

The Face of Noh (Part 2)

By Kongo Hisanori

During the Edo period it was said that an actor qualified to play the protagonist in a noh drama—the head of a noh family or school—was required to turn in a brilliant performance when performing sacred, or ceremonial, noh such as *okina* or when playing the part of the young heroine in *kazuramono* (noh dramas featuring young women in the main roles). In this issue I would like to concentrate on the *kazuramono* role which, since noh reached its zenith during the time of Kan'ami and Zeami, has been the type of piece that expresses the essence of the beauty of noh's austere mystery (*yugen*). It has long been considered a rank above other forms of noh featuring either men or demons as the main characters.

On days when several pieces are performed, *kazuramono* is seen to be the program's featured event with the other performances leading up to this one. In many cases the main character appearing is a young, aristocratic woman of the Heian period, exemplified by the *Tale of Genji*. Ultimately, this austere elegance could be said to derive from a Muromachi era revival of interest in the Heian period and a longing on the part of a war-weary military caste for peaceful, aristocratic culture.

Naturally, noh does not merely depict the world of courtly beauty. In line with the interests of medieval commoners there was to an extreme degree an attempt to richly portray the exact opposite in noh, the gloom of ghosts and other creatures wandering through hell. While people in the Middle Ages could delight in the beauty of the world of simple elegance, the more it was set off by dreariness they simultaneously applauded the beauty that could be found in forms that were steeped in the grotesque.

However, it should be noted that above all else there was a continuous striving to achieve the ultimate in noh artistry as depicted in the austere beauty of the courtly, young, Heian-style hero-

ine. This is why, at the least, leading Edo era noh actors were required to turn in fine *okina* and *kazuramono* performances in order to preserve the dignity of their art, while other actors would perform other roles. Keeping this in mind, it is easy to understand why the masks of young women have been treated with particular care.

In the Four Noh Companies of the Yamato (Yamato Yonza) that came into being before the Muromachi period, the masks used for young female roles each had their own, distinctive character and these came to be called the Masks of the Four Companies. The Kanze troupe had Wakaonna, the Hosho company Fushikizo, the Komparu group Koomote, and the Kongo family Magojiro, each employing their own mask for roles involving young women. The Kita school that appeared during the Edo period used the koomote-style for their female masks, following the tradition of the Komparu troupe. The Kanze company's young woman was a creation of the famous mask artisan from the Azuchi Momoyama period, Kawachi Ieshige. It is said that this troupe's original female mask was lost when the head of the family went to war as an ally of Toyotomi Hideyoshi and, so the story goes, Kawachi Ieshige cre-



Yuki no koomote by Tatsuemon



Magojiro by Kawachi



Yase-otoko by Himi



Aku-jo beshimi by Shakutsuru

ated a new one.

The Hosho company's Fushikizo was a type of mask referred to as *zoonna*, made by the Muromachi era *dengaku* (ritual Shinto dance) performer Zoami Hisatsugu, and because stains appeared on the bridge of the nose it was called Fushikizo (*fushi* meaning knot or node). In schools other than the Hosho family, the *zoonna* mask was used for roles involving goddesses, but as the expression was more human-like than ordinary it came to be used for roles involving young women.

The Komparu school's koomote mask is the youngest-appearing of all, as represented by the mask known as "Yuki no koomote" and there is a legend asso-

ciated with this mask. Toyotomi Hideyoshi, a great noh devotee, obtained three excellent koomote masks made by Ishikawa Tatsuemom (a predecessor of Zeami), who was most famous for masks with gentle expressions. Hideyoshi treasured them greatly and named them "Yuki" (snow), "Tsuki" (moon), and "Hana" (flower), using them as his own masks when performing noh dances.

He later presented "Yuki no koomote" to his personal noh master, Komparu Kyuren, gave "Tsuki no koomote" to Tokugawa Ieyasu, with whom he had performed, and "Hana no koomote" to the head of the Kongo family, who was famous at that time. Tsuki no koomote was lost when fire destroyed Edo castle's inner citadel, but Yuki no koomote and Hana no koomote have been passed down in the Komparu and Kongo families.

The Yuki no koomote mask changed hands at the time of the Meiji Restoration and came into my family and Hana no koomote went to be stored at Mitsui Bunko. Of these three masks, Yuki no koomote was a particularly famous work which is why the majority of koomote replicas were facsimiles of this mask.

Karma and beauty

The namesake of the Kongo company's young woman mask, Magojiro, comes from the name of the person who crafted it, Kongo Magojiro, the head of the Kongo troupe. It is said that because he created this mask while feeling the pain of his beautiful young wife's death, the mask came to be referred to as "Magojiro's Memory." This mask was passed down in the Kongo family through the generations, but is now stored at Mitsui Bunko along with the Hana no koomote mask mentioned above.

The magojiro mask shown in the photo is a work by Kawachi Ieshige who created the Wakaonna mask for the Kanze company. The Yuki no koomote mask I mentioned above is unequalled in its classic lines and serene beauty, but this magojiro by Kawachi is the best among female masks in its radiantly alluring beauty, giving one the feeling that it had an abundance of stormy tales surrounding it.

The koomote mask is imbued with the beauty of emancipation while the beauty of earthly passions is concealed in the magojiro mask. In other words, the former's beauty could be called celestial (heavenly) while the latter's would be temporal (earthly). Further, the masks originally employed in noh for young women's roles were said to have been those for goddesses. In the Gion Matsuri, a Kyoto festival with a history of more than 1,000 years, various objects of worship representing Shinto and Buddhist deities were placed on floats, called *hoko* (halberd) and *yama* (mountain), and paraded around.

Several of the goddesses were represented by dolls wearing masks, introducing the legend that the masks used for female roles in noh portrayed goddesses in ancient times. This is why the Yuki no koomote mask, a female mask from ancient times, possesses the celestial beauty of a goddess and why the magojiro mask came to take on a human character when noh dramas with various young heroines were subsequently created.

Other female masks include those employed for older women in maternal roles and others for roles involving elderly women. There is a convention in noh, that costumes and fans with the color vermilion are not used in dramas when these masks are worn, while vermilion is used for roles involving young women.

On the other hand, in contrast to these noh masks which express a world of beautiful, simple elegance, those devised by the master mask artisan Himi Munetada, who only made masks of emaciated ghosts, expressed a world of dark shadows. Himi was a 14th century Buddhist priest at the Asahi Kannon temple in Himimura, Etchu (present day Toyama). Himimura was a fishing village on the Noto Peninsula, where the sea becomes extremely rough in winter, and many people who went offshore to fish died by drowning.

Legend has it that while holding memorial services at the temple for the deceased, Himi Munetada would devise masks with the expressions of the dead. Yase-otoko (the Thin Man) is a work by Himi, whose carving skill magnificently

expresses the human facial physiognomy, as if he had shaped the flesh with only one movement of his chisel. Moreover, the gleaming jewel-like quality that is expressed in the photo makes the mask appear as if it might come back to life. The hair flowing across the face, as if it were wet, is also wonderful. It is obvious that Himi excelled at both sculpture and painting. It might be said that this mask was carefully crafted by a philosopher who worked his fingers to the bone, concentrating his deepest thoughts on the great matters of life and death that involved battles with north sea blizzards.

In addition to the masks that I have discussed, there are also ones for young men and fierce demons or ghosts and I would like to discuss these in closing. Demons first appeared in *sarugaku* (the predecessor of noh and *kyogen*) programs and are from an extremely ancient age. Yamato *sarugaku* appear to be the best example of these types of performances. It can be ascertained by writings left by Zeami that a more tranquil, elegant art was borrowed from other *sarugaku* (Omi *sarugaku*) and *dengaku*. There are consequently some demon masks from very ancient times that still exist today. Ishikawa Tatsuemom, whom I mentioned previously, was a famous craftsman who excelled at masks with kindly expressions. In contrast, the renowned Shakutsuru Ittosai excelled at masks with fierce, demon-like countenances. It is said that Shakutsuru was a 13th century Omi *sarugaku* actor and the Aku-jo beshimi mask, a typical work, conveys Shakutsuru's style.

In this and the preceding article I have discussed various types of noh masks, considered to be the central focus of the drama, and which we actors treat with more care than life itself. I would like to close with a remark my grandfather passed on: It is not the person, but the mask, that sees. ■

(Fourth in a six-part series.)

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