

that proliferate in Japan; as for London's Japanese restaurants, these tend to be regarded as high-priced, only to be patronised by those on expense accounts. Specialised Japanese food shops are expensive too, and most Japanese in London quickly become accustomed to British groceries and supermarkets. These have shortcomings—slow and slapdash service, lack of variety in the Japanese staples of fish and vegetables—but they offer a wide range of unaccustomed foods to which most Japanese quite readily adapt. It is mistaken to think of the Japanese in London as obsessively centred on their own community with no outside recourse, eating and drinking only their familiar imports from home, and spending their evenings crooning nostalgic songs against a background tape in the insulated conviviality of a *karaoke* bar.

Another mistaken image that we have relates to their motivation. Being ourselves conditioned to think in Western terms of individual people as “economic animals” and of companies whose purpose is to maximise their dividends, we observe with uncomfortable awe the workaholic Japanese, sacrificing their family life in the struggle for ever-higher efficiency; and we presume that they are economic animals, or ants, more highly motivated than ourselves. In fact, they are inheritors of a post-Confucian ethic, which instils in them a regard for hierarchy, obedience, and hard work; and for the national interest certainly, which is not the same as vulgar profit. It is no coincidence that they share this ethic with Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore, all successful economically. The profundity of the Confucian motivation is attested by the sincerity with which they sing their remarkable company songs, which are all about harmony, the joy of service, and the ideal of the public good.

As for what they are doing here in London, particularly with their massive banking operations, there are two opinions. The Japanophobe view is that they plan to take over our financial institutions. The more sanguine conjecture is that they have no such aim: that although Japanese banks now handle over a third of all the banking assets in Britain, much of this activity is in local authority financing and not in the classic private sector; that the Japanese have come to London because it is the banking focus of the world, and because they have money to spend and have to use it somehow; that private consumption in Japan is still so restricted by custom that excess money has to find an outlet. (In the 1970s it found it in “sovereign debt” of Third-World countries; but the Japanese, like our own bankers, burnt their fingers in that venture.) What could now be more natural than to operate in a banking role abroad, as the British banking system did in its 19th-century heyday? and where more natural than in London, the world's financial entrepot?

If this last view is correct, we are wrong to argue, as the British Government argues, that reciprocity of deregulation is important, and that Tokyo should be as unrestricted for foreign business as the City. On the contrary, the great strength of the City as a financial centre is its uniquely open door, compared with the restrictiveness of its foreign rivals. That comparison with over-regulated New York brought us the post-War Eurocurrency market. The same comparison with the inflexibility of Tokyo retains for London the banking turntable of the world. Let others come to us. In this real sense the Japanese in our midst are helping to sustain our lead over Continental centres of finance, are increasing our tax revenue, are making employment. For this—as for other reasons—we should welcome them.

## Cohabitant Kinds

Silent, I knead my clay. Chieko's loom  
Clack-clackets as she weaves. A working mouse  
Gnaws at a peanut dropped to the floor of the room  
For which some sparrow-freeman of our house,  
Pecking, competes. A mantis perched on the line  
Sharpens its sickles; while, with a hop-skip-jump,  
Hunting blue flies, some spider darts to dine.

Hung towels stir in the draught. With a sudden thump  
The mail arrives. The hands of the clock grind round.  
An iron pot, like a squat black cat-thing, purrs  
And hibiscus-leaves, green tongues stuck out, astound  
The air with impudence. Then, as the earth-fish stirs  
And a small ground-tremor sets the whole place shaking,  
Nervous cicadas instrumentalise  
Their sense of the world as a thing of a single making.

For all these things and creatures, pots and flies,  
Are mustered in patterns reflecting some master-fit.

And the noon-sun, huge, burns down, straight down, on it.

*Takamura Kotaro 1883-1956*

*Translated by Graeme Wilson*

# The Background to “Make-up”

## *Translator’s Notes*

“MAKE-UP” (“KESHO”) was written and first performed in Japan in 1983. The author, Inoue Hisashi (1934-), is one of the most original playwrights and satirists of post-War Japan. While many of his contemporaries look westward to writers such as Kafka, Camus, and Beckett, Inoue is unique in drawing his inspiration from the works of 17th- and 18th-century Japanese satirical writers and playwrights. His material is wholly indigenous and is set in a colourful, extravagantly colloquial language full of wordplay, puns and onomatopoeia, which confounds translators. For this reason his work has not so far been accessible to Western readers and audiences. *Kesho*, with little of Inoue’s usual wordplay and wild humour, is not typical of his work, but perhaps because of that comes within the reach of a Western audience.

The Japanese theatre still retains much that is old and traditional among its modern, progressive elements. The medieval *Noh* and the 17th-century *Kabuki* theatres perform side by side with their contemporary and Western counterparts, with their centuries-old artistic traditions firmly intact. Numerous other forms of traditional popular entertainment—such as musical story-telling, stand-up comedy acts and performances of period melodramas—coexist with avant-garde fringe theatre productions, drawing large popular support. In this panorama of diverse theatrical activities, troupes of itinerant players, like the one depicted in *Kesho*, represent one such traditional face of Japan.

These troupes are often led by women, and tour the country performing *Kabuki*-style period melodramas. Their history goes back to the Middle Ages. In fact, *Kabuki*, first performed by an itinerant woman player and her troupe in 1603, was one offspring of this tradition. In her legendary *kabuki* (“deviant”) performance, she impersonated a dashing young dandy, flirting with courtesans in a brothel scene. Women played a dominant part in the early days of *Kabuki*, many of them taking their *kabuki* dances on provincial tours. However, public performances by women were banned in 1629 by the Confucian-inspired Tokugawa régime. *Kabuki* in the major cities responded deftly by employing first young men and then, when they too were banned in 1652, older men to impersonate female roles; it developed into the popular metropolitan theatre of the Tokugawa masses by the end of the century. In the provinces, however, the edict of the Central Government was not strictly enforced, and itinerant players, men and women alike, continued their popular tradition, performing and developing their own *kabuki* repertoires.

After more than two centuries of self-imposed closure, Japan opened herself to modern Western influences in 1868. Thereupon *Kabuki*—the mass entertainment of feudal Japan—came under harsh criticism from enlightened reformers, who denounced it as a vulgar, low-bred theatre unworthy of an aspiring modern nation. A movement to reform *Kabuki* sprang up, led by high government officials; the reformers endeavoured to remodel it into a respectable modern theatre along the lines of the Ibsenian modern European theatre. But those attempts failed, with the reformers launching their own New Theatre Movement based exclusively on producing imported Western plays.

Since then, while *Kabuki* has climbed from humble origins to the status of classical theatre, consolidating its increasingly exclusive tradition, the popular tradition of itinerant players has remained where it began, close to the hearts of the common people. A small number of such troupes still tour the provinces, performing old-fashioned period plays in a spontaneous informal manner, as *Kabuki* was once performed, to loyal, adoring audiences. *Kesho* dramatises the fate of one such troupe.

In keeping with the tradition, the mainstay of the popular theatre repertory is *Kabuki*-like period melodrama in which the male lead is played by the actress/manager of the troupe, and the female lead by an actor. When the troupe is led by an actor, both leads are played by men, though actresses do perform with them as well. The repertoires, usually arranged by the head of the troupe, are not written down, since the rough plots of popular plays are well known. The players learn their lines by word of mouth, as happens in *Kesho*, and the head of the troupe often selects the evening’s programme in the dressing-room, having only then gauged the size and temperament of the audience.

In performance, there is a great deal of spontaneous verbal and physical exchange between the players and the audience, who throw gifts and tips on to the stage and may come up the aisle to embrace their favourite players. The actors in turn readily stop the show to exchange repartee with the audience. As in *Kesho*, it is customary for the head of the troupe to say a few words of greeting to the audience during the course of the evening.

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