

Evil Women of the Lower Classes A Study of Tsuruya Nanboku's Use of Chinese Novels in the Kabuki Play *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri*

Yamashita Noriko

National Institute of Japanese Literature, Tōkyō, Japan

Abstract The kabuki play *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri* was written by kabuki playwright Tsuruya Nanboku IV and first performed at the Morita za theatre in Edo (Tōkyō) in 1813. The plot of the play includes a fraud scene with a corpse, which is based on seventeenth-century Chinese popular novel *Jingu qiguan*. One of the features of *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri* is that it showcases the attempted fraud by a woman of the lower classes, Dote no Oroku, first performed by *onnagata* actor Iwai Hanshirō V. Oroku belongs to the kabuki type cast known as *akuba*, which realistically depicts the life of women of the lower classes. This type of role was first made popular by *onnagata* actor Iwai Hanshirō IV's performance in 1792, though lead actor Onoe Matsusuke I already performed evil female fraudsters as early as 1789. There is a possibility that the kabuki actors and playwrights were made aware of this particular female image in the Chinese novel by Dutch scholar and writer Morishima Chūryō. This paper discusses the social interactions between Tsuruya Nanboku, Onoe Matsusuke and Morishima Chūryō, and how Iwai Hanshirō V's enacting of Dote no Oroku was influenced by Hanshirō IV's and Matsusuke's evil old women.

Keywords Tsuruya Nanboku IV. Kabuki. Chinese novels. Morishima Chūryō.

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1 Introduction

It has been argued that Tsuruya Nanboku 鶴屋南北 (1755-1829) based his 1813 play *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri* お染久松色読販 (The Latest News of Osome and Hisamatsu's Love Affair) on the play *Daigashira kazumi no iromaku* 台頭霞彩幕 (Rising Mist and Coloured Curtains), written by Sakurada Jisuke II 桜田治助 (1768-1829) and others, performed in the first month the previous year at the Nakamura za theatre (Furuido in Furuido, Ichiko, Noma 1983, 491). Both plays feature a scheming head shop clerk, a vegetable selling farmer who gets involved in a fight, and an unconscious man's body being mistaken for a corpse.

The plots of these plays are based on the 29th episode of a seventeenth century Chinese popular novel (Ch. *huaben*, Jp. *wahon* 話本, *hakuwa shōsetsu* 白話小説) *Jingu qiguan* 今古奇觀 (Jp. *Kinko kikan*, *Mysterious Spectacles Today and in the Past*). This episode has been included in the Japanese translation of Chinese stories *Shōsetsu suigen* 小説粹言 (Novels with Elegant Words) by Confucian scholar and publisher Sawada Issai 沢田一斎 published in 1758, and the plotline was used in the *yomihon* 読本 (novels in eighteenth-nineteenth of Edo era) novel *Sekijō kaki negusa* 席上奇観垣根草 (Mysterious Spectacles at the Banquet - Grass by the Fence) by Sōkan Sanjin 草官山人 in 1770 and again by Kyokutei Bakin 曲亭馬琴 in his 1807 novel *Sono no yuki* 園の雪 (Snow in the Garden) so it was clearly a widely known plot device.

However, one of the novelty features of *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri* is that it showcases the attempted fraud by a woman of the lower classes, Dote no Oroku 土手のお六 (Oroku of the Riverbank), first performed by *onnagata* 女形 (female role specialist) actor Iwai Hanshirō 岩井半四郎 V. Oroku belongs to the kabuki typecast known as *akuba* (悪婆, evil old woman), which realistically depicts the life of women of the lower classes. This type of role was first made popular by *onnagata* actor Iwai Hanshirō IV's performance of *Mikazuki Osen* 三日月おせん (Three Day Moon Osen) in 1792, though lead actor Onoe Matsusuke 尾上松助 I already performed evil female fraudster as early as 1789. There is a possibility that the kabuki actors and playwrights were made aware of this particular female image in the Chinese novel by Dutch scholar and writer Morishima Chūryō 森島中良. This paper discusses the social interactions between Tsuruya Nanboku, Onoe Matsusuke and Morishima Chūryō, and how Iwai Hanshirō V's enacting of Dote no Oroku was influenced by Hanshirō IV's and Matsusuke's evil old women.

I would like to extend my deep appreciation to everyone at the Senshū University Library who gave me permission to publish the illustrations of the picture book *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri* of the Mukai Nobuo Collection.

2 Special Features of the Kabuki Play *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri*

One of the prominent features of the play *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri* is that lead *onnagata* actor Iwai Hanshirō V played seven roles, and his quick changes between the roles became the showcase of the play [fig. 1]. Amongst the acts, the first act at Koume tobacco shop and middle act's extortion scene at the Aburaya pawn shop are considered to be of high dramatic quality (Matsuzaki in Matsuzaki, Urayama 1961, 10). These two acts depict the realities of the lower classes in Edo realistically, a kabuki genre called *kizewa* 生世話. This particular play was not only popular in Edo, but also gained fame at the kabuki theatres in Ōsaka. It was often staged in both cities, and in 1831, eighteen years after the first performance, the script was published with pictures by the publisher Kawachiya Tasuke 河内屋太助 in Ōsaka [fig. 2].

3 The Plotline of the Fraud in *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri*

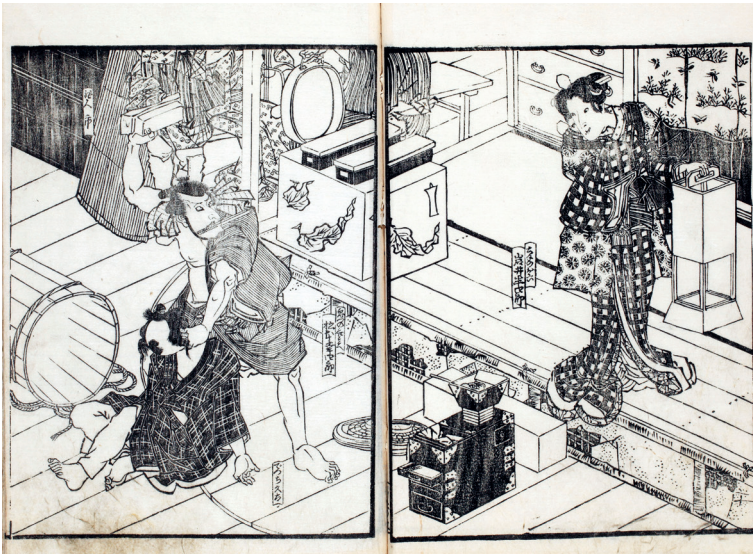
The outline of the part of the play *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri* which is considered to be based on the Chinese novel *Jingu qiguan*, is the fraud scene, and goes as follows.

The head clerk Zenroku of the Aburaya pawn shop in the Kawar-amachi quarters in Edo plots to take over the shop by forcing the owner's daughter Osome to marry him. To this purpose, he convinces Osome's brother Tasaburō to steal the certificate of the pawned sword of the Chiba family to get him disowned. Zenroku tricks the shop assistant into going on an errand so that it will look like he's run away, and thereby will be suspected of the theft. Zenroku proceeds to hide the stolen certificate in a bunch of greens the farmer Kyūsaku has brought to sell. Zenroku intends to buy the vegetables of Kyūsaku, but Kyūsaku insists that he has promised the vegetables to another buyer and can't sell them to Zenroku. A fight ensues, in which Kyūsaku is kicked by the pawn shop staff, but as the owner enters, the fight is stopped and Kyūsaku is given compensation for medicine and a new kimono, upon which he goes home [fig. 3].

In the next scene we see Dote no Oroku, who is running a tobacco shop in the Koume quarters. She used to work for a warrior household but eloped with her lover Kimon Kihē. Her former employer, Lord Takegawa, orders her to get her hands on 100 gold *ryō* coins (about 10,000,000 yen) so that he can retrieve the famous sword of the Chiba family from the pawn shop. This is repayment for the 100 *ryō* she and Kihē stole from him when they eloped. Oroku also does odd sewing jobs, and just as she accepts a sewing order from an



Figures 1-2 Nanboku/Kunisada, *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri*. 1831. NIJL Nihon Kotenseki Sōgō D.B., 22.3 × 15.4 cm. Senshū University Library, Kawasaki-city (Kanagawa-ken). © Senshū University



Figures 3-4 Nanboku/Kunisada, *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri*. 1831. NIJL Nihon Kotenseki Sōgō D.B., 22.3 × 15.4 cm. Senshū University Library, Kawasaki-city (Kanagawa-ken). © Senshū University



Figure 5 Nanboku/Kunisada, *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri*. 1831. NIJL Nihon Kotenseki Sōgō D. B., 22.3 × 15.4 cm. Senshū University Library, Kawasaki-city (Kanagawa-ken). © Senshū University

itinerary hairdresser, Kyūsaku appears, and asks Oroku to fix his torn kimono too. He also asks the hairdresser to fix his topknot, as his hair is in disarray after the fight. He tells the hairdresser about the fight at the pawn shop, while Oroku and Kibē listen intently, thinking of a plan of how to extort money from the pawn shop using Kyūsaku's torn kimono as evidence. After Kyūsaku leaves, Kibē places the corpse of the runaway shop assistant from the first act, who apparently died of blowfish poisoning. Kibē makes a wound on the corpse's face [fig. 4], and after that, has it carried to the Aburaya pawnshop, where Oroku loudly laments that the shop clerks killed her younger brother in a fight and demands compensation. But just then, Kyūsaku, who is supposed to be dead, appears. To that, the apparently dead shop assistant is revived with the help of some medicine and the fraud unravels [fig. 5].



Figure 6 Mokumokugyōin/Kunisada, *Gekijō ichikan mushimegane*. 1830. NIJL Nihon Kotenseki Sōgō D.B., 22.2 × 15 cm. NIJL, Tachikawa-city (Tōkyō). © NIJL

4 Episode 29 in *Jingu qiguan*

The above storyline is based on episode 29 in the Chinese novel *Jingu qiguan*, which can also be found in the Chinese story collection *Pai'an jingqi* 拍案驚奇 (Jp. *Hakuan kyōki*, Slapping the Table in Amazement), but it is the former work which became popular in Japan (Marui 2019, 13). The outline of episode 29 is as follows:

On a spring day, Wang Jie 王杰 returns drunk to his home in Zhejiang. In front of his house, he finds his servants fighting with a ginger tradesman Lü Da 呂大, who is a very stubborn man. Wang Jie, being drunk, ends up hitting Lü Da, who is unconscious. Wang Jie hurriedly revives him, and after inviting him for a drink and food, gives him some white silk and sends him home. But that evening, ferry man Zhou Si 周四 comes and claims that Lü Da died on his boat, and that Wang Jie is to blame. Wang Jie sends one of his servants to investigate, and indeed the servants find a body. Wang Jie gives 20 gold coins to the ferry man and asks him to bury the corpse during the night. The ferry man wants to have 100 gold coins, but after some haggling, agrees to do it for 60. Wang Jie sends his servant along to help. Later, Wang Jie's daughter falls ill, and Wang Jie tells his servant to go and fetch the doctor. However, the doctor never arrives and Wang Jie's daughter dies. The servant claims the doctor wasn't at home when he called, but later it is revealed that the servant in fact was too busy drinking and never went to fetch the doctor. Upon learning this, the enraged Wang Jie flogs the servant, who out of resentment tells the authorities of Wang Jie's murder and has him arrested. He is tortured and confesses, upon which he is imprisoned and almost dies. But half a year later, the ginger tradesman Lü Da reappears at Wang Jie's house. The servant, thinking he has seen a ghost, flees, but Wang Jie's wife convinces Lü Da to go and explain things to the authorities. In the end, Wang Jie is released, and the boatsman and servant are arrested and executed.

5 Incorporation of Episode 29 of *Jingu qiguan* in Japanese Novels

Chapter four of the *yomihon* novel *Sekijō kikan kakinegusa* (席上奇観垣根草) is a rewrite of episode 29 in *Jingu qiguan*. It faithfully follows the original plotline but stages them in a Japanese setting, making sure that each villain gets his just punishment as the story unfolds. Kyokutei Bakin, on the other hand, uses the story differently in his 1807 novel *Sono no yuki*. The storyline centres on a revenge drama between princess Usuyuki 薄雪姫 and her brother Sanewaka 実稚. Sanewaka is planning to get his hand on a fortune by marrying off princess Usuyuki to the enemy. As a drunk warrior accosts the Prin-

cess, Sanewaka manages to force him off her, but in the process the drunk warrior falls as if he was dead. When the drunk warrior later regains consciousness, he hires a beggar to go and show his clothes to Sanewaka and claim the warrior is dead. By doing so, Sanewaka again hires the beggar to bury the body. The next day, the beggar comes back and demands money not to expose the body in a fraud scene, which structurally overlaps with the fraud scene in *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri*.

6 Special Features of *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri*'s Fraud Scene

The special character of the fraud scene in *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri* lies in the humoristic setting displaying the bold attempt of fraud by a woman of the lower classes, and the coincidences which leads to her failure. Women who commit crime like Dote no Oroku are referred to as *akuba* 悪婆 (evil old woman) as a kabuki role type. This role type was made popular by *onnagata* actor Iwai Hanshirō IV's enacting of *Mikazuki Osen* in the play *Ôfuna mori ebi no kaomise* 大船盛蝦顔見勢 (Auspicious Face Showing of Shrimps Heaped on the Big Ship), performed in the 11th month, 1792 (Kawatake 1960, 25). *Mikazuki no Osen* was enacted as a real low-class prostitute. The word *akuba* infers the meaning old, but *akuba* doesn't necessarily need to be advanced in years. The root of inferring the age to the word comes from Onoe Matsusuke's enactment of evil old women as enemies. In the 1831 kabuki journal *Gekijō ichikan mushi megane* 劇場一観顕微鏡 (The Theatre Through the Looking Glass), Onoe Matsusuke's career is described as follows: "He started out as an *onnagata* female impersonator, but later started to play sexy villains. When he advanced to be the leading actor of villains (敵役 *kataki yaku*), he started enacting the important villains as old women" (Mokumokugyōin, Utagawa 1973, 331-2).

For example, he is the actor who created the role of an evil lady in waiting Iwafuji appearing in the play *Kagamiyama kokyō no nishiki-e* 加賀見山旧錦絵 (Coloured Picture of the Mirror Mountain of Yore) [fig. 6], repeatedly reenacting this role throughout his lifetime. However, Matsusuke did not only enact plotting high-ranking ladies-in-waiting, but also of the lower classes, acting as partners for villains, tricking and extorting people with the use of clever words. This use of verbal skills makes them different from previous evil women, who had mostly been displayed as murderers, thieves and evil mothers-in-laws. This eloquent scheming woman also appears in several episodes of *Jingu qiguan* (7, 13, 23 and 37). Especially episode 7, "Monopoly of the Oilselling Prostitute", has had a big influence on several Japanese works, being basis for the eloquent old brothel manager, and it is my hypothesis that Matsusuke's acting was inspired by this Chinese novel.

7 Tsuruya Nanboku, Onoe Matsusuke and Morishima Chūryō

Tsuruya Nanboku 鶴屋南北 IV's use of the *Jingu qiguan*-inspired fraud scene probably stems from Nanboku's connection to Dutch scholar Morishima Chūryō 森島中良. This connection is not a direct one, but mediated by Chūryō's teacher, the scholar and playwright Hiraga Gennai (1727-1779), who also had close connections to Nanboku and Matsusuke. The details of these relationships have been clarified by Furuido Hideo (1998, 134; 2018, vol. 1: 154, 681-2; vol. 2, 853; 2020, 24, 41), who, on the basis of the essay collection *Ukiyo zōdan* 浮世雑談 (Various Talks of the Floating World, by Mimasuya Nisōji, 1854), shows that Tsuruya Nanboku took part in the making of a showcase in the shape of a bull for the Ryōgoku area show stalls together with Hiraga Gennai, Tatekawa Enba. Further, he points to that Tsuruya Nanboku himself testifies to receiving material concerning the trouble in the Date family household from 'Lord Katsuragawa', aka Morishima Chūryō, in his essay collection *Fukiyose zōshi* 吹寄草紙 (Collected Writings, 1842). At the same time, Matsusuke was also involved with both Gennai and Chūryō. In the comic novel *Yakusha myōmyō nochi no masayume* 役者妙々後の正夢 (True Dream of Later Day Actors, 1833) by Hanagasa Bunkyō 花笠文京, we read that Matsusuke "was friendly with Hiraga Gennai and often visited the Katsuragawa's estate in Tsukiji, gathering all sorts of unusual information" (Hanagasa 1894, 839).

The Katsuragawa referred to in the text is Morishima Chūryō, who was the second son of leading Dutch scholar and Doctor Katsuragawa Hosan, who was employed by the Tokugawa government. Chūryō started studying the art of fiction writing for Hiraga Gennai at the age of nine, and in 1779, he penned the ningyō jōruri puppet play *Meguro hiyoku tsuka* 驪山比翼塚 (Love Bird's Mound in Meguro). In the story collection *Kogarashi sōshi* 凧草紙 (Leaves in the Cold Wind, 1792), he points out that writers such as Tsuga Teishō 都賀庭鐘 used several Chinese novels such as *Gujin xiaoshuo* 古今小説 (Stories Old and New), *Jingu qiguan*, *Jingshi tongyan* 警世通言 (Records of Remarkable Things), *Pai'an jingqi* 拍案驚奇 as his sources, and in the *Kogarashi sōshi* 凧草紙 (Leaves in the Cold Wind, 1792), showing his proficiency in the field of Chinese literature.

In conclusion, Tsuruya Nanboku used episode 29 from the Chinese novel *Jingu qiguan* as source material for the fraudulent scene in the play *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri*. Further, Iwai Hanshirō V's enacting of the scheming Dote no Oroku as a contemporary woman of the lower classes were based on two distinct acting traditions, one being the evil women enacted by his predecessor Hanshirō IV, and the other Onoe Matsusuke I's aged female villains. This second tradition was again also probably inspired by Matsusuke's connection

to Dutch scholar Morishima Chūryō, through whom the world of kabuki gained access to rare material such as Chinese novels.

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