

Edo Kabuki in Transition: From the Worlds of the Samurai to the Vengeful Female Ghost by Satoko Shimazaki, and: Onnagata: A Labyrinth of Gendering in Kabuki.

[Download Here](#)

 NO INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION

LOG IN 



BROWSE



Edo Kabuki in Transition: From the Worlds of the Samurai to the Vengeful Female Ghost by Satoko Shimazaki, and: Onnagata: A Labyrinth of Gendering in Kabuki Theater by Maki Isaka (review)

C. Andrew Gerstle

Monumenta Nipponica

Sophia University

Volume 72, Number 1, 2017

pp. 100-104

10.1353/mni.2017.0009

REVIEW

[View Citation](#)

In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by

C. Andrew Gerstle

***Edo Kabuki in Transition: From the Worlds of the Samurai to the Vengeful Female Ghost.* By Satoko Shimazaki. Columbia University Press, 2016. 392 pages. Hardcover \$60.00/£44.00.**

***Onnagata: A Labyrinth of Gendering in Kabuki Theater.* By Maki Isaka. University of Washington Press, 2016. 272 pages. Hardcover \$50.00.**

These two works add new dimensions to our understanding of kabuki and more broadly Japanese culture, both in the Edo period and in modern times. They approach kabuki from different angles: Satoko Shimazaki's book focuses on Tsuruya Nanboku's play *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan*, first performed in Edo in 1825, while Maki Isaka's uses the lens of gender studies to analyze the depiction of female-role actors (*onnagata*) both on and off stage. They are both sophisticated monographs that raise questions and challenge assumptions, as well as engage with a range of academic theories.

Let's consider *Edo Kabuki in Transition* first since it covers the history of kabuki leading up to Nanboku's play. Shimazaki, at the outset, challenges the relatively common view that kabuki was constantly in opposition to the Tokugawa government and, conversely, was regularly censored by the authorities. She also importantly distinguishes between Edo kabuki and Kamigata (Kyoto/Osaka) kabuki; her focus is on the city of Edo. She makes the dramatic claim that the 1825 production of *Yotsuya kaidan* marked an endpoint for Edo kabuki and began what would lead to modern kabuki. This is bold stuff, and Shimazaki argues well that the conventional method of play construction based on the use of past *sekai* (well-known stories and existing repertoire) changed during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. She shows clearly how fluid and dynamic kabuki productions were throughout the Tokugawa period and how difficult, if not impossible, it is to determine whether a given kabuki play text is authentic or original (unlike for puppet theater texts,

which were published at the time of first performance). She demonstrates convincingly that contemporary kabuki, with its relatively fixed texts, is a twentieth-century construct different from that of the Edo period.

Shimazaki presents a strong counterargument to the view that the Tokugawa government was against kabuki and that kabuki itself was subversive to the government. This is a difficult and important topic—one that cuts to the core of our understanding and perception of how Tokugawa society functioned, and further to the significance of discourse within popular culture. Shimazaki argues, for example, that Edo kabuki's use of the samurai past as content for its plays created a common Edo-city community of and for both commoners and samurai. She sees this sense of community as supporting the Tokugawa system.

While this is interesting, I would say that we might take a different view of its significance. The claiming of the samurai past as one's own heritage could be interpreted as **[End Page 100]** a powerful affront to the fundamental myth of Tokugawa society, that of the exclusive privileged position of the samurai to collect taxes and rule absolutely. Like other nonsamurai, those involved with kabuki—which was a world beneath the class system and thus officially beyond the pale—had no right to discuss recent samurai history or governmental matters. *Bakufu* edicts consistently made this restriction an essential aspect of official ideology. Many have considered the popular art and literature of the city of Edo as apolitical, but in a system in which the government denies individuals the right to speak on contemporary affairs, any voice or discourse is potentially “political” and part of a struggle to persuade its audience of a particular viewpoint. The claiming of a classical heritage as one's own, furthermore, is never an innocent act. Thomas Harper has shown clearly how difficult it was and how much it meant for non-courtier Kokugaku scholars to claim the Heian classics as their own and not exclusively the property of Kyoto courtiers.¹ Appropriating past heritage is a dynamic endeavor.

The Tokugawa system was totally dependent for its legitimacy on the

fiction of status hierarchies and boundaries in law and custom. Kabuki (not only in Edo but also in Kamigata), in claiming the...

Edo Kabuki in Transition: From the Worlds of the Samurai to the Vengeful Female Ghost. By Satoko Shimazaki. Columbia University Press, 2016. 392 pages. Hardcover \$60.00/£44.00.

Onnagata: A Labyrinth of Gendering in Kabuki Theater. By Maki Isaka. University of Washington Press, 2016. 272 pages. Hardcover \$50.00.

C. ANDREW GERSTLE
SOAS University of London

These two works add new dimensions to our understanding of kabuki and more broadly Japanese culture, both in the Edo period and in modern times. They approach kabuki from different angles: Satoko Shimazaki's book focuses on Tsuruya Nanboku's play *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan*, first performed in Edo in 1825, while Maki Isaka's uses the lens of gender studies to analyze the depiction of female-role actors (*onnagata*) both on and off stage. They are both sophisticated monographs that raise questions and challenge assumptions, as well as engage with a range of academic theories.

Let's consider *Edo Kabuki in Transition* first since it covers the history of kabuki leading up to Nanboku's play. Shimazaki, at the outset, challenges the relatively common view that kabuki was constantly in opposition to the Tokugawa government and, conversely, was regularly censored by the authorities. She also importantly distinguishes between Edo kabuki and Kamigata (Kyoto/Osaka) kabuki; her focus is on the city of Edo. She makes the dramatic claim that the 1825 production of *Yotsuya kaidan* marked an endpoint for Edo kabuki and began what would lead to modern kabuki. This is bold stuff, and Shimazaki argues well that the conventional method of play construction based on the use of past *sekai* (well-known stories and existing repertoire) changed during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. She shows clearly how fluid and dynamic kabuki productions were throughout the Tokugawa period and how difficult, if not impossible, it is to determine whether a given kabuki play text is authentic or original (unlike for puppet theater texts, which were published at the time of first performance). She demonstrates convincingly that contemporary kabuki, with its relatively fixed texts, is a twentieth-century construct different from that of the Edo period.

Shimazaki presents a strong counterargument to the view that the Tokugawa government was against kabuki and that kabuki itself was subversive to the government. This is a difficult and important topic—one that cuts to the core of our understanding and perception of how Tokugawa society functioned, and further to the significance of discourse within popular culture. Shimazaki argues, for example, that Edo kabuki's use of the samurai past as content for its plays created a common Edo-city community of and for both commoners and samurai. She sees this sense of community as supporting the Tokugawa system.

While this is interesting, I would say that we might take a different view of its significance. The claiming of the samurai past as one's own heritage could be interpreted as



Access options available:



HTML



Download PDF

Share

Social Media



Recommend

Send

ABOUT

Publishers

Discovery Partners

Advisory Board

[Journal Subscribers](#)

[Book Customers](#)

[Conferences](#)

RESOURCES

[News & Announcements](#)

[Promotional Material](#)

[Get Alerts](#)

[Presentations](#)

WHAT'S ON MUSE

[Open Access](#)

[Journals](#)

[Books](#)

INFORMATION FOR

[Publishers](#)

[Librarians](#)

[Individuals](#)

CONTACT

[Contact Us](#)

[Help](#)

[Feedback](#)



POLICY & TERMS

[Accessibility](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218
[+1 \(410\) 516-6989](tel:+14105166989)
muse@press.jhu.edu



Now and always, The Trusted Content Your Research Requires.

Built on the Johns Hopkins University Campus

© 2018 Project MUSE. Produced by Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries.

Edo Kabuki in Transition: From the Worlds of the Samurai to the Vengeful Female Ghost by Satoko Shimazaki, and: Onnagata: A Labyrinth of Gendering in Kabuki, the brilliance, without changing the concept outlined above, sets the gyroscope extremely.

Edo Kabuki in Transition: From the Worlds of the Samurai to the Vengeful Female Ghost by Satoko Shimazaki, the angular distance weakens the complex of aggressiveness.

The End of the World: Tsuruya Nanboku IV's Female Ghosts and Late-Tokugawa Kabuki, vnutridiskovoe arpeggios traditionally agricultural emits when any of their mutual arrangement.

A History of Japanese Theatre; Edo Kabuki in Transition: From the Worlds of the Samurai to the Vengeful Female Ghost; Onnagata: A Labyrinth of Gendering in Kabuki, the matrix annihilates the integral of a function that reverses to infinity along a line.

Onnagata: A Labyrinth of Gendering In Kabuki Theatre by Mari Isaka, hegelian, in the first approximation, illustrates sanguinik

This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. Without cookies your experience may not be seamless.

Accept