

Contemporary Kabuki Overcoming the COVID-19 Crisis : The Zoom Adaptation of Kanadehon Chūshingura

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Contemporary Kabuki Overcoming the COVID-19 Crisis

— The Zoom Adaptation of *Kanadehon Chūshingura*

Chieko Hiranoi

1. Introduction: Under the COVID-19

February 2020 was a critical turning point when most Japanese people started to be worried about the pandemic seriously. Many gathering events started to be cancelled and the Kabuki-za theatre also cancelled their March performances. It was August in 2020 that we came to enjoy kabuki performance live again. This only shows that people gradually get used to the COVID-19 environment, not that there was any improvement. During the blank period, from March to July, the author was really impressed by the kabuki community's efforts to make the performances enjoyable for their regular audience or attract some new audience. The National Theatre in Tokyo, the Kabuki-za Theatre and the Minami-za Theatre in Kyōto offered free streaming programmes of kabuki in live performance without audience, which originally were planned to be performed publicly in March, on their official channel on YouTube during the restricted period in March and April. In addition, actors offered enlightening or educational programmes on YouTube, which were very useful for the author's lectures.

In July, the first Zoom Kabuki, the abridged version of *Kanadehon Chūshingura*, was released on Zoom. The author was excited considering how they perform the drama within many restrictions. This is the newest type of

kabuki showing. The Zoom kabuki has three meanings:

- (1) realizing a dream (they apply Japanese kanji 'zu' and 'mu/yume' to the name),
- (2) zoom-in perspectives,
- (3) using the online application, Zoom

In the first Zoom kabuki, it seems that actors play nearly in the same way as in live performances, although they sometimes have to play without their opposite player being present, and other times they have to play in positions different from the kabuki stage. The entire play is cut into a 3 hour programme, with additional introductory narrations and reviews on the previous episodes. The Zoom Kabuki *Chūshingura* was released, divided into 5 episodes of live streaming, during July 2020. That is why each episode needed an introduction to explain some omissions and a review to invite the newcomers in the audience for each time. Roughly speaking, the length is less than half of its normal *tōshi* programme, or one treating the entire drama, in the Kabuki-za Theatre, which consists of a one-day programme divided into matinée and soirée.

This paper will focus on some conspicuous features in each Act comparing with an authentic kabuki programme at the Kabuki-za Theatre in 2009, the Farewell programme for the previous Kabuki-za Theatre for Acts I, III, IV, V, VI, VII and XI, and a prestigious programme with great actors in the Shōwa period at the Kabuki-za Theatre in 1978 for Act IX. This is because the farewell programme does not include Act IX. The author chose the Farewell programme as an example of contemporary authentic kabuki performances. For Acts II and X, the author referred to *Kanadehon Chūshingura* (Hattori, 2001) as an authorized text.

2. The Zoom Kabuki *Chūshingura*

The Zoom show introduces a *kōjō ningyō* for a narrator in charge of introduction and review in each episode, not for the *yakunin kaena*, intended to announce casting before the performance, which tended to start 10 minutes before the first Act, *Daijō* in the authentic kabuki.

Kanadehon Chūshingura originally came from *Ningyō Jōruri*, or the Bunraku puppet theatre, and it keeps some vestiges of the original genre. The first Act *Daijō*, the pre-ceremony scene, is presented with high formality and the actors pretend to be puppets in the beginning. Ashikaga Tadayoshi visits Tsurugaoka Hachimangū to identify Nitta Yoshisada's helmet and to dedicate it to God under the order by Ashikaga Takauji, his elderly brother and the chief of the Ashikaga clan. The purpose is avoiding hostility among people supporting Yoshisada, the previous enemy of the Ashikaga clan. However, in the final and harsh battle where Yoshisada died, forty-seven helmets were left near his body. Tadayoshi ordered Kaoyo, Hangan's wife, to sort it out for the dedication, because she served at the court and witnessed Yoshisada's helmet when the emperor Godaigo gave it to Yoshisada.

Although the Act in the original kabuki involves many characters depicting the importance and dignity of the event, only two characters, Kōno Moronō and Kaoyo-gozen (Lady Kaoyo) appear in the Zoom kabuki without the usual gorgeous stage settings. In the first scene, Moronō criticizes Momonoi Wakasanosuke, saying that he is rude, because Moronō lost face in front of Ashikaga Tadayoshi and the others, which was caused by Wakasanosuke's honest and faithful utterance about Moronō's interference with the policy decided by the Ashikaga clan. Moronō is in charge of directing the ceremony and Momonoi Wakasanosuke and Enya Hangan have been ordered to carry out details for the ceremony following Moronō's instructions.

In the Zoom version, the scene is depicted by one actor, Matsumoto Kōshirō X playing Moronō, addressing to the invisible young opponent,

Wakasanosuke. Such a depiction of Moronō might remind the audience of a figure cursing somebody with anger on his own. Kaoyo's sorting the helmet is not shown and the Zoom version focuses on Moronō's persistent and unethical affection towards Kaoyo. With a simplified background of the Shintō shrine, Moronō tries to hand his love letter to Kaoyo but she refuses to accept it throwing it away. The scene appears in two Zoom screens adjusted to look like one screen. The Zoom *Daijo* emphasizes Moronō's hostility against Wakasanosuke and his unacceptable desire for Kaoyo.

The first episode of the Zoom kabuki *Chūshingura* consists of the *Daijo* and Act III of the original kabuki. The authentic kabuki performances also tend to omit Act II, which conveys that Wakasanosuke's wife and servants of the Momonoi clan are worried about their future with rumours about conflicts between Moronō and Wakasanosuke. The chief retainer, Honzō tries to deny such worries, while he agrees with his lord to cut down Moronō as revenge. Shortly after such deceptions, he hurries to go out for a solution, which turns out to be preparing for the bribery to Moronō in Act III. The original text of Act II also explains the relationship between Rikiya and Konami. They are engaged and their fathers are chief retainers for, respectively, the Enya clan and the Momonoi clan. In this point, Act II is closely related to Act IX tracing the couple's story affected by the historic revenge. Rikiya visits the Momonoi clan as official messenger to announce the next day's schedule for Wakasanosuke in the Ashikaga Mansion. The scene depicts how Konami is delighted to see Rikiya, who tries to concentrate on his mission despite his feeling.

Act III of the major original kabuki performances contains the comic gift-giving scene before the entrance of the Ashikaga Mansion and a series of incidents developed in the Pine Room inside including Hangan's attack on Moronō. The Zoom kabuki follows the same place allocations. Act III in the Zoom kabuki starts with Kakogawa Honzō's soliloquy worrying about his lord's

vengeful energy against Moronō, which provides an explanation for the bribery contrived by Honzō to save his lord and the clan. Matsumoto Kōshirō X plays the three roles, Moronō, Hangan and Honzō in Act III for the Zoom version by its screen division technique. However, in the second half of this Act, in the Pine Room, Kōshirō mainly plays Moronō and the camera represents the perspectives of his opponent, Hangan outstandingly in the climax scene where he insults Hangan. It contributes to raising hatred against Moronō and sympathy towards Hangan among the audience. Hangan's face appears only in the final shot of his being captured by Honzō. After this scene, Kōshirō's Honzō delivers his speech repenting his bribery and obstruction against Hangan's revenge. The original kabuki does not describe such psychological aspects of Honzō's. Sagisaka Bannai, serving Moronō most closely, is a comic character and enhances Moronō's follies together in the original kabuki. For example, he directs his useless and foolish men to attack Honzō in vain. He does not appear in the Zoom kabuki and his absence makes Moronō look more isolated and insane during the bribery and the confrontation with Wakasanosuke in the Pine Room.

The second episode of the Zoom version is Act IV. The original Act IV is normally performed with Hangan's punishment by suicide, *seppuku*, for his behaviour and retainers' surrender leaving Enya Mansion in Kamakura. In the original kabuki, the audience expect a great variety of characters in addition to Hangan and his chief retainer, Ōboshi Yuranosuke, and his son, Rikiya appear for this Act, such as two official messengers from the *shōgun*, Kaoyo-gozen, Ono Kūdayū and other retainers of the Enya clan. In the Zoom version, only two actors, Kōshirō and his son Somegorō are involved, and Kōshirō plays Hangan and Yuranosuke sometimes in the same screen by screen division technique by Zoom. It clearly focuses on the mortification for the unreasonable sentence and the repulsion for Moronō both in Hangan and Yuranosuke. Especially in the scene of Hangan's death, the screen division technique is conspicuously

effective in such an emphatic expression, Hangan's suicide is depicted from different four angles, some of which gradually get replaced by Yuranosuke's rushing in. This is impossible on the authentic stage. In addition, the close-up technique enables actors' facial expressions to be watched clearly even for the expressions normally unseen on stage, such as Rikiya's farewell lament facing his lord shortly before his suicide. Zoom also catches the rustling sound of Rikiya walking in *tabi* holding up a dagger for his lord, which enhances the sadness and solemnity of the scene. Audiences can recognize Hangan's dagger clearly especially after his death. In the surrender scene, as Rikiya represents all the other young retainers who would like to protest against the government by force, the confrontation with Yuranosuke seems one between father and son, representative of arguments caused by generation differences, in the Zoom version. It happens to emphasize personal connotation for Yuranosuke's decision as the chief retainer, because of its man-to-man feature and the actors' family relationship.

For authentic kabuki performances, the audience expects different characters to appear and their thoughts to be delivered in Act IV on the incident described in Act III. In the original first scene, the official envoys announce the *shōgun's* sentence, Hangan's suicide and confiscation of estates owned by the Enya clan. The two messengers are depicted contrastively, as a generous, sensible character and a malicious, discriminatory one, which represents reactions within the central government. The act also depicts Kaoyo's lament reinforced by the way she repents failing to talk to her husband about Moronō's sexual harassment to her. Among retainers, some deeply feel sorrow and sympathy for their lord, and others only think about their own secular future affected by unemployment. The number of characters in the original kabuki enables a variety of ethics and aesthetics in the original drama to be presented on stage. On the other hand, the Zoom kabuki has to focus on the major characters' perspectives. It might simplify the story and decrease its

implications.

The third episode of the Zoom kabuki consists of the original two acts, Act V and Act VI. Kanpei makes a living as a hunter in his wife's parents' home. In the original kabuki, he meets his previous colleague, Senzaki Yagorō and asks Senzaki to intercede with the chief retainer, Ōboshi to allow him to join the vengeful action against Moronō. The audience gradually comes to recognize through Act V and Act VI that Kanpei has neglected his duty as a retainer for a love affair with Okaru during the injury case caused by Hangan. This is because most regular kabuki performances also omit the two sequences which depict the relationship between Kanpei and Okaru in Act III. He promises Senzaki that he will prepare the large sum of money to join the plan. After they part, Yoichibei, Okaru's father, comes on stage and narrates in front of a straw stack that he has sold Okaru to gain the money for Kanpei and he has the deposit. Although this is obviously unnatural, such a narration is permitted as theatrical convention in kabuki. Suddenly, a white hand appears from the straw stack and tries to deprive him of the money. This is Ono Sadakurō, a prodigal son of the other chief retainer in the Enya clan, Ono Kudayū. Kudayū betrays the late lord and the faithful retainers by getting along with Moronō for money and career. Even Kudayū has disowned Sadakurō for his behaviour and Sadakurō leads a life as a bandit. He kills Yoichibei to take the deposit. He gets delighted but he hides himself to escape from a boar coming lest he should be attacked. Shortly after the boar disappears, he is shot to death, taken for the boar by Kanpei. Kanpei notices he has shot a human by mistake and searches the body for medicine. Kanpei finds Yoichibei's money instead and thinks of using the money for his participation in the vendetta. Act V in the Zoom version focuses on the two murders, Yoichibei and Sadakurō. Kōshirō plays the role of Sadakurō as a typical *iro-aku*, a vicious and attractive male character, even showing his facial expression on listening to Yoichibei's narration, unseen, hidden by the straw stack in the authentic kabuki performances. Kōshirō also

plays the wild boar running around with the costume.

Act VI is a detective story for the characters, in which only the audience know the truth from the beginning. Kanpei returns to his home after giving the money to Senzaki. He gets upset to see his wife Okaru is about to be taken away by Osai and her employee, and stops them. Osai is a landlady who runs a well-known whorehouse in Kyōto. Osai has given Yoichibei the deposit in the previous night and Yoichibei leaves her house immediately. She comes to Yoichibei's home to take Okaru to her house in return for the remainder. Kanpei notices the purse with stripes he has stolen from the body is the same one as the purse Osai shows. Osai has given Yoichibei the deposit in one of the same purses. Kanpei realizes that he must have killed his father-in-law, who tried to help him. He allows Osai to take Okaru away with overwhelming pain and sorrow. Yoichibei's body is carried into the house by hunters. Okaya, Okaru's mother, gradually gets suspicious about Kanpei's attitude and bitterly criticizes him for the murder. Then Kanpei's previous colleagues, Senzaki Yagorō and Fuwa Kazuemon visit the place to return the money Kanpei has donated following Ōboshi's order. This is because Kanpei's negligence of duty for a love affair cannot be allowed and Ōboshi is suspicious about whether the money has been gained by righteous means. Okaya tells them about Kanpei's murder, and he confesses to a series of incidents in the previous night including shooting Yoichibei. When he starts to conduct *seppuku* suicide for atonement, Fuwa notices Yoichibei has been killed by sword, not by gun. He recognizes it is Sadakurō that Kanpei has shot instead of the boar. Finally, Kanpei manages to clear his name and gets delighted to see his name listed on the joint signatures for the revenge with his blood seal. In the Zoom version, the part of Osai is played by the same actor as Okaya, Kamimura Kichiya VI, only in voice. Osai is not accompanied by anyone. *Gidayū* story-teller, Takemoto Aoitayū, says the hunters' words instead like in the Bunraku puppet theatre. Kōshirō plays Fuwa Kazuemon in voice, who comes to Yoichibei's place alone. The screen division

is also useful to keep physical distance between actors. For example, in Act VI, although the couple are intended to embrace each other on their farewell scene on stage, the screen division depicts their facial expression at the same time to enhance their lament instead of physical contact. By zooming-in, the audience can focus on not only actors' facial expressions but also some key items in the drama. In Act VI, the audience can easily recognize the purse working as situational evidence in the plot.

The fourth episode of the Zoom kabuki deals with Act VII. Ōboshi seems to forget about the vendetta spending his time and money in drinking and enjoying time with courtesans and entertainers in the Ichiriki Teahouse. Some retainers get upset to see Yuranosuke's attitude soaked in pleasure. Teraoka Heiemon, Okaru's elder brother, is also eager to join the revenge party despite his inappropriately low status, and asks for Yuranosuke's permission in vain. Yuranosuke never shows what he thinks, pretending to live carefree and to enjoy secular happiness. The other ex-chief-retainer, Ono Kudayū now cooperates with Moronō for his own interest and looks into Ōboshi's intention. Kudayū forces Yuranosuke to have octopus, which is forbidden on the eve of the monthly memorial of Hangan's death, to know whether he is still sincere about the revenge. Ōboshi eats it saying that he does not feel any obligation towards Hangan because the retainers' misfortune has been caused by his folly. Once Yuranosuke lies on *tatami* for slumber, Rikiya comes with a letter from Kaoyo. Two characters are curious about the scroll, Okaru and Kudayū. While Okaru is eager to read somebody's love letter instead of her own love affair, Kudayū is persistent in looking for any hint of expected revenge against Moronō. Yuranosuke notices them and he offers Okaru that he should redeem her just to liberate her in a few days. Heiemon happens to meet Okaru when she gets excited to imagine seeing Kanpei again. In their dialogue, Heiemon comes to know Yuranosuke's intention, killing Okaru to avoid disclosure of the secret plan. He asks Okaru to die for his participation in the revenge and she

accepts his wish. When Okaru is about to commit suicide, Yuranosuke appears to stop it and to allow Heiemon to join the party. He also stabs Kudayū with Okaru as Kanpei's contribution to the loyalty.

The Zoom version makes the most of the *kōjō ningyō* or narrative puppet to explain the background and progress in the story, such as Yuranosuke's recent behaviour and the current status of Kudayū as a spy for Moronō. The puppet also encourages Heiemon to enjoy *mitate* game, or a game of imagination, comparing some object to anything interesting, one of the *ozashiki* games, games contrived for teahouses. No actor plays the role of Yuranosuke live in the Zoom version in Act VII. Yuranosuke appears only as a projection of the late Matsumoto Kōshirō VIII in the character in one of his performances. He briefly appears at first as a reflection on the surface of the wash basin in the garden for Heiemon's eyes. In the denouement, Kōshirō VIII reappears to celebrate and encourage Heiemon and Okaru. The final screen consists of three divisions, Heiemon (stage-left), Okaru (stage-right) and Yuranosuke (center). The audience got excited to see that the technique enabled the late Matsumoto Kōshirō VIII to appear on the same screen as his grandson, Kōshirō X in Act VII. The audience could fill in such comments on its chat column in the first live streaming.

The fifth, final episode of the Zoom kabuki consists of two acts, Act IX and Act XI. The Farewell performance for the previous Kabuki-za Theatre does not include Act IX as is often the case for the sake of time schedule. Act IX involves profound characterizations of Kakogawa Honzō and his wife Tonase, Konami's mother-in-law. The Act starts with Tonase and Konami approaching to Ōboshi's secluded house in Yamashina. Tonase is affectionate towards Konami with a strong sense of obligation as a stepmother. She respects Konami's deep affection for Rikiya and helps her get married to him. She visits the Ōboshi family for the marriage proposal and family wedding. Although Rikiya and Konami had originally been engaged as suggested in Act II, their engagement is suspended

because of the bloodshed incident in the Pine Room. The Enya retainers have lost their employment and regard Honzō as a villain because of his obstruction of Hangan's revenge. Oishi, Yuranosuke's wife, refuses the proposal bitterly accusing Honzō of his bribery to save the Momonoi clan. Tonase gets offended and tries to persuade Konami to give up Rikiya in vain. When the mother and daughter make up their mind to die in depression, Oishi stops them to ask for an alternative. She requests Honzō's head detached as wedding contract and gift. Then Honzō, in wandering priest costume, comes into the house and insults Yuranosuke as lazy and cowardly because of neglecting to prepare any vengeful action. Oishi tries to punish him with a spear but she ends up getting pressed down by Honzō. Rikiya comes in to help his mother and challenges Honzō. Finally, Honzō gets seriously wounded by Rikiya. It is Honzō's purpose to atone for his past deeds, bribery and obstruction, and to ask for the marriage, as he is about to die at the hand of his prospective son-in-law. Yuranosuke has foreseen Honzō's consideration and accepts the decision. Honzō confesses his repentance and agony over his past deeds. He offers a detailed plan of Moronō's residence to Rikiya, which the vendetta party has longed for. He explains additional information about the architecture and Rikiya shows measure to beat it responding to his consideration. In the end, Yuranosuke disguises himself as a wandering priest using Honzō's belongings and leaves for the Amakawa-ya store, where they have asked to hide their armour and weapons, leaving Rikiya for a brief married life with Konami.

Act IX shows the most profound insight into characterization throughout the drama by Honzō. Most *tōshi* performances tend not to include this Act, because Act II will also be indispensable for audience to understand or naturally follow the plot taken up in Act IX. It requires one-day and half to perform the entire play, if shown in the Kabuki-za Theatre in the two-part system, matinée and soirée, before the COVID-19 crisis. In 2016, the National Theatre in Tokyo realized a *tōshi* programme with all the Acts, dividing the drama into a

three-month programme, from October to December.

In the *Zoom* version, Kōshirō plays the major two characters, Honzō and Yuranosuke, with screen switching and Ennosuke IV plays Tonase, which is regarded as one of the most important and challenging roles for *onnagata* actors. Oishi does not appear in the *Zoom* version and Yuranosuke meets Tonase and refuses her marriage proposal on behalf of Konami. As it is originally written as mother-to-mother confrontation, such an alternative loses the implication and increases the overwhelming pressure on Tonase to appear brave. However, the abridgement enables the plot to be made short and explicit for the *Zoom* production with time and space restrictions. It is Rikiya not Oishi who requests Honzō's detached head as a condition for the marriage, and he starts to fight with Honzō shortly after Honzō's refusal with scornful laughter. Konami stays invisible and her response is replaced by *gidayū* storytelling by Takemoto Aoitayū, which reminds the audience of the Bunraku puppet theatre's method.

Act X is the most unpopular act among the 11 Acts. It describes a well-intentioned merchant who helps Ōboshi and the other retainers to accomplish the revenge. He dares to sacrifice his son to keep their secrets. With such a decent character, Ōboshi suspicious about his loyalty, might seem narrow-minded. Most authentic performances do not include Act X and the *Zoom* version does not take it either.

For Act XI or the grand finale, the Farewell performance for the previous Kabuki-za Theatre describes four scenes, the front gate, the inner garden, the finish of revenge before the charcoal storage house and their retreat. In the *Zoom* version, this becomes Yuranosuke's direction at the front gate, *tachimawari* or sword fighting scenes in the inner garden, Yuranosuke's decapitation of Moronō before the charcoal storage house and his consolidation of their action with reminiscence. The *Zoom* cannot describe their procession towards the temple where Hangan's soul lies, which can arouse applause among

audience in live performances. On the other hand, the screen division technique is useful and effective in *tachimawari* scenes keeping physical distances between actors. Samisen music and *tsukeuchi* or sounds to reinforce actors' stylized acting produce a sense of unity in the *tachimawari*.

The Zoom kabuki *Chūshingura* is an adaptation which abridges the traditional kabuki work keeping its acting styles. It could often be enlightening for new audiences and exciting for regular audiences. The history of kabuki has overcome a great deal of restrictions and conflicts from the beginning. Currently, the Kabuki-za Theatre offers one three-part programme per day. It requires *tōshi kyōgen* to be abridged to make them shorter than regular performances before the COVID-19 crisis. Ennosuke IV plays the title role in *Kagamiyama Gonichi no Iwafuji* (The Return of the Evil Lady-in-Waiting Iwafuji) in the Kabuki-za Theatre in August 2021 (from the 20th to the final day) and states that the performance focuses on the vengeful energy of Iwafuji's ghost and such an abridgement would never be realized without the crisis (Ichikawa, 2001, p.5). The Zoom kabuki can be the first step for the next generation of kabuki even after the COVID-19 crisis.

3. The Other Zoom Kabuki *Yaji-Kita*

There is another Zoom kabuki work, *Yaji-Kita*, based on a modern play, *Semaki Mon yori Haire* (Enter by the Narrow Gate), written by Maekawa Tomohiro and first performed in 2009. This is also the first modern drama Ennosuke IV joined as a major role. Ennosuke IV directed the play as one of the popular kabuki series of *Yaji-Kita* episodes, derived from a classic slapstick comedy of two guys travelling.

The *Yaji-Kita* kabuki had been one of the popular summer kabuki programmes shown in August from 2016 to 2019. In this series, *Yaji* and *Kita* work part-time for the Kabuki-za Theatre as stage assistant, *kuroko*. They often

fail to complete work and be criticized by actors and their colleagues.

In the first Yaji-Kita work, *Tōkaidōchū Hizakurige*, they travel from Edo to Ise to pray for their happiness accompanying two young samurai who also travel for Ise. Matsumoto Kōshirō X plays Yaji, Ennosuke IV plays Kita, and the two teenage samurai are played by Ichikawa Somegorō VIII and Ichikawa Danko V. It includes kabuki-related scenes. In the very beginning, Yaji and Kita work for a famous kabuki scene from *Yoshitsune Senbonzakura* (Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees), but they cannot manage their stage assistant job. Such a scene has a pedagogical effect showing stage assistant roles in kabuki. In this first Yaji-Kita work, they happened to visit Las Vegas, and get hired by a stage manager to act as a substitute for kabuki actors. They play the substitute skillfully in the performance of *Kabuki Lion*. The scene reminds audience of the overseas performance in Las Vegas by Kōshirō in 2016, shortly before the first performance of the Yaji-Kita drama. The Las Vegas show was originally written for the overseas stage, *Shi-Shi-Ō: The Adventures of the Mythical Lion*.

In the second Yaji-Kita work, *Kobikichō Nazotoki Banashi* (Mysteries in Kobikichō), Yaji and Kita resume their assistant work at the Kabuki-za Theatre. The second work deals with the scene of ‘*Shi-no-Kiri*’ (The Climax of the Fourth Act) from *Yoshitsune Senbonzakura*, including spectacular scenes of a legendary fox transforming himself into a samurai working for Yoshitsune. At the rehearsal, one stage assistant is killed by a nail with poison. He is not a real target, but the poisoned nail has been set in the very foot position of stylized acting. And during the performance with an audience, two major actors die, one passes away because of his old age and the other is clearly killed by a piece of stage equipment for spectacular scene. The audience can watch the background stage device for the fox unexpectedly appearing. The fourth, the final victim is also a stage assistant, and he leaves a dying message showing the three kabuki dancing titles with blood, *Yasuna, Renjishi* (The Group of Lions),

and *Tenaraiiko* (The Girl Student), all of which include butterflies. Finally, they can find out the murderer is Ochō, butterfly in Japanese. The second work has more pedagogically useful scenes than the first work because it focuses on the specific act from the well-known kabuki classic.

Both of the Yaji-Kita works are slapstick comedies but they basically include stylized acting enough to be categorized into kabuki. Sometimes, contrastive depictions are exciting, such as the same kabuki actor playing completely different roles. For example, Nakamura Shidō plays both a stage manager in Las Vegas and a samurai representing justice, Ōoka Tadasuke. Shidō plays the second role with the stylized attitude of prestigious samurai. At the end of both shows, Amaterasu Ōmikami (an ancient Japanese goddess) appears on stage to set out everything. Yaji and Kita show a farewell *chūnori*, flying over the audience at the end of both plays.

On the other hand, the Zoom kabuki, *Yaji Kita* does not include any stylized acting or samisen music except in its introduction by a Bunraku puppet and depiction of a malicious woman in charge of 'sorting' of people. Kōshirō also admits he often considers whether it is kabuki or not every time he works on a newly written play (Tsukada, 2020).

Maekawa Tomohiro, the playwright and director of the original modern drama in 2009 worked afterwards with Ennosuke IV again on the first 'Super Kabuki II' in 2014. He often works on sci-fi stories depicting this world affected by another world or a new world. The drama describes people living on the border three days before the renewal of the present world. The present world suffers from the pandemic and two-thirds of people continue to sleep with high fever. The sci-fi present world described in 2009 surely reminds audience of the situation today. Two characters in charge of the 'sorting' of people appear on stage and one of them is an old friend of the protagonist. In the beginning of the play, the sorting standard is not explicit but it gradually turns out that it is ethical and people in coma are already regarded as appropriate for

joining the new world. The cast consists of six characters. The protagonist has been relatively successful in business sacrificing his family and colleagues. His younger brother succeeds to the family business, a convenience store, which is one of the gates to the new world. He is generous and affectionate like his father. The other two characters are visitors to the convenience store, a young habitual shoplifter and a jobless old guy fired by the protagonist. The protagonist, the shoplifter and the old guy are getting to know about the renewal of the world meeting with the 'sorters.' Only the store manager doesn't know at all, even about his position as a gatekeeper for the new world. Ironically, gatekeepers to the new world cannot go there and have to stay in the world which will disappear in three years, despite their ethical behaviour. Finally, the protagonist makes up his mind to replace his brother as a gatekeeper and remains in the decaying world.

The Zoom kabuki version of this drama faithfully follows the original plot except for minor changes. Yaji has been successful in his career in the Kabuki-za Theatre in charge of restructuring the employees, as the equivalent of the original protagonist. Kita has been fired under Yaji's direction and now works in Yaji's father's convenience store as a store manager. The role of the two young samurai is the same as the original shoplifter. It is shot in a studio representing the convenience store in 4 days.

The first Zoom kabuki sincerely tries to depict highlights of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* within restricted conditions not only physical distance minimizing the number of actors and staff but also technical issues with the new media, Zoom instead of authentic kabuki crafts. It was released by live streaming and could be seen later in archives. It is a great challenge in the genre of kabuki when theatres cannot invite audiences. On the other hand, *Yaji-Kita* was made after the re-opening of the Kabuki-za Theatre in August 2020 and it faithfully traces the plot of its original modern drama without stylized kabuki acting except for the *onnagata* character with a supernatural panoramic view on the

two worlds played by Ichikawa Emisaburō III. Is this a kabuki drama or not? It could be an open-ended question without any explicit answer.

4. Other New Trends

The modern world of kabuki is serious in its attempt to attract more audience of younger generations. This is neither a new idea nor restricted to the traditional performing arts in Japan. Classics worldwide seem to be affected by such critical awareness. However, the author is very impressed by kabuki actors' active participation in a variety of areas which can contribute to the spread of kabuki. One of the most conventional means has been young and popular kabuki actors' appearance in TV programmes, movies or modern plays.

Especially, Nakamura Kanzaburō XVIII greatly contributed to such trends and he also actively started to invite modern directors to kabuki such as Kushida Kazuyoshi and Noda Hideki. In addition, he enlarged the possibility of theatre, by performing in a temporary theatre reproduced after the Nakamuraza Theatre in the Edo era and utilizing an abandoned factory in Sibiu, Romania. He also contributed to the genre of Cinema Kabuki with the Shōchiku company, in which the audience comes to watch kabuki performance as a film. Unfortunately, he passed away in 2012 at the age of 57.

On the other hand, Ichikawa Ennosuke III created the genre of 'Super Kabuki', which features new plays, new directions including spectacles, such as the first performance of *Yamato Takeru*, about a legendary ancient figure in Japan. Following such an Omodaka-ya family trend, Ichikawa Ennosuke IV has produced a series of 'Super Kabuki II' by collaborating with a modern playwright, Maekawa Tomohiro and a prestigious academic and author, Umehara Takeshi, who originally wrote the drama of *Yamato Takeru* for Ennosuke III. Ennosuke IV launched his 'Super Kabuki II' series in 2014 by *Kū wo Kizamu mono*, written by Maekawa Tomohiro, a story of a young sculptor

of Buddhist images, inviting modern actors outside kabuki. The premiere of *One Piece*, an extraordinary box-office success, was shown in 2015. This is the second play of 'Super Kabuki II.' After the great success of *One Piece* in 2015, other anime-originated kabuki dramas came to be produced such as *NARUTO* and *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*.

As the popularity of *One Piece* was overwhelming, *NARUTO* and *Nausicaa* tend to be seen as 'Super Kabuki II.' However, the two anime-originated kabuki are not categorized as 'Super Kabuki II' but 'Newly Written Kabuki.' Both categories tend to focus on familiar topics for younger generations and innovative spectacles, keeping stylized acting in part. The author understands that only when Ennosuke IV gets heavily involved in such new style kabuki, can it be categorized into 'Super Kabuki II.' Shinbashi Enbujō Theatre has featured such innovative kabuki programmes as well as traditional kabuki. Especially, *Nausicaa* was a one-day programme of more than 7 hours through matinée and soirée. While *One Piece* and *NARUTO* invited actors from modern theatre, the theatre of *Nausicaa* was composed of kabuki actors only and traditional kabuki techniques were respected.

There was a collaborative performance between figure skating and kabuki, *Hyō-En* (Ice and Beauty), shown in 2017 at the National Yoyogi Stadium. It was intended to raise awareness of Japanese culture and sports for Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics in 2020. Although the collaboration finished just as a single project, it was a great opportunity to think about performers' bodies in terms of stylized acting and skating technique. It also features Japanese drumming and projection mapping. The project was directed by Ichikawa Somegorō VII before succeeding to the name of Matsumoto Kōshirō X. He revived Chaplin kabuki, an adaptation of *City Lights*, in the National Theatre in Tokyo in 2019, which was originally adapted in 1931 for kabuki. He also starred in the Kabuki NEXT, *Aterui*, which depicts the hero struggling in conflicts between the central government and the northern tribe in the ancient Japan.

The recent 5-6 years witnessed a great variety of new kabuki. Ichikawa Ebizō XI performed a very classic kabuki piece *Shibaraku* (Just a Moment) in collaboration with a Jazz pianist, Uehara Hiromi in the opening ceremony of the Olympics. It raised much controversy, but it might just have shown one moment of such innovative trends in the world of kabuki.

5. Conclusion: Pedagogical Implications

Hagiwara (2020) describes the theatre performances online under the COVID-19 crisis in Japan and categorizes them into three types, distributing past performance videos, making original online products and hybrid performances uniting theatre and private spaces. The article concludes that online performances and authentic performances are not incompatible to survive the crisis. While Shimada points out the solidarity among actors and audience is indispensable in theatre performances, he also predicts the promise and new development of online performances as well as authentic performances (Shimada, 2020). In terms of kabuki, Inumaru (2021) overviews the kabuki performances chronologically from January to December including the Zoom Kabuki *Chūshingura*, *ART Kabuki* produced by Onoe Ukon II and Nakamura Kazutarō, *Suma no Ura* by Nakamura Kichiemon II, and other online deliveries.

The author notices pedagogical implications involved in kabuki works originally created for online deliveries. Of course, complimentary deliveries of authentic performances without audience for March 2020 programmes could entertain regular audiences and address new audiences. In addition, workshops on YouTube made by popular actors such as Kōshirō X, Kazutarō and Ichikawa Tsutanosuke III could be enlightening for younger generations in a short time. Traditional performing arts are basically full of materials to learn partly because of their explicit stylized expressions. Since before the COVID-19 crisis, there have been a great deal of exciting workshops on topics such as make-up,

masks, costumes, musical instruments and *kata* (stylized acting). In such a context, the Zoom Kabuki *Chūshingura* was a pedagogically outstanding kabuki experiment making the most of Zoom techniques as already described.

Kōshirō X and Tobe Kazuhisa abridged the entire play of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* and divided it into 5 episodes with commentaries by *kōjō ningyō*. They provided one episode per weekend and even the longest episode is approximately 70 minutes, which is a beginner-friendly project. The abridgement also made the plot clearer for beginners, suggesting what is important for the drama. The author was impressed that they depicted the tragedy of Kakogawa Honzō in Act IX, referring to his feelings by his soliloquy in the first episode, although it is neither a traditional way nor included in the authorized text. Advanced learners can compare an authentic kabuki performance with the Zoom version to find out the difference and its rationale. They were delighted to see how the Zoom version overcame its restrictions, absence of regular equipment, minimized number of actors and staff, and physical distances. On the live streaming, audience could read and fill in comments on the chat column, ovation, critique and surprise. The *kōjō ningyō* introduced some of them. The innovative adaptations could be useful in revealing what the original work is by absence or alternatives of something important.

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