

## The Performing Arts Connecting the Dead with the Living: In the case of “Soga Legends”

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### Introduction

How were the “Soga Legends” formed? One of the most reliable sources was the “Soga Monogatari” text. While “Heike Monogatari” and “Taiheiki” both deal with historical wars and are collectively called war epics, “Soga Monogatari,” which deals with personal biography, and “Gikeiki” (which depicts the life of Minamoto-no-Yoshitsune (源義経), one of the most famous tragic war heroes in Japanese history), are classified as quasi war-epics. The central purpose of “Soga Monogatari” is to describe the lives of the Soga Brothers (曾我兄弟), Juro-Sukenari (十郎祐成) and Goro-Tokimune (五郎時致) (whose lives were devoted to avenging their father’s death), and also to create an elegy to the brothers, who were tragic heroes who died violent early deaths. This tale was believed to have originated from the one told by female itinerant entertainers, whose base was in the two mountain site Shrines at Hakone and Izu.<sup>1</sup> It is also assumed that “The Soga Legends”

1. Orikuchi, Shinobu, *Kokubunngaku no Hassei* (the fourth edition), in Orikuchi Shinobu *Zenshu* series Vol.1, Kodai Kenkyu Kokunbungakuhen. Tokyo: Chuo-Koron-Sha, 1995.  
Kadokawa, Gengi, *Myohonjibon Soga Monogatari ko*, in *Kichokotenseki Sogan Myohonjibon Soga Monogatari*. Tokyo: Kadokawa-Shoten, 1969.

told by blind female traveling entertainers had an influence on the formation and circulation of this tale. As a result, in various parts of the tale, we can perceive the female viewpoint. Similarly, that Kanjo Volume 12 of “Heike Monogatari” ended as the story of a woman can be seen as further evidence of this viewpoint.

In addition, “Soga Monogatari,” which is closely connected to the performing arts in origin, also supplied materials for various sorts of performing arts during the medieval and early modern eras in a wide variety of ways. For example, there are twenty Noh plays that are related to “Soga Monogatari,” and in the Kowaka Dance, seven pieces are related.

Next, I would like to mention some more examples which show the strong relationship between “Soga Monogatari” and the performing arts. Although the so-called old Joruri (traditional melodious narrations), which appeared in the medieval era, was still under the influence of contemporary dance music, the advent of Chikamatsu’s (近松) “Yotsugi-soga (The Soga Heir)” (first performed in 1683) heralded the arrival of modernized theater. “Yotsugi-soga”’s newness lies in the author’s innovative plot treatment, which set the plot after the brothers’ deaths. Kabuki Theater, which began its rise in the early period of the pre-modern age (16th century), reached the first period of its distinguished theatrical accomplishment around the Genroku period (1688-1704). In those days in Kamigata (the general region of Kyoto and Osaka), a Kabuki performance called Bon-Soga was held as the memorial service for the Soga brothers during the Bon period in July (Bon is one of the Japanese Buddhist festivals to memorialize the ancestral spirits).<sup>2</sup> In the Edo district the performance of “Kachidoki-Yoro’i-Soga” by Ichikawa Danjuro (市川團十郎) I at Yamamura Theater was the first occa-

Fukuda Akira, *Soga Monogatari no Seiritu*. Tokyo: Miyai-Shoten, 2002.

Yamanishi Akira, *Soga Monogatari no Seiritu*, in *Kokubungaku Kaishaku to Kanshou*, the extra no., Murakami Mitoshi ed. *Soga Monogatari no Sakuhin Uchu*, Tokyo: Shibundo, Jan. 2003.

*Yakusha-Kuchijyamisen*, Vol. Kyo, part on Sakata Tojyuro, March 1699. “The performance of the Heroes’ gallantry with beautiful courtesans in the second program of the year, and the Soga Plays on the occasion of the Bon festival were made customary, so that a full house could be expected at least twice a year. Other theaters also followed this custom, especially in Kyoto and Osaka.

2. *Yakusha-Man’nengoyomi*, Vol. Edo, Opening Part, March 1670. “The fact that, on the occasion of the Bon festival, the program should always be the Soga play shows the deep desire of the people to console the souls of the Soga brothers, even by means of the plays performed in theaters.”

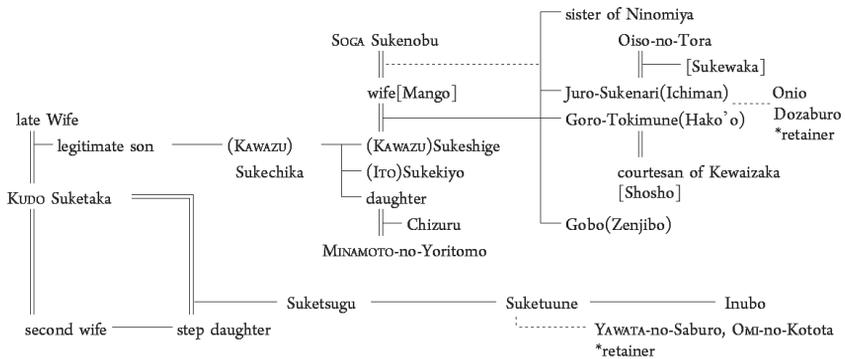


plate 1 Family tree of main characters in “Soga Monogatari”

sion of the Soga series.<sup>3</sup> All of these events tell how closely the “Soga Legends” and the performing arts were connected. In this paper, I would like to explain the relation between Kabuki Theater and “Soga Monogatari” regarding drama-making and the customs and manners of the theatrical world, and moreover to discuss the essential function of the performing arts, which unite the dead with the living.

I will outline “Soga Monogatari” and describe their family tree<sup>4</sup> (plate 1). The names of the characters put in brackets are the ones which did not appear in the original work, but were added and fixed in the subsequent process of tradition and literary formation.

Actually, the Soga brothers and their mortal enemy Kudo Suketsune (工藤祐経) are related to each other by blood, coming from the same clan. However, because of a rivalry between the families over some territory, they are involved in a hostile relationship to the point of fighting each other.

Kudo Suketaka (工藤祐隆) (an ancestor of the Soga brothers, four generations senior to them, who later became a priest called Jyakushin (寂心),

3. Hananoedo-Kabuki-Nendaiki Vol.1.

4. Emended and annotated by Ichiko Teiji, Oshima Takehiko, *Soga Monogatari*, in Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikai series. Tokyo: Iwanami-Shoten 1966. The original Text is an old script of ten lines of a collection of Seishu-Bunko in the Faculty of Letters: Japanese Language Section, the University of Tokyo.

from the Izu area, lost his legitimate son, so he gave the family name and the Ito-no-sho territory to the son of his daughter-in-law, Suketsugu (祐継). At the same time he gave the Kawzu-no-sho territory to his grandson Jiro-Sukechika (二郎祐親). Sukechika, who was proud of the direct line of descent, stole the Ito-no-sho territory from Suketsugu. The son of Suketsugu, Suketsune, ordered his retainers Omi Kotota (近江小藤太) and Yawata-no-Saburo (八幡三郎) to assassinate Sukechika.

At a Sumo-tournament held those days to entertain Minamoto-no-Yoritomo (源頼朝), who becomes the founder of the Kamakura Shogunate, Sukechika's son Kawazu Saburo-Sukeshige (河津三郎祐重) defeated Matano-no-Goro-Kagehisa (俣野五郎景久). Yawata and Omi tried to kill Sukechika on his way home but accidentally shot Sukeshige instead. His wife [Mango] (満江), who later remarried Soga-Taro-Sukenobu (曾我太郎助信), told her sons Ichiman (一万) and Hako'o (箱王) to avenge their father's death. In due time, Yoritomo rose in revolt and unified all Kanto (the eastern area of Japan), cut off Sukechika's head, and gave Ito-no-sho to Suketsune. He then tried to execute young Ichiman and Hako'o but forgave them and spared their lives, owing to a petition by powerful vassals such as Hatakeyama Shigetada (畠山重忠).

Not long before, Ichiman had celebrated his attainment of adulthood and took the name Soga-no-Juro-Sukenari. Hako'o became an attendant of Hakone Gongen Shrine. Suketsune met Hako'o and gave him a small knife with a red wooden handle as a present. The night before he was to become a monk, Hako'o abandoned the Shrine and the mountain, and celebrated his attainment of adulthood with the help of Hojo-Shiro-Tokimasa (北条四郎時政), who substituted for his natural father. Hako'o took the name Goro-Tokimune, and as a result, was disowned by his mother. Juro was entertained by a courtesan named Oiso-no-Tora (大磯の虎), and Goro also became familiar with a courtesan in Kewaizaka [Shosho] (化粧坂の少将).

When the influential vassal Wada Yoshimori (和田義盛) gave a feast together with the members of his clan, he summoned Tora and Juro there, and Goro rushed to the feast. Yoshmori's legitimate son, Asahina-Saburo-Yoshihide (朝比奈三郎義秀), pulled out Goro's kusazuri (a piece of armor) to persuade him to enter the room. Juro accompanied Tora to Soga and regretted their parting. Goro was then forgiven by his mother and given

a kosode (short-sleeved kimono). When Goro came to Gyojitsu (行実), the steward of Hakone Shrine, to say farewell, Gyojitsu gave him a sword named Tomokiri, which had been handed down through several generations from the Genji clan.

Secretly slipping into Yoritomo's hunting site in Fuji Plain, the brothers searched the layout of the temporary shed in Ide and let their followers Oni'o (鬼王) and Dozaburo (団三郎) return to Soga. On the night of May 28th, 1193, the brothers finally slew Suketsune and achieved their vengeance. But Juro was killed by Nitta Siro-Tadatsuna (仁田四郎忠綱). Goro was captured by Goromaru (五郎丸), who was disguised as a woman and beheaded.

In September, Tora and the brothers' mother conducted the hundred days' anniversary of the brothers' death at Hakone Shrine. In order to console the Soga brothers, Yoritomo built Syomyo-Kojingu Shrine at Fuji Plain and donated some territory. Tora became tonsured and went to Kyoto, where she became a disciple of Honen (法然) (an illustrious monk). After traveling through many regions, she returned to Oiso and finally settled in a hermitage. On the seven year anniversary, the brothers' mother and sister visited there. Thus the story eventually comes to its end as a story of women.

### The Soga Legends in Edo Kabuki Theater

"Soga Monogatari" has been performed with a wide variety of characters. Above all, the commitment of Edo-Kabuki to "Soga Monogatari" has been extensive. We can see glimpses of the contents of these performances through illustrated drama books (containing the summaries of Kabuki scenes with illustrations) from the Genroku period (1688-1704). The following Soga drama books: "Tsuwamono-Kongen-Soga" at Nakamura Theater in 1697, "Keisei-Asamagatake" and "Keisei-Asamaga-Soga" at Yamamura Theater in 1703, "Oyakata-Yotsugi-Soga" at Ichimura Theater in 1706, "Keisei-Arashi-Soga" at Nakamura Theater in 1708, "Keisei-Ichchonoyumi" at Yamamura Theater in 1708, and "Kaishun-Soga" at Morita Theater in 1710, were all printed in the Edo area.

I will describe the outline of "Tsuwamono-Kongen-Soga" as an example

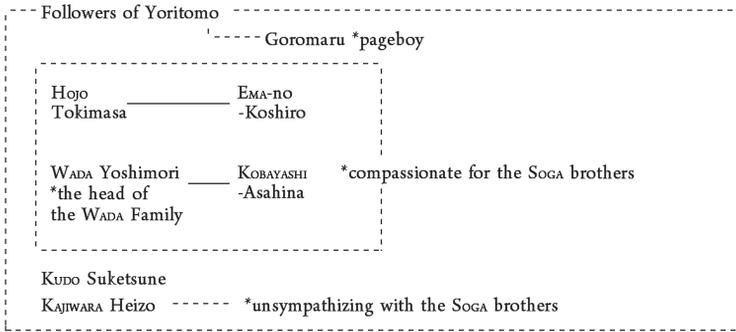


plate 2 The relationships of the characters in “Tsuwamono-Kongen-Soga”

and show the relationships of its characters (plate 2). The large title “Tsuwamono-Kongen-Soga” includes the following small titles from the first figure to the fourth one. The names of the scenes are put in brackets (containing assumptions about the locations of the scenes).

Figure 1: The sweet Banquet, pouring one cup of sake

**[Hojo Castle]** Hojo-Tokimasa holds a sumo wrestling tournament, inviting Yoritomo. Kajiwara-Heizo (梶原平三) lies to Yoritomo, saying that there is someone trying to assassinate him. Then Yoritomo gives orders to put Ito’s men to death, and sends Goromaru to Soga. Then Kobayashi-Asahina demands that the Soga Family be saved as a result of a suit brought by Hatakeyama Shigetada.

**[Shrine]** Juro shoots the arrow, praying for the success of his vengeance and his love for Ema-no-Koshiro (江間小四郎) (Tokimasa’s son). Otome-no-mae (乙女の前) entreats Juro to tell her love to Koshiro. When Koshiro arrives there, Juro persuades Koshiro to enter into their homosexual relationship. After that, he introduces Otome-no-mae to Koshiro and an oracle marries them.

Figure 2: Warriors show their courage in two ways

**[Along the highway]** Oni’o and Dozaburo, two of Soga’s men, meet Kudo-Suketsune on their way to Hakone. Kudo says it was Matano-no-Goro who murdered Kawazu.

**[Hakone Gongen Shrine]** Tokimasa tells the steward that he let Hako’o

celebrate his attainment of adulthood, and the steward, lamenting, encourages Hako'o (Goro) to master military arts. Then Kudo also arrives and meets Goro and gives him a knife. Facing his enemy just in front of him, Goro shudders. However, he remembers the absence of his brother and becomes red-faced because of an intense embarrassment, praying to Fudo-Myo'o (Cetaka), who gives him power.

**[Austere religious discipline]** Fudo Myo'o appears where Goro, who is conducting his austere religious discipline, and Asahina are fighting, and both are pleased and encouraged by Fudo.

Figure 3: The sons beg their mother three times

**[Soga Village]** Oni'o makes straw sandals to earn a living, while Juro grieves over the destitute state of the Soga family. Tora visits there and dresses Juro in a linen kimono.

**[Hojo castle]** The brothers' mother brings an iris that resembles a sword as a congratulatory gift to the boys' Festival. Juro shows Goro, who was disguised as a doll, to their mother. Goro asks her to forgive him, and she forgives him.

Figure 4: Peace in four directions / Kongen-Soga

**[Oiso]** The sister leaves for Oiso to admonish Juro. The Wada Family holds a banquet, and Tora is there reluctantly. Juro also is in the room. Goro appears, tearing the paper sliding doors, and Asahina pulls Goro's kusazuri (plate 3). In no time Goromaru announces the departure of Yoritomo for Fuji Plain. (At this point, the description of the illustrated drama book ends.)

“Tsuwamono-kongen-Soga,” whose outlines are introduced here is an illustrated drama book printed in Edo. It is the oldest after “Sankai-Nagoya,” and the oldest one by



plate 3 The illustrated dram book of “Tsuwamono- Kongen-Soga”

which we can get the detailed contents of the Soga Plays. Danjuro I was the first to play Goro, and his powerful embodiment of Goro through his representation of Fudo and austere religious training impressed the audience very much. Asahina, who competed with Goro in the austere religious training and Kusazuri-biki (pulling kusazuri), was played by Nakamura Denkuro (中村伝九郎) I. Denkuro's Asahina set the standard for the figure of Asahina on the stage. Although Juro was not largely focused upon, this role was given to Murayama Shiroji (村山四郎次), who was renowned as an actor and a handsome man. He played a soft and charming character in his performance of Koshiro's solicitation or the conversation with Tora. And the role of Kudo was played by Yamanaka Heikuro, (山中平九郎) a great villain actor. The rest of the characters, for instance, Oni'o and Dozaburo (the faithful retainers of the brothers'), their lovers Tora and Shosho, and the mother are included.

Several major scenes are depicted, including the presentation of the knife with a red wooden handle, Goro's appeal for forgiveness from his mother, and Kusazuri-biki. In addition, several aspects of the story are shown, such as the tensions with Yoritomo, the Sumo wrestling match associated with their father Kawazu, the strong bond between the brothers (who were determined that there should be no vengeance without the collective commitment by both of them), and the poverty of the Soga family. Although the performance was in May, when the actual historical event happened, the night raid was not performed.

When we examine the other examples, we can find that in the Soga plays of the illustrated drama book period, the characters surrounding the brothers were always fixed in style. Also in dramatic situations, scenes like the grinding of an edge of an arrow and Juro's hair being combed were already established, and such elements as the anguish of loyal subjects were also discernible. The night raid scene was sometimes performed but sometimes not. This meant that without the night raid scene, the play could stand up as a drama by describing the brothers, who spent all their time plotting revenge. In the Soga Plays by Nakamura Shichisaburo (中村七三郎), however, the performance of the night raid scene was distinct, as was the defiance against Yoritomo, the obsessions even after death, the appearance as a vengeful ghost and finally the enshrinement as a guardian god. So it can be

said that the play was not so much separated from the concept of the original “Soga Monogatari” in this period.

Drama books were no longer printed in the Edo district by the end of Ho’ei (1704-11). Because the daicho, the hand-written texts of Kabuki plays, have not survived, the Kyoho period (1716-36) is called a blank period for the research on the plays of those days. But despite the lack of daicho, we can restore each play by collecting printed matters published by theaters, such as various sorts of banzuke (contemporary booklets, posters or flyers) or visual matters such as Kabuki actors’ figures drawn in ukiyoe. Furthermore, we can understand more deeply with the help of the periodical Yakusha-Hyobanki (the magazine reporting the reviews on actors) and the diaries of theatergoers from those days. In this way, I tried to recreate the “Haruwa-Akebono-Kuruwa-Soga” performed at Ichimura Theater in 1743.<sup>5</sup> The daicho appeared around the Enkyo period (1744-48), and a part of the 1744 “Tamakushige-Yoso’oi-Soga” script from the Ichimura Theater has remained. We can also read most of the “Otokodate-Hatukai-Soga” script.<sup>6</sup> In the next section, I will use these materials to summarize the story of “Otokodate-Hatukai-Soga.”

Figure 1: The first sounding of a small drum (see plate 4 of the characters’ relationship)

**[Along the highway]** Kotota, the follower of Kudo, accompanying Kudo’s son, Inubo (犬房), meets the brothers’ sister, Ninomiya (二の宮). Kotota laments that they murdered Kawazu, mistaking him for the tonsured Ito (伊東).

**[Dance and music]** The courtesans in Oiso are summoned for the occasion of Lady Masako’s (政子) (wife of Yoritomo, Generalissimo of the Genji clan) dance and music performance. Shizuka-gozen (静御前) (the late Yoshitsune’s mistress) and Mimyo (微妙), under the name of Tora and

5. Sato Chino, “Edo kabuki no kogyo to Kyogen --Kyoho 3 nen Haruwa-Akebono-Kuruwa-Soga no Ba’i,” *Kinsei Bungei* no.69, Jan.1999.

6. Shuzui Kenji, ed. *Kabuki Kyakuhonshu* in Nihon Meicho Zenshu series. Tokyo: Nihon-Meicho-Zenshu-Kankokai 1928. Hayashi Kimiko, annotated, *Kabuki Daicho Shusei*. Vol.8, Kabuki-Daicho-Shusei-Kenkyukai, ed. Tokyo: Benseisha, 1985. The 55th Kabuki Performance of National Theater in January 1973 was an adaptation of this play. An explanatory information and others on Otokodate-Kichirei-Soga” by Toshikura Koichi appeared in *Plot*. Kokuritu-Gekijyo-Jigyobu, 1973.

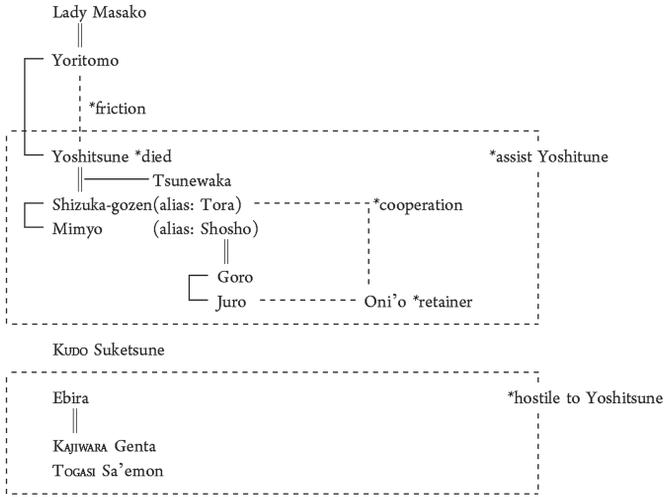


plate 4 The character's relationship in "Otokodate-Hatsukai-Soga"

Shosho, come to this occasion, and manipulate a puppet of Ushiwaka (牛若) (Yoshitsune's childhood name). Shizuka, who is disguised as Tora, sheds tears remembering Yoshitsune. Lady Masako, perceiving the true identity of Shizuka, gives her the small drum named "the first sounding." From the body of the drum appears the letter which the head of the dead Yoshitsune held in his mouth. As a result, it is revealed that Kajiwara's wife Ebira (箆) is the enemy of Yoshitsune. Kajiwara Genta (梶原源太) and Togashi Sa'emom (富樫左衛門) try to kill Tsunewaka (経若), who is Yoshitsune's orphaned son, but Asahina saves Tsunewaka and offers congratulations for a long life. Hako'o meets Kudo during the dance and music performance. Kudo admonishes the impatient Hako'o and makes a promise that he is sure to be revenged on the occasion of the hunt in May. He gives Hako'o the map of the hunting site. Backstage, Hako'o is romanced by Mimyo of Shosho, and Asahina mediates the love between them.

Juro, on the way to the site of the performance, accompanied by Oni'o, is robbed of his clothes by a money lender, and Oni'o clears all of Juro's debts. Shizuka stabs Ebira, who casts suspicion on Tsunewaka, and also revenges Yoshitsune's death. When they discuss the murder of Ebira, Oni'o and Shizuka both share their true intentions with each other.

**[Kudo is forgiven]** Blamed for missing Tsunewaka, Kudo is ordered to commit hara-kiri, and Juro and Hako'o plead for his life because they will fail in their cause if Kudo commits hara-kiri. On this occasion, Juro succeeds in seeing Kudo in person and receives the knife with a red wooden handle. It is decided that Kudo can be forgiven if Tsunewaka is found within a hundred days. Oni'o disguises himself as Ume-no-Yoshibeï (梅の由兵衛), and Kudo's follower Yawata-no-Saburo disguises himself as Uba-no-Genbei (姥の源兵衛) and leaves to search for Tsunewaka in the Musashi region.

**[Hakone Shrine]** Shizuka witnesses the robbery of the Tomokiri-maru sword. Goro appears violently and is caught by Goromaru, but actually Goro is disguised as Oni'o. On the other hand, Goromaru is disguised as Yawata. The sword which they are scrambling for is a wooden one. Then the real Goro rushes in, bringing a suit of armor named Saka-Omodaka with him, and conducts Kusazuri-biki with Asahina, who is running after Goro.

Figure 2: Tomokiri-maru (see plate 5 which shows characters' relationship)

**[The barbershop in Ryogoku Bridge]** As the paper sliding doors of two barbershops are opened, Yoshibeï and Genbei are shaving customers' sakayaki (from the forehead to the top of the head). Nurse Oman (お万) calls at Genbei, and they have a lover's spat. Courtesan Oshu (奥州), who lets the customer Murasaki-no-Shichi (紫の七) go past, sits in Yoshibeï's shop. Oshu once was Yoshibeï's wife Ko'ume (小梅), and looking at Chokichi (長吉), the apprentice of a liquor shop, she remembers her own child with Yoshibeï, whom she sent away to be raised by foster parents (plate 6, Yoshibeï and Chokichi). Juro's medicine bag is cut, and Genbei, watching for a chance, steals his lucky charm bag to find that it contains the map of the hunting site. Genbei receives, through his henchman, the Tomokiri-maru sword and a letter from Ogata Saburo (尾形三郎).

**[Takaraya, amusement parlor in Yoshiwara]** Oshu meets Shichi, accompanied by Juro, who is disguised as a zato (visually impaired body masseuse). Genbei lets Juro (in zato disguise) massage him, and Juro stretches out his hand to the bag. After Oshu keeps the bag, Tora takes it and hides it in her inside breast pocket, then throws it into a charcoal brazier. Picking

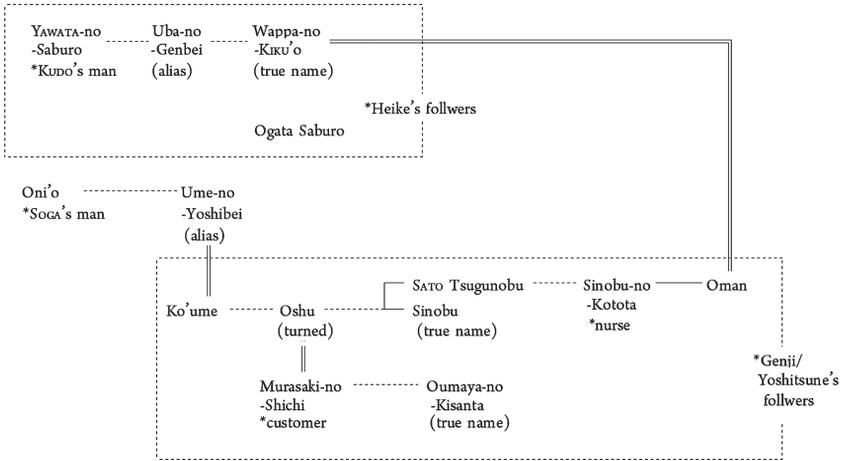


plate 5



plate 6 Ukiyoe: a scene from "Otokodate-Hatsukai-Soga"

it up quickly in panic, she realizes it contains the edge of Notonokami-Noritsune's (能登守教経) (Heike's military commander) arrow, and Tora mistakes it for her own. Oshu is the sister of Sato Tsugunobu (佐藤継信), the loyal retainer of Yoshitsune (a member of the Genji Family), and her true name is Shinobu (忍). She secretly shelters Tsunewaka in a wicker clothes box. Actually Shichi is the make-shift name of Yoshitsune's man Oumaya-no-Kisanta. They tell each other about the edge of the arrow which Tsugunobu caught in the battle of Yashima, Genji versus Heike, protecting Yoshitsune (Genji's military commander). Wappa-no-Kiku'o (童の菊王), who followed Heike, and shot Tsugunobu, is their enemy. They are worried about how to get the money that is necessary for setting Tsunewaka free.

Genbei gives three hundred ryo (old currency unit) to Oshu. Then she cuts her little finger to show recognition. But Genbei runs away because Oman appears and leaves him the letter written by Ogata to Kiku'o. Ogata is the inhabitant of Bungo who tried to invite Heike to Dazaifu. Oman perceives the identity of Genbei. Yoshibeï notices Oshu's little finger and beats Oshu, blaming her for having an illicit lover. Genbei also draws his sword and stabs through the wicker clothes box to search for the illicit lover, but inside is Oman. Oman reveals that she is the daughter of Shinobu-no-Kotota (しのぶの小藤太), a nurse of the Sato brothers, and Tora is the princess of Noritsune, and Genbei is Kiku'o. She confesses she tried to be killed by her husband as a substitute for Tsunewaka as a way of compensating for marrying the enemy of Genji.

**[Yoshiwara Nakanochō Street]** Yoshibeï and Genbei compete against each other under their true names, and Kiku'o is killed by Oni'o, who asks him to take care of Noritsune's daughter. Oni'o lets Oshu touch, with the sword, the body of Kiku'o, who is the enemy of her brother. He moves out, taking Tomokiri-maru with him ("Sukeroku").

Figure 3: The Flute of summoning snakes

**[dance and music "The destiny of the Flower"]** Yokobu'e (横笛), the daughter of Shouji-Saemon (庄司左衛門) at Manago Village, falls in love, but it ends in tragedy.

**[dance and music "Kyokanoko-Musume-Dojoji"]** Yokobu'e starts for Dojoji Temple in order to heal the bitterness of her unfulfilled love.

**[dance and music "Imahamukashi-Umewaka-Yanagi"]** The beginning of the killing of Chokichi.

Figure 4: The memorial of the late master's obligation

**[At the foot of Narihira Bridge]** It is rumored that the couple Yoshibeï and Ko'ume become gardeners to nurture Juro, and Sasaki-Saburo-Moritsuna (佐々木三郎盛綱) investigates the survivors of Yoshitsune or Heike. Yatsurugi-Naiki (八剣内記) reveals that he is Omi Kotota's brother and that his true name is Tonai-Narikage (藤内成景). He employs Hachibeï (八兵衛), a laborer, at Kudo's for the purpose of searching for the knife with the red wooden handle which Juro pawned. Hachibeï's mother Oko (おかう) (a relative of the Oshu-Fujiwara Family), her sister Osen (おせん), and Tsunewaka return from picking herbs in the fields.

**[At Sasaki Castle]**

**[Kameido Shrine site]** Yoshibeï kills Chokichi just to get back the sword with a red handle and robs Chokichi of his hundred ryo, but finds that Chokichi is his own son and sinks into deep sorrow. Juro recovers from his eye disease through the divine grace of Tada-Yakushi and gets Tomokirimaru. He starts for Fuji Plain, together with Goro, and fulfills his heart's longing. Thus the performance and the story both arrive at their final stage.

Next, I will explain the structure of Kabuki drama in reference to the examples mentioned above. According to "Kezairoku," a book on Kabuki dramaturgy (first version completed in 1801), "in the structure of Kabuki drama, vertical lines represent the <world>. On the other hand, horizontal lines represent <idea>. The vertical is already fixed, where there is little mobility to the last ending of drama. (This means that "vertical" can give the audience easy and comfortable feelings owing to its familiarity. At the same time, there is a possibility that it will make the audience bored because of a series of already familiar scenes.) On the other hand, the horizontal can make the drama new by bringing plots into the drama even if it is halfway into its development."

In Kabuki drama-making, there exists the conception of <world (sekai)> and <idea (shuko)>. <World> indicates stories or earlier works which construct the background for the development of events. It helps drama-making by regulating the names of characters, their characterization, and their relationships. It even regulates, through the process of the plot unfolding, where the climax of a drama should be. In "Sekai Komoku" (which first appeared around 1791) approximately 150 examples of this method of drama-making are mentioned. On the other hand, <idea> indicates large or small plans or motifs which are developed throughout a drama. For instance, the <world> of "Kanadehon-Chushingura" is "Taiheiki," and its <idea> can be the raid by Ako, the unemployed samurai. (In fact, the raid by Ako, the unemployed samurai, occurred in the Edo period, but because it was prohibited to dramatize contemporary incidents of the warrior class, writers substituted the "Taiheiki" <world> of the medieval period for the background of the very contemporary dramatic work.)

The <world> of the Soga Plays, needless to say, is the Soga Legends, and

in the case of “Hatsukai-Soga,” the story of “Ume-no-Yoshihei” is introduced as an important <idea>. In this tragedy, Ume-no-Yoshihei, a dandy, who is assumed to live at Honjo-Umebori, kills the apprentice Chokichi, and steals a hundred Ryo, only to find Chokichi is his relative.<sup>7</sup> As a minor <idea>, there are “Sukeroku” or “Dojyoji.” When compared with the period of illustrated drama books, the concepts of <world> and <idea> become more clear, and a deeper drama-making style is recognized. When we compare Scene 1, (which consists of Lady Masako’s attending the dance and music performance, Kudo’s attempted hara-kiri, Goromaru and Goro’s wrestling, Asahina and Goro’s kusazuri-biki), with Scene 2, (which consists of a solicitation between men and women at a barbershop, the abuse by a dandy, the finger cutting of a courtesan and “Sukeroku”), Scene 2 displays so many more original settings and developments in contrast to the first Soga that we could easily separate them. For example, the night raid, the ending of the original work, was moved to the final scene, which is performed only in long-running performances. And the climax of the drama moves to the scene where the brothers meet Kudo. This scene is called “Taimen (confrontation),” and sometimes it is performed as an independent repertoire. In addition, there are a lot of paintings of this scene in Ukiyoe.

The characters are adopted from not only the genuine Soga <world> but also from the neighboring “Izu-nikki,” “Gikeiki,” “Heike Monogatari” and “Genpei Ikusa (the battle between Genji and Heike).” In these works, we find such differences as the true identity of the Genbei, who is supposed to be Yawata-no-Saburo, Kudo’s man. Instead, he was Wappa-no-Kiku’o, who used to be a follower of Heike. But it produces a multilayered drama by means of the marvelous unexpected twists at the end, brought about by revealing the characters’ true identities. This is also a function of <world>. The contradictions born in its process are overlooked. In no time, Goro becomes more of a hero than his elder brother Juro, and Kudo transforms from a villain to an important leader of a troupe.

7. Supervised by Kawatake Toshio, Furuido Hideo ed. *Kabuki Tojyo Jinbutsu Jiten*. Tokyo: Hakusuisha 2006.

### Customs and manners of the theatrical world

Edo Kabuki is a term which describes Kabuki in the Edo district, in contrast with Kamigata Kabuki. One more interesting matter relating to Soga is that the Soga brothers' shrine is enshrined backstage,<sup>8</sup> and the Soga festival is held both within and outside the backstage. How was the Soga festival held? Let's examine some of the writings written by the theater people of those days.

According to "Yakusha-Zensho 3" (published in 1774):

The beginning of the Soga festival has been recently celebrated. Before, the performance of Soga at the beginning of Spring was so prosperous and popular that it continued to May, and as a token of happiness and joy, theater people enshrined the Soga brothers' shrine, and the company held a celebration on 28th May. At first, it was held backstage on the third floor of the theater. This custom came about so spontaneously that we don't know when it actually began. In 1753, when the first performance at Nakamura Theater achieved a big success, this practice became habitual at the three great theaters. After that, every year, from the middle of May, all the company wore beautifully dyed summer apparel of the same design, and danced and played and produced a portable shrine decorated splendidly with flowers. The bustling and cheerfulness are beyond description.

Next, according to "Shibai-Noriai-Banashi 2" (first appeared in 1800):

When May comes, there is a Spring performance of the Soga Plays, and then the Soga festival is held. It is decided that the festival day is on the 28th, and from the middle of May, they call it the Soga festival. Actors with no wigs and makeup wearing the same summer dress all are cheerfully bustling around. A portable shrine of Soga is brought out on to the main stage. After prayers by the actors to the gods, the

8. A branch of the present Soga Hachiman Shrine, located at Kami'ide in Fujinomiya city, Shizuoka Prefecture.

end of the festival is announced by the beating of a drum.

Next, according to “Shibai-Kin’mo-Zui” (published in 1803):

It is said that the Soga festival originated in celebration of the success of the Spring performance, which was very popular and attracted a large audience. As a result, a festival was held backstage, and a big celebration feast was held by the whole company. Nowadays, the festival held backstage after a finished series of Soga Plays is called the shadow festival, and every year when a big hit and a full house continues, a portable Soga brother’s shrine is brought out to the shikiriba (an office inside of the theater), and sacred straw rope is put up all around and offerings are put on the altar.

Next, according to “Nakamura-Hayashi-Nikki” (first appeared before 1853):

When the Soga festival comes to the final closing of a successful performance, the theater proprietor, dressed as a Shinto priest, dismounts from his horse with strips of white paper hung from branches in his hand and sits down in the center of the main stage.

Next, according to “Gakuya-Suzume 1” (first appeared in 1845):

Because of Shinto ritual, the Soga festival is held on 28th May. This is called the Soga festival arranged as a play. The whole company holds a celebratory feast. The Soga festival was held at Ichimura Theater in 1756. During the festival, the parade moves from the town entrance to the front of the theater, and then to the neighboring towns, and then finally comes back to the stage. This continued to the end of Kansei (1789-1801).

According to these articles, if the Soga Plays which started on New Year’s Day were highly successful, the performances continued to run until 28th May, the very day when the Soga brothers achieved their vengeance.

As reported in “Yakusha-Zensho,” the festival began backstage on the third floor of a theater, so spontaneously that nobody knows when and how. Therefore, we cannot specify its beginning. In addition, the Soga brothers’ shrine was re-enshrined on the third floor backstage, and a portable shrine also existed. There are two explanations of how the festival, originally held backstage, was brought to the real stage.

For example, it was brought to the real stage “in 1753, when the first performance at Nakamura Theater achieved a big success” (“Yakusha-Zensho”). The main program of the performance was “Otokodate-Hatsukai-Soga,” which was mentioned earlier. It continued from January to the middle of June. Another example is “Umewakana-Futaba-Soga,” which was performed in Spring 1756 at the Ichimura Theater (“Gakuya-Suzume”). The performance of “Umewakana-Futaba-Soga” was scheduled to open on 15th January, but the theater burned down during the Shirakoya-Fire. After the reconstruction of the theater, its rescheduled first opening day was on 11th March. In July and August “Gonin’otoko-Kariba-no-kadoide” was added, and the performance continued until Autumn.

The Soga festival performance inside a theater began before the Horeki (1751-64). It was to appease the spirits of the Soga brothers, the forefathers of the Soga Plays. At the same time, it was a reward to the New Year’s performance. Starting from “Hatsukai-Soga” or “Futaba-Soga,” it became habitual to bring the “shadow festival” onto the stage to show the audience, and also to have a parade around the neighboring towns when the Soga Plays were performed for an unusually long time. Around An’ei (1772-81) this festival was established as a joyous annual event at the three great theaters in Edo.

The usual tradition with some variations was to enshrine a portable shrine at the office inside of the theater, putting up sacred straw rope all around and also placing a number of offerings on the altar. Several big flags were raised, and decorative lanterns and painted lamps were common both inside and out. Not only actors but also theater staff and teahouses in neighboring towns were all involved, wearing the summer dress or using the tea cloth of the same design. They accompanied the portable shrine decorated with flowers and marched onto the main stage from both the east-side and west-side elevated passageways.

The program consisted of flower dances by children, a characteristic dance by the prestigious actors, and a flower hat dance by female impersonators. These were all followed by a dance of all the company, which included improvised farce. And at last the portable shrine was brought to the center of the stage, and the proprietor of a theater, who took the role of a Shinto priest, finished the festival. Although the climax of the festival was on 28th May, the anniversary of the brothers' raid, the festival went on for several days afterwards (plate 7, "Gishi-Meisho-Zue").

It is not known precisely how the Soga festival in the Kabuki world came to an end. In "Gakuya-suzume," (an essay on the theatrical world quoted above) which first appeared in 1845, a Soga festival was reported. It said that "the festival existed to the end of the Kansei period (1789-1801), and I myself saw it in my younger days." In "Nakamuraza-Hayashi-Nikki" which first appeared before 1853, there is an entry that noted it was once a big event. As for the Soga festival, it declined during the later Edo period, when various customs were already in decline. Through the end of the Tokugawa shogunate and the Meiji Restoration, as the theater world was modernized, it was extinguished.

However, at the present time the Soga festival has succeeded in another style. The Hakone-shrine was re-dedicated in Ashigarashimo-gun in Kana-



plate 7 "Gishi-Meisho-Zue"

gawa prefecture and is one of the sites for the production of “Soga Monogatari.” Therefore, the shrine has long had a deep relationship with the brothers. An annual ceremony is held at the Hakone-shrine on 28th May. In addition, at Jyozenji-temple in Odawara city in Kanagawa prefecture, a ceremony called Umbrella-burning is held on the same day (plate 8). According to “The new version of Sagami-hudoki-ko,” published around 1842, in those days there was a temple called Sozenji-temple in the neighborhood. The temple was founded by Soga-no-Taro-Sukenobu, the brothers’ foster father, and the relics left by those people remain. Later the Sozenji-temple was destroyed, but the other small temple related to the Soga Family was integrated into the Jyozenji-temple. Umbrella-burning is based on a popular folklore belief that the brothers made use of an umbrella instead of a torchlight. Perhaps the umbrella (kasa)-burning might protect people from smallpox (also called kasa in past times). The Umbrella-burning festival is held by the Society that oversees the Soga brothers’ remains. Theater people assist in its organization and in the memorial ceremony at the Jyozenji-temple. Finally, on the premises of the temple, there stands a monument for the Soga brothers. Tsubouchi Shoyo (坪内逍遙), the renowned scholar of Japanese drama, dedicated the monument, and Yamazaki Kayo (山崎



plate 8 Umbrella-burning ceremony at Jyozenji-temple in Odawara city

荷葉), the founder of the Actors' Association, whose chairman was Nakamura Utaemon (中村歌右衛門) V, selected the writings for it. Kabuki actors are still present there today.

## Conclusion

In Edo, the first performance of "Kachidoki-yoroi-Soga" by Ichikawa Danjuro I at Murayama Theater in 1675 mastered the beginning of the Soga Plays. After 1709, a New Year's performance became common, and a performance of Soga at the beginning of Spring became a festive annual custom. At the official theaters called "The Three Great Theaters in Edo," newly written Soga Plays were performed every year throughout the Edo period and also in the Meiji period. Even at the present time, the "Taimen (confrontation)" is often selected as a New Year's program.

In the process of multilayered drama-making by means of <world> and <idea>, the Soga Plays are expanding and growing into the <world> that is beyond the ordinary <world>. Gradually absorbing neighboring stories from works such as "Izu-nikki," "Gikeiki," "Heike Monogatari" and "Genpei Ikusa" that are independent in origin, the "Soga" <world> has become much more prestigious and superior to the other <world>. It is clear that in Kabuki, especially in the Edo district, the Soga Plays have been much loved. The conjunction between Edo-Kabuki and the Soga legends does not depend merely on the fact that the story involves famous warriors from the Kanto district. After the Genroku period, Juro's importance as a dramatic character was reduced,<sup>9</sup> but Goro has evolved into one of the great heroic figures in Edo-Kabuki drama. In fact, the existence of a Goryo belief (spirit cult) has been observed. There is persistent talk that Goro, through communication with Goryo, has become a hero god.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the spirit festival is deeply connected with "furyu,"<sup>11</sup> which was one of the popular

9. Imao Tetsuya, *Jyuro no Suijyaku: Ronshu Kinsei Bungaku Kabuki*. Tokyo: Benseisha, 1991. Yanagida Kunio, *Imo no Chikara*, in Yanagida Kunio Zenshu series Vol.11. Tokyo: Chikuma-Shobo, 1991. Orikuchi Shinobu, *Nihon Geinoshi Rokko* in Orikuchi Shinobu Zenshu series Vol.21. Tokyo: Chuo-Koronsha, 1996.

10. Orikuchi Shinobu, *Nihon Geinoshi Rokko* in Orikuchi Shinobu Zenshu series Vol.21. Tokyo: Chuo-Koronsha, 1996.

11. A dance something like carnival style, in which a large crowd of people disguised in vari-

performing arts among folk people in the Medieval Period, and from which Kabuki originated.

Although Kabuki was highly refined as one of the urban entertainments, and the Soga Plays and the Soga festival became a regular annual event, we can still perceive a profound relationship between the performing arts and the ceremony held for the purpose of appeasing the troubled souls of dead people. The elements of revenge and appeasement for the brothers which are included earlier in the text itself were written out of the play as it developed the <idea>. The Soga festival, which was arranged as a peripheral event, could instead function as a treatment of those elements, namely revenge and appeasement.

Although it moved outside of theaters, and its aspects underwent changes, the Soga festival was still a complex example of the performing arts and had the spiritual function of appeasing dead people's souls. Performing arts can still give solace to the souls of people who have died unnatural deaths. In the Soga Plays, we can discern, through their celebration rituals and the ceremonial Shinto rites which were held simultaneously as an annual event, an undercurrent of the deeply rooted feelings of the people praying for the appeasement of the troubled souls of dead people.

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### **Photo Credits**

plate 3 University Library of Tokyo University of the Arts  
plate 6 *Ukiyoe Taisei* Vol.3. Tokyo:Toho-shoin, 1931.

our flashy costumes parade dancing with funny gestures accompanied by music and songs. It was popular from the Heian Period to the Medieval Era. The special festival of the Toyokuni Shrine, which was held in 1604, was the last example of this sort of dance.