyō kabuki*”

Tsutsumi Harue

*Proceedings of the Association for Japanese
Literary Studies* 8 (2007): 222–230.



PAJLS 8:
*Travel in Japanese Representational Culture: Its Past,
Present, and Future.*
Ed. Eiji Sekine.

**KABUKI ENCOUNTERS THE WEST: IWAKURA EMBASSY AND
*HYÖRYŪ KITAN SEIYŌ KABUKI***

Harue Tsutsumi

Travel abroad often results in the traveler's discovery of not only a new world but also a new perspective to life and reality. This paper will analyze the diplomatic mission headed by Iwakura Tomomi (1825–1883) in relation to a journey depicted in a new “western” kabuki.

From 1871 until 1873, Iwakura's delegation toured the United States and Europe during which they learned much about western civilization including opera, theater and other arts. Eight years later, *Hyōryū kitan Seiō kabuki* [The Wanderer's Strange Story: a Western Kabuki], a kabuki play written by Kawatake Mokuami (1816–1893) and produced by Morita Kan'ya XII (1846–1897), the most progressive theater manager in the Meiji period, describes the progress of a group of Japanese visiting the United States and Europe. A clear parallel can be discerned between the actual journey of the diplomats and politicians and the adventurous expedition portrayed in the fictional drama. It is very likely that the person responsible for the strong resemblance between the two journeys was Fukuchi Ōchi (1841–1906), one of the “first secretaries” of the embassy who became a prominent journalist in 1874, also known as an “advisor” for Kan'ya and Mokuami. I argue that this particular kabuki production reflects not only Ōchi's personal experiences abroad as a member of the Iwakura Embassy, but also his practical proposals, as a journalist, on how to westernize Japan.

In 1871, the Japanese government dispatched the Iwakura embassy to the west in order to engage in preliminary negotiations aimed at revising the unequal treaties, and also to study various western institutions. Headed by Minister of the Right Iwakura and including important members of the Meiji government such as Ōkubo Toshimichi (1830–1878), Kido Takayoshi (1833–1877), and Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909), the embassy was composed of more than one hundred government officials, as well as a large number of students, including the first five women to study abroad. Since the mission failed in its objective to persuade western nations to revise the unequal treaties, the leaders who had participated in the journey abroad realized the need to begin a domestic reform program that might, by proving to the world that Japan was truly westernized and civilized, eventually help place Japan on the even international footing they desired.

The Iwakura mission set sail from Yokohama in December, 1871, arriving in San Francisco in January, 1872. The embassy traveled across the United States by train to Washington, D.C. When their attempt to revise the treaty with the American government failed, the embassy sailed to Europe. After visiting England, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Russia, Denmark, Sweden, Italy, Austria, and Switzerland, the mission headed for home, returning to Japan in September, 1873. The official journal of the mission, *Tokumei zenken taishi Beiō kairan jikki* [A Record of a True Account of the Ambassador Extraordinary & Plenipotentiary's Journey of Observation Through the United States of America and Europe], compiled by historian Kume Kunitake (1839–1931), member of the embassy, was published in 1878.

In September, 1879, *Hyōryū kitan Seiyō kabuki* was produced by Morita Kan'ya, who held the hereditary position of the owner-manager of the Shintomi-za, successor of one of the three licensed theaters in Edo. The play was staged by kabuki actors, including the greatest kabuki actor of the time, Ichikawa Danjurō IX (1838–1903). However, the play is very unconventional for the kabuki theater because it deals with the adventures of Japanese fishermen who travel around the United States, England and France. Unfortunately, the text of the play has been lost; but criticism and synopses were published in three theatrical magazines: *Kabuki shinpō* (“*sujigaki*” *Kabuki shinpō*, vols. 29–34), *Shibai shinpō* (“*Shintomi-za kyōgen ryakuhyō narabini sujigaki*” *Shibai shinpō*, vols. 44–46), and *Haiyū hyōbanki* (Norizuki 310–27). There are also quite a few illustrations of the play, painted by Kawanabe Kyōsai (1831–1889), Adachi Ginkō and other artists (Kokuritsu gekijō chōsa yōseibu shiryō ka 8: 22–23; Nihon āto sentā 41; Clark 130–35).

Many elements of *Hyōryū kitan* are strongly reminiscent of scenes, events, and people involved with the journey of the Iwakura mission. The most direct of these apparent connections involves the play's plot. The route followed by the main characters, passing through the United States, on to England and France, coincides with the first half of the embassy's course. The play presents a scene in which a group of Indians attack a train.¹ During their visit to the United States, the members of the Iwakura mission encountered Indians several times and showed a strong interest in them (Kume 1: 131–32; Kido 145). Regarding the play's characters,

¹ Although “Indian” is presently considered discriminatory, I have chosen to retain it in this paper because it was the term commonly used in the nineteenth century.

Wakaba, San Francisco Consul General Akitsu Takeshi's sister-in-law and is planning to enter a women's college in New York, bears a resemblance to the five female students who accompanied the mission in order to study in the United States, most particularly Yamakawa Sutematsu and Nagai Shigeko who eventually graduated from Vassar College. In San Francisco, the members of the Iwakura mission also encountered a Japanese "wanderer" brought to the United States after being shipwrecked (Gaimushō 5: 24).

As previously mentioned, the causal link between the Iwakura Embassy and *Hyōryū kitan* was Fukuchi Ōchi. Ōchi studied Dutch, and later, English, serving the Tokugawa government. He visited Europe twice as a member of two different missions sent by the Tokugawa regime. Later, he served the Meiji government as a junior officer in the Finance Ministry [Ōkurashō]. He visited the United States as a member of a small mission and then participated as a member of the Iwakura mission to United States and Europe. After resigning from government in 1874, Ōchi worked as a journalist, serving as chief editor and president of a major newspaper, the *Tokyō Nichinichi shinbun* [Tokyo Daily News].

Although Kan'ya only acknowledged that a scholar recently returned from abroad [*yōkō gaeri no gakusha*] helped him out in the production of the play, it is quite likely that it was Ōchi who was involved in the production (Kawatake 247). Fourteen months before the production of *Hyōryū kitan*, Shintomi-za, destroyed by fire, was reopened with a "western" inauguration ceremony in which actors in frock coats stood on stage making western-style speeches. It was Ōchi who wrote the speech for Ichikawa Danjurō IV (245). Ōchi's name also appeared as "advisor" for two kabuki plays with a strong western element written by Mokuami and produced at the Shintomi-za in 1879. The name of a minor character and a prop also suggests the play's relationship with Ōchi. The minor character, student Suematsu Noboru, is obviously modeled after Suematsu Kenchō (Norizumi), a former *Tokyō Nichinichi shinbun* newspaperman who was studying at Cambridge at the time of the production. The play also used a copy of the newspaper as a stage prop.

Ōchi's collaboration on *Hyōryū kitan* can be seen in the promotion of ideas on how to westernize Japan. First, the process of westernization was presented in the central character, Shimizu no Mihozō. There was a clear contrast between the "non-westernized" character Mihozō and the "westernized" Consul General Akitsu. The names of the characters themselves suggest their differing relationships, traditional versus westernized. Mihozō's name—Shimizu, a town in Shizuoka, and

Mihozō, connoting the famous pine trees of Shizuoka—suggests that he is an old-fashioned Japanese who, like those who lived under the Tokugawa feudal system, only associates himself with his local community. Although the old domains were abolished in 1871, Mihozō is still unfamiliar with the concept of the unified nation, Japan. In contrast, Akitsu's family name, as well as his wife's first name, Shikishima, suggests archaic descriptive terms referring to the "islands of Japan," *Akitsu-shima* and *Shikishima*. Akitsu is a new kind of Japanese who belongs primarily to his unified nation. In early Meiji, the very idea that a person belonged above all to his country, an entity that subsumed its many local domains, was itself regarded as a notion imported from the west. His confident self-identification as Japanese marks Akitsu as westernized, and thus as an international figure who can stand on an equal footing with foreigners.

The difference between the ways the two characters dress and behave also illustrates their different degrees of adjustment to the west. Among Kyōsai's illustrations for *Seiyō dōchū hizakurige* [Shank's Mare in the West] written by Kanagaki Robun and Fusao Kan, there is a visual chart of three stages of enlightenment. According to the chart, a samurai carrying a sword is a "totally unenlightened" barbarian. A man in Japanese kimono, wearing a western cap and shoes and carrying a western umbrella represents a "partly enlightened" person. A man with a moustache and a beard, wearing a flock coat and a silk hat and carrying a cane, is an "enlightened man" (Yamaguchi 135). Thus in Act I, Mihozō, wearing a kimono over his western-style underwear, is clearly being depicted as a "partly or a slightly enlightened" person ("*sujigaki*" *Kabuki shinpō*, vol. 29). Even in Act II, where we see him in the United States wearing western-style clothes, Mihozō still remains a "partly enlightened" man. Nineteen-year-old New Jersey born Clara Whitney (1861–1936), who accompanied her father on his visit to Tokyo in 1875 and saw the production, described that the character Mihozō, taken to the Japanese consulate in his "ill-fitting uncomfortable clothes" and "tight boots, which caused in him intolerable pain," still behaves as if he were in Japan as he "dropped on all fours before the consul and could not be persuaded to sit on a chair for some time" (Whitney 284).

In contrast, Whitney describes Akitsu as a "dignified personage" (284). In Kyōsai's illustration of Akitsu and Shikishima in front of the magnificent Paris Opéra lit by bright gaslights, Akitsu looks exactly like the "enlightened" man in Kyōsai's chart (Clark 131). According to Timothy Clark, Akitsu and his wife in front of the Opéra were "a thoroughly international Japanese couple, remarkable in their poise and

self-confidence.” It is likely that in order to fully represent an ideal westernized gentleman, Akitsu needed to appear side by side with his beautiful and westernized wife.

The two types of the characters, the “unenlightened, non-westernized” and the “enlightened westernized,” represented the two types of men in 1879 Japan. Keeping in mind that the play was produced only eight years after the abolition of the Tokugawa system, it is easy to believe that most Japanese people were, like Mihozō, still attached more to their old domains than to their country. They did not know how to wear western-style clothes, or how to behave in western settings. In contrast, a limited number of elites, who had the opportunity to visit the west, learned how to dress and behave like westerners. In the early Meiji period, most of these new cosmopolitans were politicians, diplomats, or civil servants who were very likely to be former mission members. Akitsu, a diplomat, is indeed the image of the ideal early Meiji “westernized” Japanese man.

The last part of the play which takes place in Paris stages the reunion of all the important characters. In these scenes, the contrast between Mihozō and Akitsu has become less striking. By showing Akitsu and Wakaba standing beside Mihozō and Gozaemon, the drawing by Kyōsai suggests that they are in the same category, all “enlightened westernized” Japanese (Clark 132–5). The last scene of the play conveys the message that like Akitsu, Shikishima and Wakaba, Mihozō and Gozaemon have become enlightened and westernized Japanese.

Second, the play emphasized the importance of the advance of industry in nineteenth-century western civilization through the use of steamship, train, telegraph poles, and the Crystal Palace as important stage settings. These three major technological advances of the nineteenth century, as well as the Crystal Palace, a building made of glass in an iron framework clearly represented modern industrialized western civilization.

In the beginning of the Meiji era, it was this kind of western civilization that Japan frantically tried to import. The Meiji government began construction on a railway in 1870; a telegraph service began operation in 1874. In the 1870s, steamships, trains, and industrial expositions were novelties that constantly attracted the Japanese people’s attention. It is worth noting that even after he resigned from the government, Ōchi maintained a strong relationship with the government officials especially those from Chōshū, particularly with Itō Hirobumi. It was Itō, the first Minister of Public Affairs from 1873 until 1878, who actually promoted the industrialization of Japan, mainly by introducing

the railway system and telegraph. It is my belief that by presenting positive images of trains, steamships, and the telegraph on stage, Ōchi was trying to publicize former Minister of Public Affairs Itō's political achievements in industrializing Japan.

Third, *Hyōryū kitan* established in the audience's mind an image of foreigners as friendly, civilized and helpful. By doing so, Ōchi was trying to fulfill the specific objective of promoting the idea of opening the country to the foreigners [*naichi zakkyo*]. Indeed, all the foreigners in the play are extremely friendly and helpful. Upon their reunion in Paris, after long journeys around the world, Mihozō and his father, Gozaemon state in unison, "Nobody is more friendly than the foreigners [*gaikoku no katagata hodo shitashimi no fukai mono wa nai*]" ("*sujigaki*" *Kabuki shinpō*, vol. 34; "*Shintomi-za kyōgen ryakuhyō narabini sujigaki*" *Shibai shinpō*, vol. 46). In kabuki plays written by Mokuami, the central characters are often surrounded by dangerous situations in order to make the plot eventful enough to sustain the interest of the audience. In *Hyōryū kitan*, too, Mokuami did his best to present as many complications as possible—but without casting any westerner in the role of villain. This must have been an arduous task, as the play takes place entirely in foreign countries. Therefore, Mokuami used a natural disaster, the mental state of the central characters, and an attack by racial minorities who were not considered "civilized," and therefore not representative of the west, as the means of plot complication.

The question of opening Japan to foreigners was one of the most important and emotional issues connected with the revision of the unequal treaties. After the 1858 treaties opened Japan, foreigners were allowed to reside in their own enclaves. Within these enclaves, where entrance by Japanese and exit by foreigners were strictly controlled, foreign residents enjoyed extraterritoriality rights. Ōchi's interest in opening the country to foreigners had its roots in his experience abroad as a member of the Iwakura mission. While the members were staying in Salt Lake City, Itō wrote a memorial about the object of the mission and gave it to the senior members of the mission (Shibahara et al. 31). In this memorial, Itō mentioned the idea of opening up Japan to foreigners, suggesting a gradual abolishment of extraterritoriality while making some foreigners eligible to serve on juries. Because Ōchi became close to Itō while they were traveling abroad, it is very likely that Ōchi shared Itō's opinion. Later Ōchi was sent straight from France to Egypt to study the systems of "mixed court," the legal system of hiring foreign judges, which allowed resident foreigners to be tried by a mixed court made up of judges from both host and foreign countries. This system was

introduced in Egypt in order to abolish extraterritoriality (Shibahara et al. 30; Huffman 71). Ōchi subsequently submitted a report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, proposing a treaty under which Japan might set up a similar system. However, Foreign Minister Terajima Munenori from Satsuma was against the idea of opening the country, and in favor of prohibiting foreigners from traveling inside Japan (Shibahara et al. 30). In 1879, mixed residence was still a point of dispute because, when Terajima was negotiating for treaty revision with western countries between 1875 and 1879, he focused on tariff autonomy and omitted the issue of extraterritoriality. Clearly, Ōchi shared Itō's opinion that Japan must abolish extraterritoriality even at the cost of opening the country to foreigners. An editorial of *Tokyō Nichinichi shinbun*, very likely written by Ōchi, attacked Terajima's policy, although it managed to do so without mentioning the issue of mixed residence (Shinbun shūsei Meiji hennen shi hensann kai 3: 430). Nevertheless, many Japanese people were against mixed residence. For this reason, it was very likely that Ōchi felt the need to encourage his fellow countrymen to believe that foreigners were nice and helpful so that they would feel safe enough to open Japan to foreigners.

Finally, by producing “real” western operettas as plays within the play, performed in the scene inside the Opéra in Paris, Ōchi suggests that Japan was westernized enough so that it was capable of producing western operas (operettas and an opera buffa) as well as westernized kabuki. In *Places of Performance*, Marvin Carlson states that by the late nineteenth century “the opera house had become an obligatory monument for any city anywhere in the world wishing to establish its European-oriented cultural credentials” (83). He also states that “The new moneyed classes of the nineteenth century appropriated the opera as their central example of high art, and the monumental opera house became the architectural symbol of nineteenth-century high bourgeois culture” (81). The members of Iwakura Embassy were invited to opera productions at least four times—in Washington, Brussels and Berlin—and were impressed by the importance of opera in western countries (Tsutsumi 92–114). It is likely that Ōchi's knowledge of the symbolic nature of opera as high art representing the cultural standards of the country encouraged Kan'ya to invite a touring opera company to stage these plays within *Hyōryū kitan*.

Unfortunately, this ambitious production was a commercial disaster. Most of the audience, who had never witnessed any theater other than traditional kabuki, could not appreciate the acting of real “western” actors and actresses introducing western theatrical conventions that were

completely different from those of kabuki. When a soprano began singing in high notes, the audience burst into laughter (Whitney 277). Kan'ya, who lost a huge amount of money because of this production, lost an interest in producing “western” kabuki. Ōchi's intimate relationship with Kan'ya and his company also came to an end.

Hyōryū kitan was a propaganda play written under the influence of journalist Fukuchi Ōchi who was trying to support the Meiji government leaders, especially those of Chōshū background. It is likely that Ōchi, as well as Kan'ya were trying to suggest that “their Shintomi-za was the center of modern culture in the new Tokyo, equivalent to the Paris Opéra” (Clark 132). However, western objects, western plays with western characters, and even real westerners performing in the theater would never transform Shintomi-za into the Opéra. Ironically, the theatrical production that attempted to promote westernization revealed the discrepancy between the reality of Japan and the ideal image of a westernized Japan, or the Japan that was trying to imitate the image they held of the west. It is because, although the real journey of Iwakura Embassy helped to westernize its members and the fictional journey of *Hyōryū kitan* helped to westernize its character, the productions of western drama did not succeed to “westernize” Japanese kabuki audience.

WORKS CITED

- Carlson, Marvin A. *Places of Performance*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993.
- Clark, Timothy. *Demon of Painting: The Art of Kawanabe Kyōsai*. London: British Museum, 1993.
- Gaimushō Ed. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs]. *Nihon gaikō monjo* [Collected Diplomatic Documents of Japan] Vol. 5. of 73 vols. Tokyo: Nihon Kokusairengō kyōkai, c1949.
- Huffman, James L. *Politics of the Meiji Press: The Life of Fukuchi Gen'ichirō*. Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1980.
- Kabuki shinpō* [Kabuki news]. 1878–1879. (vols. 1–36)
- Kawatake Toshio. “‘*Hyōryū kitan Seiyō kabuki*’ kō [A Study of ‘*Hyōryū Kitan Seiyō Kabuki*’]”. *Nihon engekigakkai kiyō* 37. (1999): 231–280.
- Kido Takayoshi. *Kido Takayoshi nikki* [Diary of Kido Takayoshi]. Vol. 2. Tokyo, Nihon shiseki kyōkai, 1933.
- Kokuritsu gekijō chōsayōseibu shiryō ka Ed. *Shibai hanga to zuroku* [An Illustrated Catalogue of Theater Prints and Other Prints]. 10 vols. Tokyo: Nihon geijyutsu bunka shinkōkai, 1969–1998.

- Kume Kunitake. *Tokumei zenkentaishi Beiō kairan jikki* [A Record of a True Account of the Ambassador Extraordinary & Plenipotentiary's Journey of Observation Through the United States of America and Europe], ed., Tanaka Akira. 5 vols. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1977–1982.
- Nihon āto sentā Ed. *Kawanabe Kyōsai*. Tokyo: Shinchōsha, Norizuki Toshihiko. “Rokuniren ‘Haiyū hyōbanki’ 5 [Critical Booklet on Actors by Rokuniren, vol. 5]” *Kabuki: Kenkyū to hiyō* 5. (1990): 298–328.
- Shibahara Takuji, Ikai Takaaki and Ikeda Masahiro, Eds. *Taigaikan* [Foreign Views]. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1988.
- Shibai shinpō* [Theater News]. 1878–1879. (vols. 1–48)
- Shinbun shūsei Meiji hennen shi hensannkai Ed. *Shinbun shūsei Meiji hennen shi* [Chronicle of Meiji Through Newspaper Articles]. 15 vols. Tokyo: Zaisei keizai gakkai, 1934–1936.
- Tsutsumi Harue, “Kabuki Encounters the West: Morita Kan’ya’s Shintomi-za Productions, 1878–79” Dissertation. Indiana University, 2004.
- Whitney, Clara A. N. *Clara’s Diary: An American Girl in Meiji Japan*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1978.
- Yamaguchi Seiichi and Oikawa Shigeru. *Kawanabe Kyōsai giga shū* [The Caricatures by Kawanabe Kyōsai]. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1988.